THE SCHOOL OF ORGANIC EDUCATION

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STANDARDS AND THE CHILD

WE HAVE built up an educational system which is very hard to break, even though it crushes us. We have accepted standards and seem unable to change them. We complain from time to time about these standards being unjust to the individual. And yet the idea of changing them or removing them altogether seems unthinkable to many people. Even the most progressive schools are handicapped by the necessity of covering certain ground or reaching certain ends in order that the children may enter high school and college. In fact, many of the finest modern methods and devices are merely efforts to meet the old standard in a better way.

We need a new standard, an inner one. This should be to provide work so truly adapted to the native interests of childhood as to enlist the keenest mental activity. Children and young people should work in the same spirit as that shown in play or "extra-curricular activities." Such work is sincere and is its own reward. If it is otherwise wholesome, it is truly educational. External standards tend to develop self-consciousness. Working for grades or marks or promotions is fundamentally insincere. No child may fail. Failure is bad for the spirit, and the problem of education is that of providing conditions under which every child may flourish; none languish. The reward of study is knowing. It is the nature of mind to want to know. Children should not be questioned to see if they know; questions should help them to understand.

Childhood is not a preparation for adult life. It is important for itself. The school must satisfy the interests of childhood. Singing, dancing, hand work, nature, free play, and stories are properly the work for children. Progress cannot be measured by any external measure. It is recognized in the joy and spontaneity of the attack and by the satisfaction in the experience.

The order of the development of the nervous system may not be violated; therefore, all formal work such as learning to read, write, and use figures should be postponed until the ninth or tenth year. The prolonging of childhood is the hope of the race. No child may be accelerated. Children should never be stimulated to try to "keep up" with others. Trying to reach goals, to be "thorough" makes for self-consciousness, and may cause arrest of development.

When the use of books is introduced at eight or ten years of age, the same spontaneity and freshness of attack should continue. History, literature, geography, mathematics, and science should be studied to satisfy an inner need, just as sports and hand work, music and dancing are pursued. The work of every group should be determined by what has already been done rather than by the demands of the curriculum.

CO-EDUCATION

The fundamental condition of growth for the adolescent is social.

Co-education is an absolute necessity. During these years of rapid growth, it is most important that there should be the balanced attraction afforded by co-education. Community singing, folk dancing, dramatics, sports and hand work are fundamentally social in their nature. It is imperative that the high-school process provide for these young people experiences through which they grow in the consciousness of interdependence. It is a mistake to subject them to an individualizing process through the high school and college years, and then exhort them to develop social-mindedness. The social mind grows through experience rather than through direct instruction. When young people realize that they cannot attain their own ends excepting through the cooperation of their fellows they develop a social consciousness. The high-school program should provide strong academic work, but this should be done in a fundamentally social atmosphere. The attractions of youth must be respected.

In the high school also, failure is bad for the spirit, and no young person should have that experience. It makes for the inferiority complex.

THE OPEN DOOR

After the young people have had four years of serious, earnest work, four years of wholesome life, four years of play and study, they are ready for the next process, which is that of the college. The college should not ask, "Where have you been?" "What do you know?" "What are your credentials?" Its problem is to meet the need of these young people and lead them into a larger life. There should be no entrance requirements for college. That a young person of eighteen years wishes to go is sufficient. Of course, there will be problems of discipline. There will be those who will take advantage of the opportunity to go to college and not work. But if the college would open its doors to all young people of eighteen years of age, the high school would be free to minister to youth in the most effective way. And this effective work in the high school would produce an increasingly finer material for college.

This, of course, would open the way for the elementary school to concentrate its attention upon the all-round development of childhood. Assuming that the right conditions of growth have been provided for childhood, we would have a group of eager young minds entering the high school. The high school could then minister to these needs in the best possible way, without the pressure of preparing for college entrance. It could concentrate its attention upon conserving the nervous system, upon preserving the freshness of intellectual attack, and reaching the inner standard of providing the conditions which enlist the finest use of the native endowment.

The college program would also be fundamentally social. There would be no courses to take, but merely subjects to study. There would be no tasks assigned, no external pressure of any kind. The standard in the college would be the same as that in the lower school.

It would not reach goals, nor concentrate on attainment and achievement; it would not standardize or measure growth by any external means, but would strive to understand the young adult, to guide him and control him in the most wholesome way, to stimulate and inspire him to express himself and find himself, knowing that, if the school can provide an environment in which the young lose themselves utterly in concentrated effort for ends which are their own, they are in the path of self-realization.

AIMS

Education is life, growth; it has no ends beyond itself. It is dynamic, not static; the ends are immediate; the process and the end are one. Progressive education has set itself the task of ministering to the growing child. Its job is, therefore, to study, to know, and to meet the needs of the unfolding organism. The child is immature and ignorant. Education must provide for him conditions which bring about a sound, accomplished, beautiful body; an intelligent, sympathetic mind; a sincere spirit. In the measure that it does this, it is educational. The institution may not make demands; it must meet demands, and these demands are indicated by the nature of childhood and youth.

Young people must grow in confidence and in certainty that life is sweet and good, and that they are wanted in the world. The egotism, arrogance, and unstable condition of youth often develops an attitude of intolerance and domination later. Therefore, great care should be given to insure disciplinary experiences of the right kind. The finest discipline is secured when the subject itself holds the attention and enthusiasm. The creative activity of the little child affords abundant disciplinary experience. Sports and all social experiences are also disciplinary for the youth. All subject matter may be treated in such a way as to provide the fullest mental discipline. To concentrate, to endure—yes, even to suffer for ends that are desirable or necessary, is wholesome for youth.

EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITY

Education is the instrument of society for preserving the best of itself, for defending itself against violence and revolution. It is the undeveloped person who throws the bomb. In self protection, society must minister to all of its young, must see to it that they grow in an even, balanced way, that there is no acceleration, no unwise specialization, that the order of the development of the nervous system is respected, that the integrity of the intellect and the unity of being are preserved.

The best preparation for the future is a well-spent to-day. Therefore, education may safely concentrate its attention upon present needs. Society owes the young guidance, control, instruction, association, and inspiration throughout the growing years. If the school program ministers to all-round development, we may safely trust detailed results to that mysterious thing called Life.

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