METHODS WITH ADOLESCENTS

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FOREWORD

The road from theory to accepted practice is frequently long and arduous. Modifications of practice as a result of changes in theory are frequently so slight as to be almost imperceptible except over long stretches of time. And in no field is this truer than in a field characterized by all of the complex elements of human nature. It apparently is easier to improve the quality of steel rails, to propagate a new variety of corn, or to change the constituent elements of limestone soil, than it is to modify human nature.

Science, however, is not concerned with things of the material world alone. Long ago it began the study of mind itself. It imposed upon the realms of thought and action, the methods of introspection, of critical observation, and of philosophical implication. Conclusions, novel and bizarre in character, fill the literature of the periods when these various methods were in vogue.

Science as it improved its technique and refined its procedure discovered, among other things, that the laws of mental life are not fixed and immutable. On the contrary, it discovered that they are subject to wide deviation because of a variety of factors that play upon them.

One of the great leaders of the movement to study the content and nature of the human mind was G. Stanley Hall, the president of Clarke University. While his methods may not have been so meticulous and exact as the scientists of the present generation

might desire, they were nevertheless the methods of a pioneering and adventurous spirit. He said in effect, "Let us study the person to be educated. Let us discover the characteristics of human beings, their needs, their wants, at different levels of maturity, and then build our educational system on the basis of these characteristics, needs and wants." Long before his monumental work on adolescence appeared, articles by himself, his students and associates, pointed the way to a new view of education.

The enthusiasm of Dr. Hall and others was not readily transmitted to the schoolmasters of the country. They listened with attention and sat at his feet, realizing that they were in the presence of one of the world's master teachers, but they did not know how to apply these new views, these psychological generalizations to the practical work of the schoolroom. Indeed, the course has not yet been run, but great has been the progress.

Apparently progress in education never moves forward in a straight line. It moves forward under the influence of dynamic personalities or the stress of effective movements. Things emphasized to-day may drop into the background to-morrow, but new things will be advanced to take their places. The emphasis of yesterday may not be the emphasis of to-day. But the values of these varying emphases apparently are never lost. Periods of little stress may really be periods of incubation. Periods of apparent quiescence may actually be periods of ripening for the harvest.

Much of this sort of thing has been taking place in secondary education. The influence of Hall and his group gave way before that of another group which laid emphasis upon a different technique and called attention to a different set of circumstances. The

study of mind became a matter of measurement rather than a matter of observation primarily. The methods of measurement did not bear fruit at once. There was much skepticism when they were first advanced. That they represented a refinement of the methods of Hall was not at first clearly seen and their ultimate significance has not yet been clearly understood.

There was another movement equally significant that influenced policies and determined programs in the field of secondary education. It was what was known as the sociological movement in contradistinction to the psychological movement. It was another case of lifting into relief a force long known to be present and to be effective in determining educational policies. The claim was made that the materials of instruction are determined by social conditions, forces, and conventions, while the methods of instruction are determined by the characteristics of the human mind. This meant that the teacher must look two ways—to society to find out what to teach and to the mind of the child to find out how to teach it. It is obvious that this movement has been more responsible than any other for a revival of interest in the curriculum. For a decade or more we have had curriculum studies without end. There has been much progress and great improvement in the reorganization of the materials by instruction. Only a beginning, however, has been made, or perhaps it would be more nearly correct to say that this is a problem to which there is no end so long as society is changing.

Critical observation, psychology, measurement, sociology, each in turn and in its own way, has influenced the conception of adolescent education, and yet there has never been a time when any one of them has been

absent. It has remained for the practical administrator or teacher on the job to keep these forces playing in proper relation to each other. Since he is not a philosopher, it has not been easy for him to integrate these contending forces. Indeed, he has not always succeeded in doing it, but the task has been his more largely than that of many a theorist. He learned that the materials of the curriculum, their selection and organization, cannot be disassociated from their psychological implications; that the methods of instruction are social in origin and social in meaning; and that both materials and methods lend themselves to measurement. Perhaps the practical schoolmaster was not solely responsible for this discovery, but he certainly played a conspicuous part in it.

This book is the fruition of this series of movements and the result of years of fruitful schoolroom experience by the author. It lays heavy tribute upon the lessons of psychology in presenting both the character and methods of instruction involved in educating the adolescent child. Questions of importance are disposed of not on the basis of the consensus of opinion but rather on the basis of the mental characteristics of the adolescent. The book is none the less pragmatic for that reason.

The problems of secondary instruction are stated with a clearness born of experience and solved with an assurance born of conviction. The treatment of these problems as related to the various branches of study is refreshing, in that integrity of the intellectual composition of the individual is never lost sight of. The materials of instruction as well as the methods involved in presenting them are seen at all times as contributing to this end. While the book is a book of method, it rises to a far higher level than devices, aids, helps,

hortatory advice, and rules of thumb. Method is not the end; it is merely an instrument or means of accomplishing through certain materials the social education of the adolescent child. The book, therefore, should be of helpful service to high-school teachers and administrators in training and to those in service in supplying them with fresh points of view relative to the practices of the secondary school. It professionalizes the materials and socializes the technique of instruction.

L. D. COFFMAN.

PREFACE

Four years ago the author published *Adolescence and High-School Problems*. The reception accorded that book by colleges, universities, normal schools, and reading circles encouraged him to write this volume. In the former book an attempt was made to solve problems pertaining to social administration and the high-school curriculum on the basis of adolescent psychology. In this book the author undertakes to deal with teaching problems in the same manner. It is assumed that, for the high-school teacher, there are two sources of inspiration: (1) a sympathetic and intelligent insight into the workings of the mind of his individual pupils and (2) a broad and growing knowledge of his subject matter. It is also assumed that the nature and needs of the pupils should largely condition both the content and the method of presenting high-school subjects and that in turn success is conditioned by these. Chapter II is a brief statement of the adolescent characteristics that furnish the foundation for the chapters that follow. This chapter is based on both study and observation, the author's experience in dealing with high-school pupils and in supervising the work of student-teachers having naturally influenced the discussions.

This book was written for the purpose of helping high-school teachers and prospective teachers, especially those in the smaller schools who are called upon to teach many subjects, and high-school principals who wish to aid their teachers in the solution of classroom

problems. It is a book of special methods. It is not a book of devices. Many teaching problems must be solved and much classroom procedure determined while class discussion moves rapidly toward its purpose. It would seem that the exigencies of the classroom can be met most successfully by the teacher who has considered carefully the relation of adolescent traits, not to high-school teaching in general, but to the teaching of the particular subjects. Because of its extreme difference in content and its varying appeals, each subject has a psychology and a pedagogy of its own which is here set forth in the successive chapters.

It is hoped that the reader will proceed through the entire book as it is written; the lack of common interest on the part of special teachers endangers the unity of educational aims. It is only by knowing the function of other subjects and being interested in their content and method that the teacher can understand, not what his subject contains, but what part it contributes toward the entire educational activity and welfare of each individual pupil. "Correlation" and "coöperation" are words to conjure with when considering the varying intellectual and social needs of the high-school pupils who daily pass from one teacher to another. However, each chapter is based directly on Chapter II and is intended to be complete within itself. Chapter III, as the title suggests, deals with principles and considerations that apply to all high-school teaching. Chapters IV, VII, and XIV are somewhat general and should be read in each case in connection with the two chapters that follow.

Ever since the days of Herbert Spencer, it has been repeatedly urged that "to prepare us for complete living is the function which education has to discharge"; that is, complete living is the *end* of all educational effort. Such is not the assumption of this book. The

treatment of each subject proceeds on the hypothesis that education *is* complete and vigorous living—not a new doctrine—and that both content and method must be made to conform to the interests and wants of the pupils as they go about their daily tasks. We are to meet present vital needs, not future contingent needs concerning which we may prophesy. It is here taken for granted that the full unfolding and maturing of all the pupil's powers by duly exercising these powers is the best possible preparation for the uncharted voyage that lies before him; abundant, well-rounded living to-day prepares for successful living to-morrow. However, the proponents of the "practical" education who propose to survey the needs of the economic, industrial, and social worlds and thus to determine content and method, are fruitfully contributing to educational theory and practice. The natural curiosity and intellectual hunger of adolescent boys and girls can usually be satisfied by using subject matter and methods found in fields of practical endeavor; for the psychology of adolescence teaches that pupils of high-school age, because of their broadening social outlook, are interested in processes and materials that best serve human needs. Interested, enthusiastic application of all the powers, however secured, is complete living and makes for self-realization.

The aim of every chapter is practical. Skillful, sympathetic teaching brings abundant returns; it encourages the weaker pupils, stimulates thought and imagination, and makes clearer to a larger percentage of the class misunderstood features of the subject. Because of the infinite gradation of ability, and because of the numbers involved, a slight improvement in teaching brings proportionately large returns. It is the aim of every chapter to aid the teacher in obtaining these returns.

The thoughtful reader will see that the theory and the practice here urged are dominated by the thought that high-school teachers will succeed in proportion to their knowledge of what individual adolescents really are and what they really need.

RALPH W. PRINGLE.

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March 1, 1927.

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METHODS WITH ADOLESCENTS

CHAPTER I

METHOD IN EDUCATION

I

In all lines of human endeavor, the world has ever been ready to depend upon new schemes and devices in attempting to overcome difficulties.

A few years ago, a group of high-school principals, most of whom were in charge of the larger high schools of central Illinois, met to discuss and study educational matters of common interest. Each in turn presented for discussion what he considered his major problem and explained the methods and devices that he was using in attempting its solution. The problems were all of the kind familiar to high-school teachers and principals of experience. Much of the discussion centered around the difficulty of raising and maintaining standards of scholarship in the large city high school. Two of the largest schools represented were in the throes of attempting to create higher ideals of school work among their pupils. The methods of attack were thoughtful and vigorous; and the results, if measured by higher average grades, were encouraging. The means employed were mostly negative administrative devices. Elaborate and thoroughgoing systems of reports concerning the failing pupils and their work were demanded from the teachers; these were made the basis of conferences with pupils and parents; then came many carefully planned follow-up schemes. All

the methods and devices described seemed practical and gave evidence of much earnest and intelligent effort to accomplish the desired ends; and they were commended by the educational expert in charge of the meeting. But is it not astonishing that throughout the entire half-day's discussion no mention was made of the most important and natural means of raising and maintaining standards of scholarship? No reference was made to any special effort put forth to improve the classroom teaching; yet all present were ready to admit that skillful teaching solves nearly all ordinary high-school problems.

Yes, all who give thought to the matter are convinced that skillful work in the classroom is desirable; but there are still many who believe with a writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* for January, 1923, that teaching is "purely a matter of personality and practice," and that a deep and broad knowledge of the subject, together with the enthusiasm which this knowledge engenders, is the only preparation needed—and this in the age of efficiency engineers who exhaust their ingenuity to discover the best way of doing even the most mechanical tasks! In trying to comprehend the mental workings of him who is so sure that there is no need for instruction in the art of teaching, one is somewhat tempted to conclude with Shakespeare that man is "most ignorant of what he's most assured." Many years ago Sir William Hamilton, a common-sense philosopher, gave us the simple formula, "All method is a rational progress toward a definite end." All through the ages it has been found a most difficult thing to secure rational, systematic procedure in all lines of human endeavor; it has been found difficult to make conduct continually subservient to a definite end, even when it has been possible to agree upon the desired end. As a consequence, there has slowly