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THE TEACHING OF CIVICS

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

WE have come at last to a sound notion of teaching civics in the schools. Long experience with traditional modes of instruction has indicated their failure, and teachers now turn to a more direct application of important principles of pedagogical procedure long urged by the practical psychologist and recently verified by careful experimental work.

For a generation past the teaching of civics aimed at little more than the acquisition of knowledge about government. It was assumed that the school's function did not extend beyond an intellectual treatment of social and political welfare. The subject-matter was formal and necessarily barren, remote from ordinary human interests, and more remote still from any concerns of children. In the earlier years it consisted of a study of the mechanics of government through analysis of the fundamental law as provided by constitutions and charters. More recently the social functions of government have been given the chief place in school study, and political structure has been made secondary. On

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the whole, the kind of information given under the latter régime is more useful and interesting than that required earlier, but it is still quite remote from the civic problems most likely to press themselves upon youth.

Persisting disappointment in the results of civics teaching has caused considerable experimentation, and out of these new failures and successes well-defined principles have been evolved. These constitute the standards for selecting concrete materials for instruction, special methods of presentation, and modes of transition from one topic to another. These controlling principles or considerations it may be well to state.

(1) It is now clearly perceived that the initial point of departure must be a study of those particular phases of our group life which fall well within the intimate circle of the child's personal affairs. It is in the active concerns of child life that those habits of critical investigation and active coöperation, so important in mature civic life, are to be established. The opportunity for vital instruction is to be found in those activities of children which originate in their spontaneous interests — in their sociable play, in their group games, in their competitive athletics, in their student organizations, in their government of the

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school grounds, and in their coöperative activities of every sort. Here the relations of individual participation and group coöperation, of social function and political control, are easily made clear, because they are seen in connection with interests and necessities immediately stirring in the lives of the children.

(2) Once the experiences of children have been fully utilized to develop better social attitudes and more competent coöperation in connection with their own vivid interests, the foundation for further growth is provided; the teacher has only to follow with patience the gradually expanding civic relations of children. The margins of the child's life are always extending; he is constantly becoming aware of a larger world through the conversations of his family, the comments of his neighbors, and his daily readings. It is easy for the teacher to enrich the pupil's interest in the neighborhood's effort to maintain cleanliness and beauty, in the municipality's attempt to keep peace and order, and in the State's effort to regulate industrial relations. If the teacher will only invoke it, the child's understanding of the need of collective action in his own small affairs can be made to interpret the larger group responsibilities of neighborhood and town. Comprehension

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of his part in still larger units — in State, Nation, and world — remains as a natural later step.

(3) The teacher's task will neither begin nor end in mere intellectual appreciation of civic relations. The end of good teaching goes beyond understanding; it involves sensitiveness to obligation and the development of a willingness and ability to act with other men for the common good. From the beginning to the end of teaching, the chief aim should be to get the child to perform his part in civic life. It will be a small and fragmentary part at first, simply because life starts with few and small contacts. But whatever need the teacher can get the child to feel and understand, that need he must seek to realize. Action is the goal of civics teaching.

(4) Meanwhile it must not be forgotten that real activity is one of the best resources in the teaching of children. In the teaching of civics it is used both as end and as ways and means. The child who has tried to participate in any given situation will have a sense of reality about it that can never be had from conversations or books. He comes away from it with an accurate understanding that indicates the meaning and value of details which otherwise would be dull and formal to him. His actions have pointed his mind so

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as to observe pertinent truths, and he comes to the classroom ready to have his problems discussed, his knowledge augmented, and his intentions better controlled. Because he has been participating in life itself, he will want to take an active part in every classroom activity which flows from it, — in discussion, reading, or investigation at first hand.

(5) It is inevitable that a conception of civics teaching which makes action rather than knowing the end of teaching will greatly enhance the educational value of all school activities outside the classroom; indeed, of all the child's institutional memberships outside the school. Home, playground, and neighborhood life will be the laboratories where civic truths are to be experienced, learned, and tested out. The classroom exercise will occupy a supplementary if not a secondary position. It will be a formal meeting where children gather to discuss their social affairs, much as citizens go to a club or a town meeting. Here they will report their problems, exchange information, propose solutions, and assign parts, emphasizing the constant common obligation of each little citizen and designating the special committees with particular tasks. Throughout these stated classroom meetings, the

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teacher will be the natural leader. Out of his superior wisdom he will stimulate and supervise the group, suggesting methods and appraising achievements.

To aid teachers in the application of these vital principles of the new teaching of civics, a volume of very concrete suggestions is here offered. It has been prepared by a teacher of unusual scholarship in the command of materials needed for interesting and competent study, one whose insight into the mental life of children has been gained by actual contacts that make her psychology and pedagogy sure.

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THE TEACHING OF CIVICS

I

THE PROBLEM OF CIVICS TEACHING

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I

CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS

The new humanities in college and university

THE awakening of the civic conscience and its immediate materialization in the movement for social betterment has nowhere functioned with more permanent interest than in the work of the college and university. Through newly developed courses in "Political and Social Science" it has been made possible for students to get a close view of the various ramifications of society. Twenty-five years ago it was almost impossible to find an opportunity in any institution of learning to investigate social activities. In no other century has it been deemed necessary or expedient for the great body of students at large to take into consideration the bases which go to make up society — the family, the home, the community, the city, the State, the Nation, each with its own several relationships with the other, and all with their connections with the evolution of civiliza-

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tion itself. President Woodrow Wilson well calls these essentials "the new humanities." With the introduction of a study of vital problems of the political and social order, a new interest, both humanitarian and philosophic, has been aroused, which exceeds any other academic interest ever presented in undergraduate work.

It matters little what a college student decides to investigate along the lines of political and social science; whatever topic he takes for his first work he finds engrossingly absorbing. It may be the labor question, yet it often ends in a minute consideration of a detail of a larger subject; immigration, for illustration, embraces many phases of national life, any one of which needs concentrated attention, such as housing, sanitation, or rapid transportation. The point is, that the moment the student finds himself at work upon some one topic of human interest, all else becomes submerged in the problem which has been offered him for solution.

The need of civic education in elementary and secondary schools

The college and the university, however, are not the public schools. And the mind of the nation is not the college-bred mind. Rather, it is a

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mental product developed from elementary education, supplemented in part by the secondary schools, and by the ever-increasing knowledge accumulated from daily experience.

If we are to make sure that the mind of the public is growing commensurately with the college mind of the minority, if the nation at large is to enter upon a civic awakening, and the majority is to take part in the betterment movement, as a democratic whole should take part, it behooves the public school world to develop a course in civics which in a measure will correspond to the college courses in political and social science.

The education of the individual for himself alone has had its day; a day that saw great advancement and that was sufficient for its generation. Not only were the tools of education generously meted out to all alike, through our great public school system, but to a certain extent the treasures of the liberal arts and the knowledge of the sciences were shared. Music and drawing, history and geography, literature and oratory, were taught in the public schools that the soul of youth might have the largest inspiration. This individualistic education, however, has not wrought the miracle of good citizen-