



# The Pedagogical Seminary

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## Notes

Theodate L. Smith

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## NOTES

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A new trade school in Boston, founded by Arioeh Wentworth, a citizen of Boston who left over three and a half million dollars for the purpose of "furnishing education in mechanic arts," has already nearly completed its first building and now announces its scope. The initial group of buildings will provide for one-year courses in three building and three manufacturing trades, designed primarily for apprentices. More thorough courses are given to make superior workmen, mechanics and foremen, and are open to those of unusual ability. These two-year courses are to be in machine construction and tool design and electrical instruction and operation. In order to utilize the plant to its maximum, the Wentworth Institute will offer instruction at night similar to that during the day. It will have part-time courses with weekly alternations between employment and school work. In order to keep out those who have little genuine interest in the work a fee of only \$6.00 per term is charged and \$6.00 for two terms of evening school. So far the plan of the Institute presents nothing startling, but will evidently be a great addition to the admirable educational opportunities offered in Boston. But now comes the great and splendid innovation which Wentworth Institute is making and is contained in the following sentence from its announcement: "No definite amount of previous school training should be required as a standard, but boys who have been partly or perhaps entirely through the high school should be found working side by side with boys who have not even graduated from the grammar school. There are no entrance examinations required for the one-year day courses or for the evening courses. Ability to profit by the instruction is the only requirement." In this element of the plan, Wentworth Institute already more than justifies its existence. It promulgates the principle that children and youth have a right to those opportunities by which they will most profit. It also proclaims that industrial ability has no necessary dependence upon or connection with mere scholastic training. It practically invites all those who can really profit by its courses to come, regardless of every other consideration. This view of human nature is quite in accord with the psychology that is now teaching the independence of human powers one from another and that at least in the scholastic sense there is no such thing as general education.

The Survey<sup>1</sup> reports the first public meeting of the New York League for the Improvement of the Children's Comic Supplement. This league seeks to be a kind of home mission to protect the child against a heathen press which one writer said went on the assumption that all children love to lick paint off wall paper. The *Brooklyn Eagle* is making a high appeal to children against what Hamilton Mabie calls "the most pernicious and vulgarizing single influence that is brought to bear on the child at his most impressionable age." Some of these artists show great originality and inventiveness but the constant push to get something new soon exhausts spontaneity and results in vulgarization. Instead of new "slops," why not revive the work of the old humorists, although we must not deny all justice

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<sup>1</sup> April 15, 1911, p. 103.

to Little Nemo or even to Buster Brown. Children should not be taught a form of humor that inculcates disobedience, ridicule, trickery, practical jokes, sensationalism, love of ugliness, meanness and destroys the exquisite natural qualities of the young mind. It is not the sheltered nursery children but those of the poor, to whom the newspaper is the chief intellectual food, that the danger is greatest. These children have keen insights, brilliant imaginations and find the element of cleverness very captivating, but why not make it also healthy like that of Lewis Carroll or Peter Newell?

In an article entitled "Il metodo Montessori sperimentato in una 1.<sup>a</sup> classe elementare nell' anno scolastico 1910-11," published in the *Rivista Pedagogica*, November, 1911, and received too late to be incorporated in the article printed in this issue, we have the report of an experiment in the Montessori method as applied to the first grade of the common schools of Rome. The class was formed October 26th, and thirty-one children were registered, but of these six were removed by the medical inspector, two were found to have already had some instruction in reading, and two removed from the locality. Twenty of the children remaining in the class were either already six years of age or reached their sixth birthday before January 1st, one was a backward child of nine, arrested in physical development, and whose mental development appeared to be inferior to that of the children of six. To the twenty-one children thus regularly enrolled were added, for the sake of experiment, two children taken from private kindergartens, who, being only five years old, were too young to be regularly enrolled in the public schools.

As the experiment was conducted in an ordinary school room, furnished with the usual stationary desks and seats instead of being equipped in accordance with the new method, the conditions were by no means ideal for securing the physical liberty of the pupils, deemed by Dr. Montessori so necessary for free intellectual and moral development. The didactic material for teaching reading, writing and arithmetic was not received until January 15th, and the time from October 26th to that date was spent in sense training and especially in muscular and practical exercises, *i. e.*, in developing freedom of movement and independence in waiting upon themselves. All these children had been in a kindergarten but the teacher found them lacking in spontaneity, and complained that they confused goodness and discipline with immobility and silence, so that it was by no means an easy task to inspire them with the idea of freedom in both physical and intellectual movement and individual self-discipline which are fundamental characteristics of the Montessori method.

The autosenorial education was carried on by means of the material which Dr. Montessori has scientifically adapted to the purpose. But this sense training is not limited to the mere reception and retention of the things observed, for the children not only use their powers of observation but they draw their own conclusions and apply their acquired knowledge in every way possible. The interest and unhampered energy of the child being the mainspring of the progress, the teacher noted that the mental food was always adapted in quality and right in quantity for the assimilation of the individual child, and she herself marveled at the results of this spontaneous evolution. With the simple phonic method of teaching the vowels and consonants already described, with simultaneous stimulus of the visual tactile-muscular and auditory sensations, the pupils began spontaneous composition before they had learned the whole alphabet and were thus stimulated to acquire the sounds and symbols which they lacked. There were great individual differences, and the period of learning all the

letters of the alphabet and the different combinations into words varied from five to thirty days for the different pupils. It is to be remembered, however, that the learning to read and write is merely the culmination of the previous sense-training. Generally, the learning to read, which began with exercises in composition by means of the movable letters, followed by reading of lesson cards of the first, second and third grades, preceded the phenomena of spontaneous writing. After this stage was reached progress became more rapid.

When the school closed on June 17th eighteen of the children, including the two five-year olds, passed the examination for the second grade. Several of them had surpassed the requirements, being able not only to read and write fluently, but also to read and write numbers beyond 100,000 and to perform addition and subtraction with four, five and six figures. Some of them developed a great fondness for arithmetic and amused themselves by making examples on which to exercise their newly acquired powers. Of the five who did not entirely complete the work of the first grade, one was the backward nine year old, one a child with hereditary defects who could not speak plainly and one a child handicapped by malnutrition. The two others were very near reaching the standard, but as the normal and spontaneous development of the child is the aim of the system, no effort to hasten their progress was made. Perhaps the most interesting thing in the experiment is the fair opportunity for each child to develop in accordance with his own abilities without forcing and without retardation, the more gifted children as well as those less amply endowed doing the work suited to their capacities and doing it happily and with a sense of conquest, for the dullest of these children had no sense of discouragement or failure. So unconscious are they of being taught that one of them, exulting in the newly discovered ability to write, naively asked her teacher, "Can you write?"

THEODORE L. SMITH