Supervised Study in the Elementary School

BY

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To the Memory of

A. S.

WHOSE LIFE IN THOUGHT, WORD, AND
DEED WAS AN INCARNATION OF
MAN'S MOST CHERISHED TREASURE—
FRIENDSHIP

PREFACE

WHEN the author's earlier volume on Supervised Study appeared (in 1916), the literature in this field was meager indeed and the number of schools employing some form of this educational method comparatively few. During the past seven years widespread interest in supervised study has become manifest in an extensive literature of several hundred titles, and in courses dealing intensively or incidentally with this form of school practice. Many high school principals and school superintendents have expressed their faith in the method by introducing some form of it into their schools. Leaders in the promotion of the junior high school regard supervised study as a fundamental method in this type of school. There are many problems still to be solved — one may well question whether any at all have been solved — before supervised study can be considered as integral in public school policy and practice. Not a few of these problems are engaging the efforts of superintendents and principals. Graduate students in education are devoting themselves to research in this field.

Practically all of this development, however, has been confined to the high school. In many quarters the need for similar activities in the elementary school has become acute. County superintendents, especially, are impressed with the possibilities of supervised study. Several large city systems now recognize the feasibility of arranging the program and schedule so that pupils may be taught how to study and be supervised while they study. In response to a considerable

number of requests from superintendents and teachers in many sections of our country this volume on *Supervised Study in the Elementary School* is offered as a companion volume to *Supervised Study in the Secondary School*, in which the discussion is limited to high school conditions.

Students of the subject are not agreed on the best name indicating the essential meaning of this type of school administration and educational method. Some prefer "directed learning," some "directed study," others "directive study," or "supervised learning." The author reserves a critical discussion of the concept, study-supervision, for another volume, now in course of preparation. Partly for the sake of uniformity with the other titles in the series the term "supervised study" is here retained.

It is impossible for the author to mention by name all of those to whom he is indebted for help in the making of this book. Hundreds of students and teachers in many summer school courses, institutes, conferences, and regular university sessions have contributed reports, studies, points of view, and criticisms that have entered into the content and organization of this volume. The author makes grateful acknowledgment to all of them. To Dr. W. C. Bagley, whose point of view influenced the author's presentation of the material in Chapter I; to Miss Mary Barnette, former Supervisor of Penmanship in Roanoke, Virginia, and now in charge of Penmanship in Hughes High School, Cincinnati, for much of the material in the chapter on Handwriting; to Professor McConnell of Miami University for his generous coöperation in the preparation of the chapter on Geography; to Mr. Walter Aiken and Mr. William H. Vogel, directors of Music and Art, respectively, in the Cincinnati public schools, for

their critical reading of the chapters on The Decorative Arts and on Music; to Silver, Burdett and Company for their courtesy in permitting the author to quote extensively from their publication, *Listening Lessons in Music*, and to Miss Lucy Thom of the Editorial Department of the Macmillan Company for her efficient and critical preparation of the manuscript for the press, — to all of these grateful acknowledgments are made.

The book has been written mainly for teachers in service, because the author knows that a very large number of them are ready to employ supervised study when they more clearly understand its purposes and procedures. Many of these teachers do not have ready access to libraries, and for this reason considerable space is devoted to quotations from sources in fields related to this subject.

The book leaves the author's desk as a reaffirmation of his faith in the purpose of education as a means of teaching children how to use their minds and of providing conditions under which the intelligent use of the mind may efficiently proceed. Study involves a series of acts and attitudes in the complex process of learning. These acts and attitudes must be understood by teacher and pupil. Teaching the pupil how best to perform these acts and acquire these attitudes; surrounding him with conditions under which he can independently best perform these acts and acquire these attitudes; and making successful study a realizable goal for all pupils according to their individuality, thereby quickening the will to learn — these are three great lights in the large meaning of supervised study that underlies the discussions in this volume.

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PART ONE

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

SUPERVISED STUDY

CHAPTER I

Supervised Study a Vital Part of the Curriculum

1. **The Chief Aim of Teaching.** The student of education is early introduced to philosophical and sociological discussions of the aims that controlled or should have controlled educational practice in the past. A study of aims and purposes is necessary also to a clear understanding of the reasons for current policies and procedures in public education. We must know what kind of product society expects of the school, what sort of individual the coming generation probably will need. Many of the aims considered in the history of education — such as knowledge, skill, social efficiency, character, culture, harmonious development — seem too comprehensive and vague to be adequate definitions of the purposes and outcomes that should guide the daily efforts of teacher and pupils. Such vague and comprehensive terms remind one of the preacher who chose the *Bible* as his text.

For the teacher who is interested in supervised study, however, these various definitions may be summed up in her own terminology: the aim of work in the classroom is to produce an individual who can economically and effectively direct himself as a learner. Knowledge of subject matter is of less importance than the consciousness of possessing mind power.

More than this, the chief aim of teaching is to develop an individual who knows how to use his mind, in order that he may be more willing to use it in large and worthwhile commissions. The pupil who undertakes assigned work with assurance, expedition, and happy success — in short, who knows how to study — may be helped in his attack on problems confronting him throughout the rest of his life. To teach her pupils how to study, then, is the means by which the teacher must try to attain the aim of education.

2. **Popular Misconceptions as to What Study Means.** The popular conception of study refers to it as " book larnin'." In spite of the progress made in the employment of problems, projects, and various types of socialized instruction one finds a very large per cent of teachers still insisting on memoriter recitations as criteria of real ability to study. It is still all too common to find that brilliance is considered synonymous with a good memory. One need only study the typical examination for evidence that ability to study is too often defined chiefly in terms of memory power.

3. **The Meaning of Study.** One of our duties as supervisors of study is to teach the pupil that studying means much more than memorizing. For a number of years the author has been collecting definitions of study from teachers and educators. The following composite and itemized conception of study is based on a collection of nearly a thousand definitions.

The word " study " is employed in a number of related and at the same time somewhat distinct meanings. We refer to a physician studying his patient, to a lawyer studying his case, to an engineer studying his problem, to a salesman studying a prospective customer. Again we speak of a carpenter studying an architect's plans, of a cook studying a recipe for a cake,

of a subordinate official studying the orders or directions received from his superior. It is customary, furthermore, to say that the actor studies his part, the preacher studies the sermon he has prepared, the teacher studies the lesson he is to present. Evidently the term *study* has different meanings as employed in these three types of cases. It is clear, also, that some common meaning must underlie the differences.

Let us consider the first group. When the physician studies a patient he tries to discover wherein this patient is in a certain sense unique and peculiar; he classifies the observed abnormalities according to the disease of which they are symptoms, and he decides what treatment will remove the disease.

Similarly with a lawyer. He is asked to handle the case of a client who faces a serious charge or a heavy suit. In order that his defense may be planned, the lawyer must understand the nature of the accusation; he must recall the law as it applies to this particular offense; he must obtain a clear understanding of all the occurrences upon which the accusation was made.

The engineer must study his problem when he is about to plan a bridge. He must thoroughly understand all the conditions affecting the building of this particular bridge, and he must recall and apply to the project in hand all of the knowledge that he has gained from his own and others' experience at bridge building.

In each of the foregoing cases, *study* is clearly identical with *constructive thinking*. There is a difficulty to be overcome by analysis; its complexities must be simplified and a solution to the problem found. One must search diligently for a clue, a suggestion, a hint, a hidden meaning that will point out a

way through the hazy situation. Real thinking, it is seen, always involves three elements: the recognition of the problem or situation demanding solution, the analysis of the complex problem or situation into its simpler elements, and a persistent search for "clues" that through association with what one already knows will suggest the solution.

The second group is somewhat different. The contractor studies the plans of the architect to find out just what he will have his workmen do. Each detail has been clearly worked out beforehand. The contractor does not create a plan — he executes one already made and studies in order to perceive accurately what he must do. Quite analogous is the study given by a subordinate officer to the written instructions of his superior. Here also there is no creative thinking demanded of the subordinate — only *a clear and accurate understanding and execution* of what some one else has thought out. This is *reproductive study.*

The third group covers a narrower range of activities. The actor and clergyman and teacher study their respective materials not as the engineer or physician, not as the contractor or subordinate, but as interpreters, exhorters, expositors, to some extent original, but concerned with a type of performance that aims to set before others the meaning, the beauty, the value of some experience already produced. *Interpretation* is the main purpose. This type may appropriately be called *appreciational study.*

It is clear that the process of studying is composed of a number of acts, the presence or absence of any one of which is determined by the objective of study. Concentration, understanding, analysis, synthesis, observation, assimilation, thinking, reasoning, memorizing, comparison, judging, re-

viewing, experimenting, testing, are included in the general process of studying. Studying may involve exact reproduction of a model or the contents of printed source. As in the case of Darwin, it may entail long and wide traveling, careful observation of many natural phenomena, the recording of what was observed, the painstaking examination of the collected data, and the subsequent deduction of conclusions. While much of the study in the elementary school is confined to books, a considerable amount is stimulated by means of play and certain socialized activities where the book is of minor importance. Music and dramatics, industrial arts, and domestic science are cases in point. The child engaged in learning to spell or in adding a row of figures is studying. The process probably is much simpler than when he is trying to solve a problem in percentage, but in each instance he is learning, he is adjusting himself to a new situation — one already prepared, as in spelling; the other new and unprepared, as in percentage.

4. **Studying and Thinking.** Many educators prefer to consider studying and thinking as synonymous. Dewey, however, calls attention in his careful volume on *How We Think* [1] to four uses of the words *thought* and *thinking*. They may be used broadly and loosely, to signify everything that "goes through our minds"; to refer to matters not directly perceived, such as imaginative incidents; to denote real or supposed knowledge, probable or improbable; and to mean reflective thinking, based on sound evidence.[2] Dewey defines thinking as "that operation in which present facts suggest other facts (or truths) in such a way as to induce belief in the latter upon the ground or the warrant of the former." [3] He

[1] D. C. Heath and Company, 1910. [2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 2–5. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

refers to the importance of suggestion in trying to find one's way out of a difficulty. Suggestions come from past experience and prior knowledge. "If the person has had some acquaintance with similar situations, if he has dealt with material of the same sort before, suggestions more or less apt and helpful are likely to arise. But unless there has been experience in some degree analogous, which may now be represented in imagination, confusion remains mere confusion. There is nothing upon which to draw in order to clarify it. Even when a child or a grown up) has a problem, to urge him to think when he has no prior experiences involving some of the same conditions, is wholly futile." [1]

To confine the meaning of study to thinking, regardless of grade or subject, runs counter to the foregoing view of thinking. Does the child think when he learns to spell *dog?* There are desirable thought situations that doubtless will facilitate learning to spell this and other words, but apart from such thought situations he can learn to spell. He is required to *study* his spelling lesson. He learns the name of Albany as the capital of New York. Need he think in order to do so? *Can* he think about Albany as the capital when the word and its significance are first presented? He learns to write by establishing certain necessary bonds — a purely mechanical process; yet in school terms he is told to study his writing lesson, or drawing lesson. He does not learn these manual assignments by thinking, but by the acquisition of manual dexterity. If we define study as the *series of acts performed by an individual in order to stimulate and adequately direct the learning process*, the provision is made for these more mechanical forms of learning within the scope of study. Desirable as

[1] *How We Think*, p. 12.

it is to lift school tasks from the dead level of meaningless routine and mere mechanical reciting or performance, it needs to be recognized that within the learning situations are elements that only in a broad and loose sense can approximate thinking. When we are engaged in teaching children to study, these elements must be recognized and provision made for their adequate acquisition. There is danger that while we are stressing the larger and perhaps more significant parts of the educative program the smaller and homelier units of knowledge and skill may be neglected. In a comprehensive scheme of directed study, however, they need to be emphasized.

5. **The Type of Study Determined by the Nature of Response.** Where the aim is skill in using the tool factors of a subject studying will consist very largely of repetition and drill. Illustrations of this type are spelling, the four fundamentals of arithmetic, dates in history, skill in paper cutting, drawing, handwriting, sewing. In subjects of this kind, the supervision of study will involve the control of conditions favoring early and permanent habits of mechanical skill.

Of a different character are such subjects as geography, nature study, history (aside from dates). Here the aim is to develop skill in making judgments, in building ideas or concepts, in evolving principles and ideals. Drill plays a minor rôle in studying of this type. Consequently, the type of supervision will differ from that referred to in the preceding paragraph.

a. Reproductive and Productive Types. Study may be regarded from the points of view of its reproductive and productive types. The former to a considerable extent is necessary to the latter. Without the background and the supply of facts and ideas furnished by others it would be very diffi-

cult, if not impossible, to produce anything new. The new is largely a reorganization of the old plus certain additional discoveries. Study in this class may, therefore, be grouped under the terms *memory work* and *problem solving*. Both are essential and each in its own field possible of large development. In practically all subjects, aside from spelling and handwriting, both types are found.

b. Book Study and Study Apart from Books. Yet another classification can be made on the basis of book study and study apart from books. There doubtless has been too close dependence upon the textbook in American education; but on the other hand, in many school subjects, books must be regarded as permanent essentials. Teaching and training children in the economical and effective use of books and printed matter in general is, therefore, an important aim. Skill in observation, in gathering data other than those in print, and analyzing situations and institutions, as in civics, are likewise necessary. It is obvious that supervision of study along lines such as these must differ from that of activities more repetitive and mechanical in character.

c. Judgments. Frequently we are called upon to express opinions, to pass judgments, and to make choices. The need of doing so carefully and with sound arguments is all too often ignored. Snap and imitative judgments are characteristic of persons who lack either sufficient background or moral force to pronounce sincere and independent or critical judgments. In school the pupil easily accepts an author's or the teacher's statements. He repeats words and cares but little about their meanings. Facts appear isolated, not as parts of a system of knowledge. To train pupils to be critical, to guide them in the judgment process, to unravel for them some of