

CASE STUDIES
for TEACHERS of
RELIGION

GOODWIN B. WATSON, Ph. D.

Instructor in Educational Psychology,
Teachers College, Columbia University

GLADYS H. WATSON, A.M.

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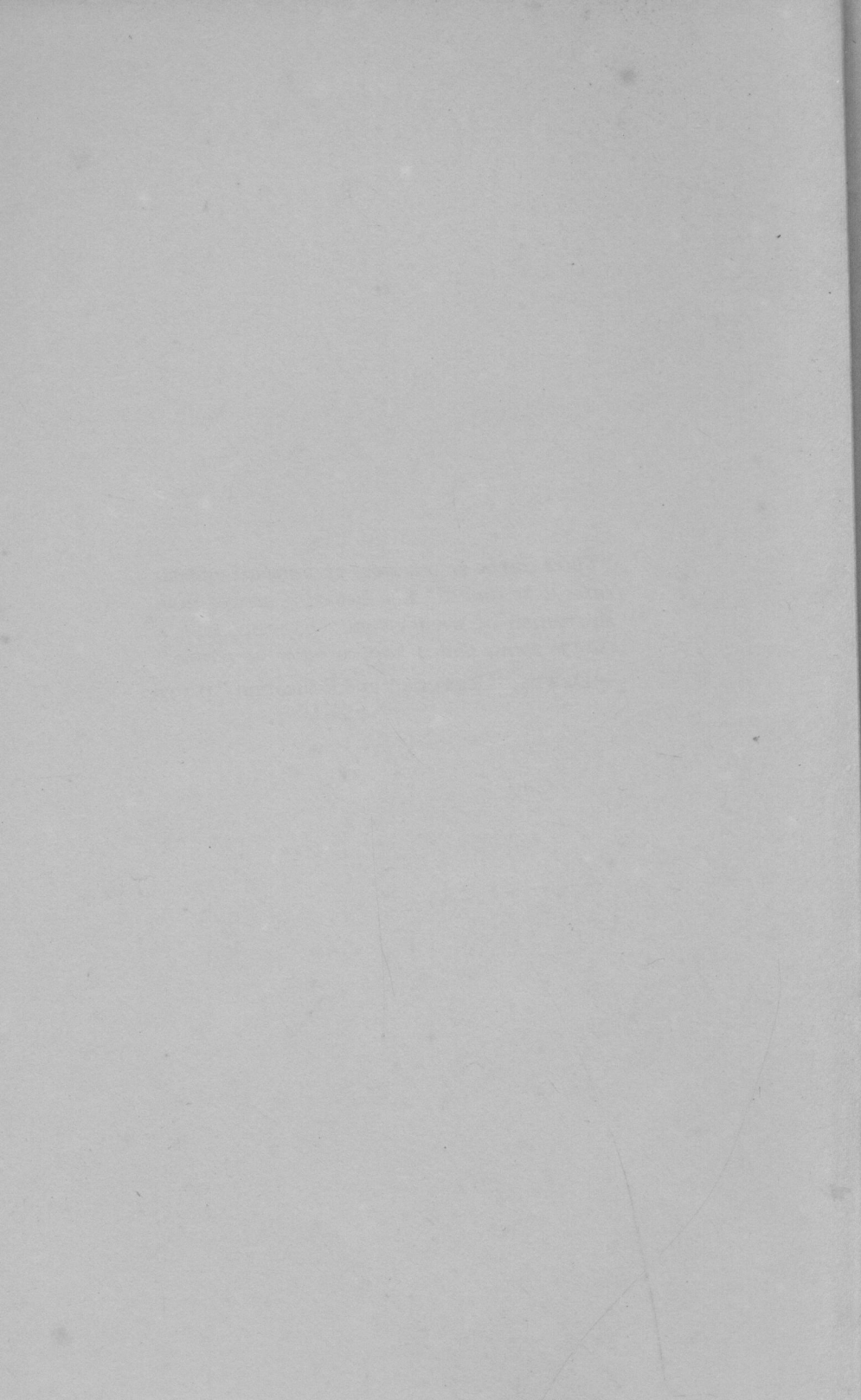
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HOME



"There can be no discovery of a method without cases to be studied. The method is derived from observation of what actually happens, with a view to seeing that it happen better next time."

—DEWEY, "Democracy and Education," p.197.

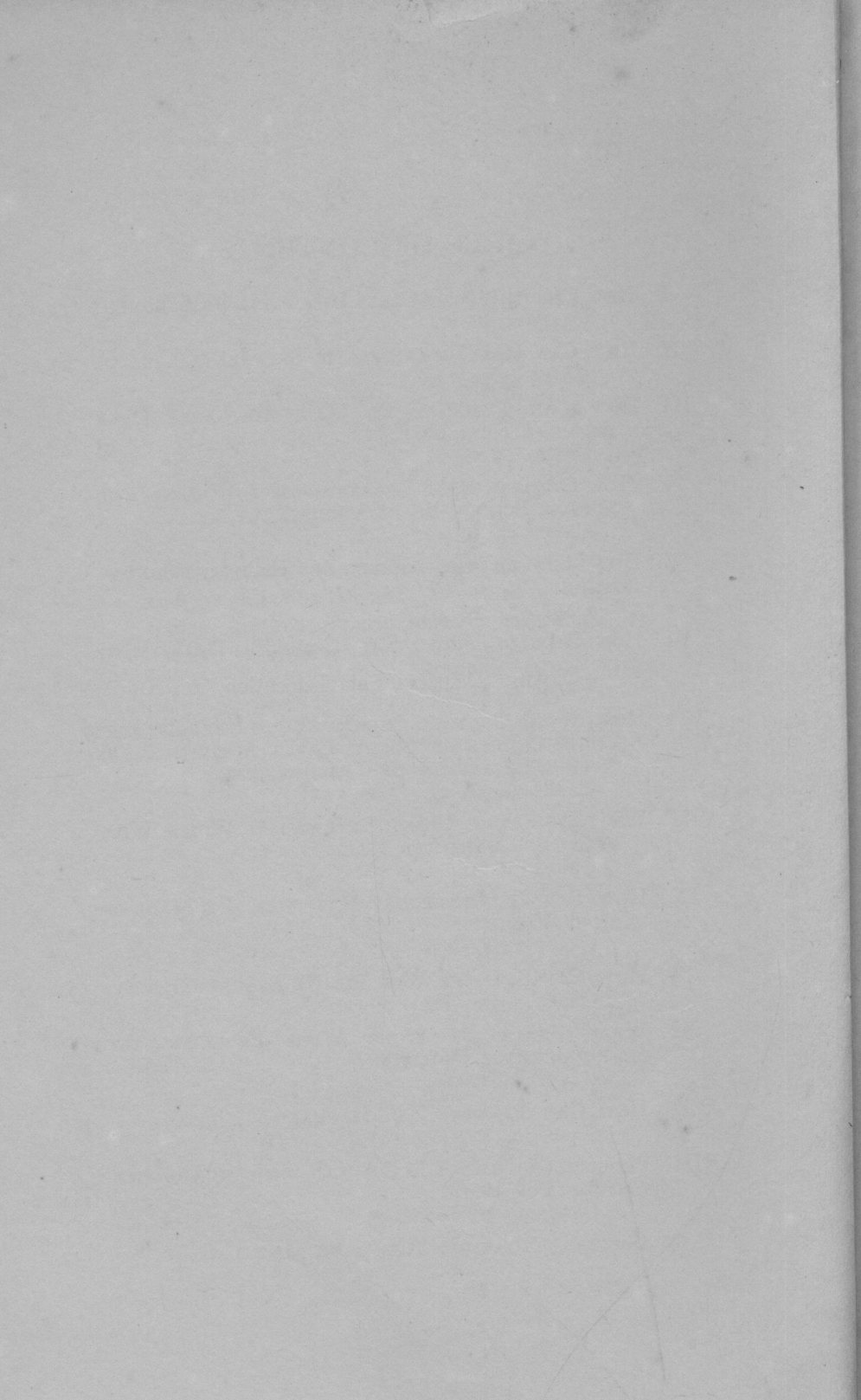
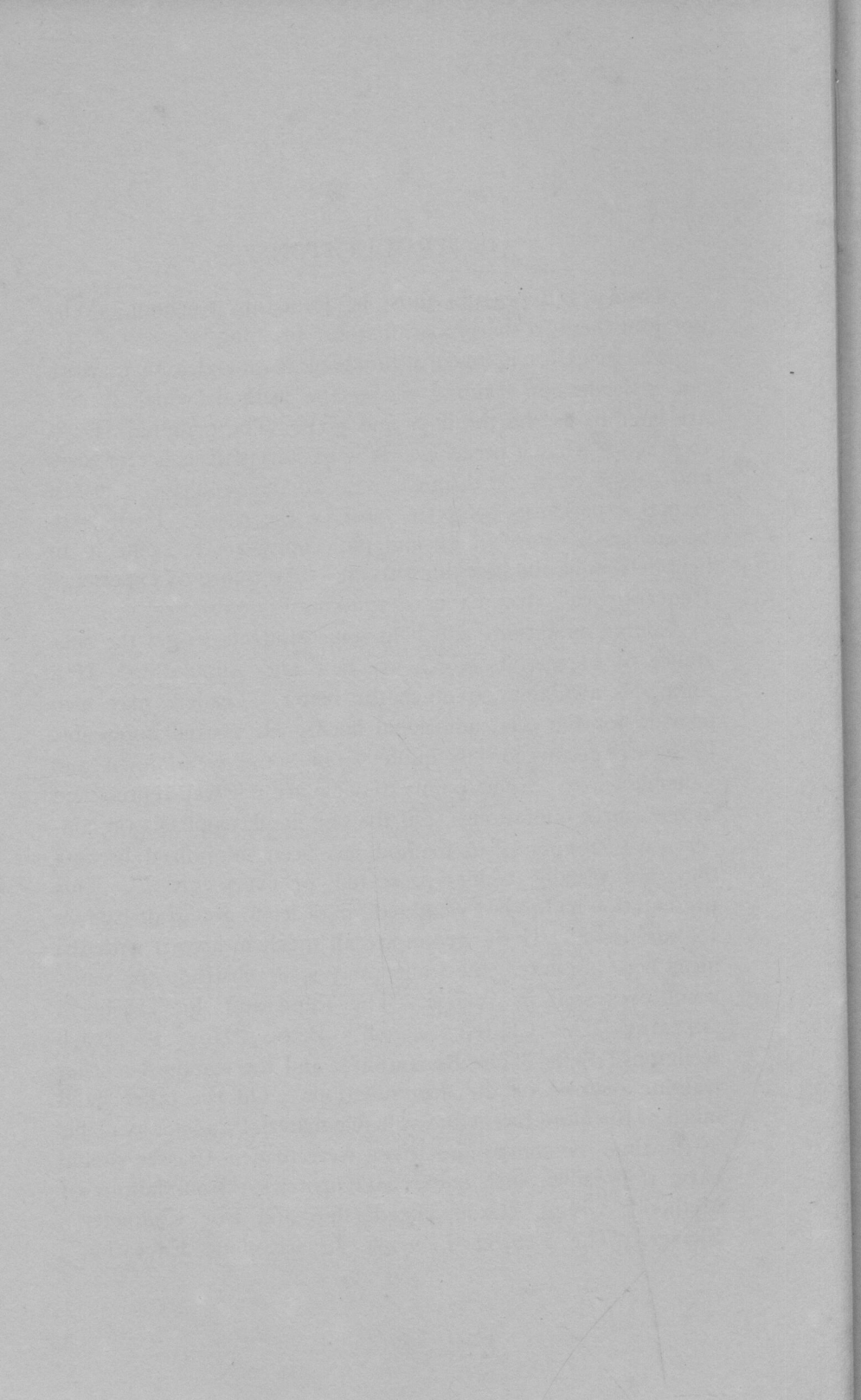


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INTRODUCTION

Theory and practice must be joined in teaching. Why not join them in the preparation for teaching?

The method employed in this book is an endeavor to work out in leadership training classes the methods which leaders are later to use on the boys and girls. The training class is to practice what it preaches. It is to start with concrete cases and follow each one through, with all the problems it raises. Actual experiences comprise most of the cases. Each is to be analyzed. Psychology and philosophy are to come in to help determine the best thing to do. "An ounce of experience frequently calls for a ton of thinking."

Source quotations will help some students to get the substance of viewpoints which are new and stimulating. If a library is available, so much the better. Leaders may well provide for the class additional books. It proved impossible to secure permission to quote from some well-known and valuable books. Some points of view are not well represented in the source quotations. On the one hand, emphasis on conservative viewpoints in method has been minimized because they are usually well represented in every group. This presentation had to be "weighted" in order to get a fair balance for discussion. If the group are all much in accord with the ideas here presented, the leader may well substitute the viewpoint expressed in Weigle, "The Pupil and the Teacher"; Athearn, "The Church School"; Betts, "How to Teach Religion"; Betts, "The Recitation"; and the standard teacher training courses of the denominations. On the other hand much of the more recent and valuable material was not available at the time the source quotations were made. Classes should have, if possible, such books as Kilpatrick, "Foundations of Method"; Gregg, "Group Leadership and Boy Character"; Shaver, "The Project Principle in Religious Education";

Betts and Hawthorne, "Method in Teaching Religion"; Bower, "The Curriculum of Religious Education"; Burt, "The Young Delinquent"; Van Waters, "Youth in Conflict"; Hadfield, "Psychology and Morals"; Pierce, "Understanding Our Children."

It is not expected that all of these cases represent the needs of any one leadership training class. Certainly there is no expectation that they shall be taken up in the order in which they happen to be arranged here. It is hoped that each leader will start with the problems felt by the teachers at the time when they begin their work together. Whenever actual cases of difficulty or success can be reported from the experience of members of the group, it is far better to use those than the cases here given. Sometimes the cases in this book will be useful in illustrating and supplementing one which has arisen in the week-by-week experience of the teachers and club leaders. The hope of the authors is that this collection may increase the resourcefulness of the class and the leader with reference to the range of situations studied and the facts and viewpoints brought to bear on these situations.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the courtesies extended by the Macmillan Company, Charles Scribner's Sons, The Pilgrim Press, Harper and Brothers, The University of Chicago Press, George H. Doran Company, D. C. Heath and Company, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, The Atlantic Monthly, and Samuel McChord Crothers, in the form of permission to use copyrighted quotations. They are deeply indebted to Professor William Heard Kilpartick of Teachers College, Columbia University, not only for permission to quote his class remarks, but also for the viewpoint suggested in the entire work. They owe much, also, to their co-workers in the St. James Methodist Episcopal Church of New York City, the Englewood Week Day Schools of Religion, and the Union School of Religion, whose resourcefulness and teaching skill appear in the best of the cases presented.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE LEADER

1. Since the aim of this class is to increase the skill of the students and not their erudition, your business is to help them think, not to think for them. The results of your thinking, however much better than theirs, are not really so valuable to them as the crude, imperfect results of their own attempt to decide questions for themselves. Hence, lead discussion, don't lecture.

2. Always use actual cases arising in the experience of members of the class in preference to cases from the book. If there are parallel cases in the books, these may be supplementary and the suggestions under them may be a guide to your conduct of the discussion of the cases which the class bring.

3. It is part of your responsibility to become so familiar with the cases and the source material that when a problem comes up in the class you can immediately call to mind the similar instances and the fruitful source quotations. This involves preparation of the whole material before starting to teach any of it. Test yourself by imagining a case that might come up and think what you would do.

4. Cases which are recent, concrete, vivid, and detailed are better than remote, abstract, general statements of difficulties. Thus when a teacher says, "My problem is to hold the interest of my class," that is too vague a statement. Get it stated in terms of exactly what she tried to interest the class in, under what circumstances, why she did it, and exactly what happened.

5. It is frequently best to avoid in the beginning cases in which feeling runs high and prejudices are likely to prevent fair discussion of the problem. Never fail to come to these questions before the course concludes, but it is frequently wise to illustrate the same issue first in fields which are far removed and more or less emotionally indifferent.

6. Don't take the source quotations authoritatively. They represent points of view of thoughtful human beings. Frequently they differ in their recommendations. The class is to be its own judge, making its own decision in the light of all of the evidence it can get on all sides of the questions at hand.

7. Try to get contributions of illustration, experience, and opinion from each member of the group. Do this informally. Easy questions, not too personal, upon which everyone can comfortably contribute something are good "openers."

8. Let all be done in utter good fellowship. The class is a quest, not a debate. "My side against your side," brings more heat than light. Various points of view, none of which may include the whole truth, should seek together for a truth big enough to comprehend the values each one wishes conserved. Help each member of the group, from the very beginning, to feel that the group as a whole can see further than can any single member (not excepting the leader), but that no group decision is complete until each member is wholeheartedly satisfied. Integration, rather than compromise, is the aim.

9. Respect minorities. Try to help the rest of the group to understand why this person or group holds a different point of view. Strive to incorporate minority desires in each decision. Do not let a sincere objector be "downed" by the vehemence of the opposition.

10. Encourage brief statements, not speeches. Seek for a rapid give and take such as goes on in conversation. Interesting conversationalists do not expound or harangue to their friends at length. They enter into a stream of thought with a sentence here, a question there, and an explanation later. An ideal class would see ideas raised, passed back and forth, modified, changed, reinterpreted, etc., with quick, easy resiliency something like the batting back and forth of a ball in a tennis match. This being the ideal way for the class to participate, set a good example as leader!

11. Use a blackboard freely. Write down questions, comments, essential points in illustrations, etc. Try to develop the habit of writing rapidly, and of being able to carry on discussion while you write. Use the words of the speaker, not your reinterperatation of those words. They mean more to him in the form in which he said them. Putting them on the board makes the contribution seem to be of real significance, helps to focus discussion, and keeps a running record so that everyone may see what has been suggested.

12. Frequently summarize. A good form is, "You remember we began by asking . . . Then these reasons were pointed out: (1) . . . ; (2) . . . ; (3) . . . But on the other side, it was suggested that we ought to consider (1) . . . ; (2) . . . ; and (3) . . . Considering all of these points of view, on what are we agreed? On (a) . . . ? On (b) . . . ? Where do we still have a difference of opinion?" It is frequently wise to reserve one blackboard just for the points of agreement that are reached, the conclusions formulated, etc., as the discussion proceeds.

13. Be alert to recognize the need for evidence. When there is a clash of opinion, try to get each side stated in terms of particular cases and illustrations. Don't quarrel over general principles. Recognize, further, the difference between facts and points of view. Keep the class alert to notice which statements are scientific evidence, and which are values, opinions, preferences. Both are important. When a discussion becomes desultory because no one in the group has the necessary facts, appoint a committee to get them, and lay the question aside until the evidence is at hand. Do not try to settle scientific questions by theories spun out of the heads of members of the group.

14. Beware of desultory talk! Keep to the issue. Summarize! Do not hesitate to interrupt any speaker to inquire just what bearing his suggestion has on the point at issue. If it is not directly pertinent, suggest that he hold it for a few moments until the class comes to the phase of the question he

is about to discuss. Do not leave any point until the members of the class are all clear that they have gone as far as they care to with it, that they understand perfectly just how far they agree, and the specific points on which they differ, and have some insight into the reasons for their differences. Always end up with at least a tentative conclusion, a working hypothesis. Never leave the matter wholly in the air.

15. Always ask, "What differences will this conclusion make in our practice?" This is not a question only for the end of the hour, but for the beginning as well. Keep the discussion in terms of the concrete throughout. But certainly before a problem is laid aside, there should be some specific plans, some ways and means, some definite concept of exactly what is to be done. In many cases this will involve getting teachers to experiment in their classes, coming back later with reports of how the experiment worked out, ready to make and to receive suggestions for improving it next time.

16. Do not hesitate to reopen questions which have been discussed, whenever new evidence appears. Questions are not settled for all time and circumstances, by a unanimous vote of a class.

17. Always bear in mind that in the training group, the answer to a question, the particular conclusion reached, the specific material mastered, is of much less importance than is the skill which the individuals of the group have gained in analyzing problems, and reaching their own conclusions.

Have the students themselves found the heart of the issue involved in a practical situation? Have they discovered pertinent evidence? Have they weighed, fairly, differing points of view? Are their conclusions their own, not taken because somebody said so, or because it always has been thought to be so? Are their conclusions in such form that they are put into practice, right away, in the very next lesson they teach? After a matter has been considered, are they still open-minded to consider new evidence, and if it seem desirable, to change their viewpoint?

These are the tests of your work!

CHAPTER I

HOW CAN THE BEST CLASS DISCIPLINE BE SECURED?

CASE I

A second-grade teacher was having trouble with discipline in her class. Pupils did not pay good attention to her stories. They moved around or talked to one another. She decided one thing they needed was physical exercise, so put in a five-minute period of calisthenics and activity. This helped greatly.

She then secured forty big pictures, "The Primary Picture Stories," of the Missionary Education Movement. The first Sunday six of them were hung around the room at a height which was convenient for the children. She asked them, "Which one shall we talk about?"

Excitedly the children discussed the pictures and decided, "We want to hear about all of them."

Finally they agreed on three. The next week they found the same six with two new ones. For the benefit of some pupils who were not present before, one of the pupils retold the stories they had had the previous week. Then they went on to discuss the new pictures.

Sometimes the retelling took the form of telling a made-up story without telling which picture it was about, the rest of the class trying to guess the correct picture. Sometimes the class acted out the story of the pictures.

Their bad habits disappeared. They remembered the stories. They improved in their ability to make up new ones, and especially in their attitude toward the children of other lands and races, shown in the pictures. They mounted some smaller pictures to take home. At home they made up stories about them to tell to their parents. They presented the fifth grade with a picture which would illustrate the things the fifth grade had been studying.

List all the reasons why some people might think this was more desirable than trying to make the children pay attention to the kind of story they were having in their regular lesson leaflets. List the disadvantages of this method.

Would you advocate:

A period of exercise?

Letting the children move around the room?

Pictures of modern life rather than of ancient times?

Encouraging pupils rather than the teacher to select the picture?

Repeating stories that have been given before?

Making up stories?

Mounting pictures for others rather than merely expression or hand work?

How would you justify each of your positions to someone who disagreed?

See Source Quotations Nos. 1, 5, 6, 39, 57, 215, 233, 238, 260.

CASE 2

A group of boys and girls in the fourth grade were making trouble for their teacher. The teacher wanted it to be a self-governing class. Whenever any case of misconduct arose she tried to conduct a discussion about it.

“Shall we grab books from one another? What will happen if we do? How will the other people feel about it? How much will we get learned?”

As a result she spent two-thirds of every lesson period going over and over again the discussion of misconduct which had taken place in the session. The children grew restless and said, “Let’s leave this discipline business and get to some real studying.”

What were the children learning in these lessons?

What attitudes were they forming?

Suppose the teacher had had a discussion like this the first