LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE JUNIOR SCHOOL

by

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PREFACE

IN WRITING *Learning and Teaching in the Junior School* I have tried to show how schools might be developed along the lines suggested in *The Primary School*, the report of the Hadow Commission appointed by the Board of Education.

The plans of work and the suggestions for radical changes of method described in that report are being practised, in part at least, in some junior schools; to that extent this book does not break new ground. But though many teachers are experimenting in different types of curriculum, time-table, and method, very few schools yet conform to the ideal foreshadowed in that report.

In the great majority of schools there has been little change of attitude towards such vital questions as the value of creative work, the place of instruction, the relative value of the three R's, etc., in spite of the fact that the body of information on child psychology, now at the service of teachers, demonstrates the futility of many generally accepted practices that ignore children's interests and their methods of learning.

This adherence to unwise methods is not, I think, because teachers distrust psychologists, and certainly not because they fear the Board of Education would sponsor Utopian schemes. But teachers are rightly proud of the achievements gained by formal but tried methods, for they can point to the differences between the children who leave the elementary schools now and those of thirty years ago. Hence the more cautious and conservative prefer the good they know, and fear those ways they know not of. It is hoped that in some measure *Learning and Teaching in the Junior School* may lessen that fear.

Perhaps some readers will gain further assurance from

the statement that the practical suggestions made in this book are not merely 'out of my head'; all have been tested and found useful by one or more of that gallant band of teachers without whose help, in discussion and by reports on experiments carried out in their schools, this book could not have been written.

June 1941 N. C.

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WHAT THE JUNIOR SCHOOL MUST ACHIEVE

THE TEACHERS' PROBLEMS

WORKERS IN junior schools have one of the most interesting and at the same time most difficult tasks that can fall to the lot of educators. They receive into their schools children whose chronological age is round about seven while their mental age may be anything from five to eight and a half. Nor is this the only problem, for the children may up to the age of seven have worked in a most formal school where initiative is taboo and speech for the most part confined to answering questions; or in a school where the children grew naturally and healthily and were given instruction only when they needed it and in the form in which it would be most useful to them.

Considering the aim of the junior school from the point of view of the children—and that surely is the predominating one—the staff must give to these seven-year-olds of all stages of ability and attainment that training and instruction which will satisfy their urgent needs and will ensure each child having as full a life as is possible till, during his eleventh year, he leaves for the senior or secondary school. Stress should be placed on the need of allowing each child to live his fullest possible life, as no school is completely satisfactory that sacrifices the individual to the community, or at all satisfactory that uses one period of a child's life mainly as a preparation for the next. Hence the idea that all the children leaving the school at ten-plus should be able to achieve a fixed standard in the three R's should not dominate the curriculum and time-table of the school; and one should not

hear it so frequently asserted that the entrants must in their first year reach a given point because that is the only way of getting to a necessary standard by the last year. I have more than once found the curriculum of a junior school planned almost entirely with the idea of what the children must have done by the time they take the entrance examination to the next school or, worse still, of the needs of a matriculation examination to a given university.

Hence, in general terms, the work of the junior school or department is to give every child all kinds of opportunity and help that will enable him to live through the period most fully, to develop mentally, socially, and physically, and to enter on the next stage of his education with zest and fearlessness.

The work of the junior school teacher obviously would be easier if there were a generally accepted aim and technique for the education of the under-sevens. But though the majority of teachers for children of that age are more ready than others to accept natural methods and give more opportunities for free development through play and activity and less time to formal teaching, nevertheless the truly 'free' school is still the exception. Children may come to the same junior school with varieties of experience; they include the child of the good home and school, full of initiative and confidence and with the realization that the task of learning has distinct uses for him, and the three R's, for example, are worth acquiring, and also the child who has been 'taught' the rudiments of the three R's as lessons and who has not yet connected his school work with his own play and personal interests. The problems of these entrants' classes must be dealt with in a later chapter. Here it must suffice to state that whatever their experience has been, the junior school must do its best not only to give 'the full and active life not dominated by external standard',[1] but also to compensate for the

[1] *Suggestions for Teachers*, p. 103.

omissions and to rectify the mistakes of the previous period.

Coming events cast their shadows before, and the junior school should not ignore the fact that a second school of some type is the next stage in the child's education. Perhaps nothing is more psychologically upsetting than a marked break in the standards of behaviour and methods of work to a child still dependent on his elders for help, encouragement, and security. Hence, if at the beginning of school life, the teacher has to make the passage from infant to junior school as smooth as possible, preparation for the next stage must be taken seriously, even though one disapproves of the type of work that will be expected of the entrants to senior schools. Thus, junior school teachers are faced not only with the problems left over from the earlier school years but also with those that will confront the child in his next school. The problem of the leavers' class will be dealt with in a later chapter. Teachers in junior schools have enough to do in bringing their own department into line 'with the more generous ideas set out in the Hadow report of the Primary school', and only indirectly can they modify the attitude of the senior school teacher, as, indeed, have teachers of children under seven indirectly modified those of teachers in junior schools.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN AGED 7–11

Bearing in mind these limiting factors, we can nevertheless make our general aim more explicit by considering what are the characteristics of the statistician's 'average child' when he enters, and what they should be when he leaves. In other words, what in terms of activity, social attitude and knowledge should be expected of him when he enters the senior school.

Activities. I propose in this section to make use of investigations into children's out-of-school behaviour, as

in that way one probably gets a more reliable view of their normal likes, dislikes, and needs. Teachers should consider these likes and dislikes very carefully, for it is obvious that it is better to educate along the line of children's interests than against them. The days of 'go and see what Tommy dislikes and make him do it' are over.

To a large extent, a child's games and physical activities are dependent on his physical energy, and hence growth in physical strength is an important condition in his choice of games. The child of the junior school is at a stable period and may never again be so strong until he has reached full maturity. He is passing through his second 'filling out period' and unless he is combating with the after effects of the childish illnesses that occurred in the second 'spring up' period (from five to seven years) he should be building up powers of resistance to face that difficult period of growth that lasts from the eleventh to the fifteenth year. It is probably the need felt to use the growing power of body, limb and muscle that makes it almost impossible for children at this time of life to sit still. Their games and their boasts reflect this characteristic. A girl of eighteen confided to me that until she was fourteen she never understood why people amused themselves by reading or 'sitting still games' unless they felt unwell. Frieda Sack[1] found there is no period of life during which resistance to disease is so high as during the tenth year, and the child himself is conscious and proud of his strength. She cites the ten-year-old boy who writes, 'I am strong and vigorous. I stand straight, my arms and legs are strong'; and the girl of the same age: 'I am very brave; I like to do things that require courage'.

Many games are learned in informal ways during this period—football, the use of a scooter (at its height of popularity at nine years old), swimming, when opportunity is given, and bicycling; left to choose his own

[1] Quoted by Charlotte Bühler in *From Birth to Maturity*, p. 144.

occupation, the child of this age selects an activity, very often demanding a fair amount of constructive ability. Thus a boy of nine constructed with string and cardboard a telephone system for his home, and it was the construction that was the main interest. Another two boys organized a 'District Messenger Service' and made a tariff of every conceivable job, one in passing, doing his first really careful writing practice in this connexion. Janet, aged eight, finds her greatest joy in scrubbing a stone floor—she does not like polishing or drying up as much, for she declares any little girl could do that. Peter finds salvation from boredom at times when he must be in a small house in the use of a carpet sweeper.

Indoor games at this period are most popular if they necessitate a certain amount of skill, can be improved by practice, and show the ability of the young performers either to other children or, better still, friendly elders. They prefer playing draughts or halma with elders; by the time they are nine such games as snakes and ladders of the sevens give place to Rummy and Monopoly and complicated word games which again later are superseded. They will, however, from time to time revert to earlier favourites. But above all in popularity are dramatic games, and this preference is as true of the entrant at seven as the leaver at ten plus.

Social Growth. In the *Handbook of Suggestion* (1938) when discussing the need of modern education to adapt itself to modern needs, the statement is made that 'the citizens of to-morrow will be citizens of a more complex and more difficult world than that of yesterday. Social contacts are becoming more frequent and more varied, and children will need to learn to mix with a greater variety of types of individual than their parents probably knew, and to understand the point of view in other lands besides their own.' The junior school must play its part in making this type of modern man, and hence must take into account the social characteristics of the children,

i.e. what characteristics of the average child can be used if he is to become a sympathetic and active participant in the social life of his time. Charlotte Bühler writes[1] that it is during the period between eight and twelve that 'the group begins to play a dominant part in the child's life. . . . Children of this age enjoy the organization of as well as participation in group life. Clubs and other organizations are founded where rules or law require the performance of certain duties and responsibilities. In this way the child is given valuable training and preparation for social and civic responsibilities.'

It was seen in the previous section that the majority of children preferred both indoor and outdoor games that necessitated a companion and some habitual rules, and later it will be seen how this appreciation of group activities can be used in school.

The growing feeling of group solidarity makes a child of this age more dependent on his companions and less on his elders: hence the importance of the tone of the group to which he attaches himself and to the insistence on each child's taking his share of responsibilities and of giving his services as well as taking help. Group leaders—sometimes chosen for a special purpose, sometimes for outstanding organizing competence—will naturally arise. But one of the functions of the school must be to train such children to take their share of drudgery and to help those who meekly obey the leader to take a part in planning and organization.

Intellectual Growth. Children show marked emotional and social development especially in connexion with their free activities out of school. Their activities necessitate increasingly better technique in connexion with the making and running of the shop, 'bus, garage, etc., hence not only do they want to acquire greater skill with tools, paints, and in making stage costumes, etc., but they realize —though to a less extent—the value of being able to read

[1] *From Birth to Maturity*, p. 150.

well enough to get what they want from a book or letter, to write their requests or needs, their stories or plays, and, to a far less extent, to calculate at least in money. The need to calculate is less pressing than that of reading and writing, and the curriculum of the junior school should be framed accordingly. The type of mathematical work arranged for the junior school should reflect the fact that the children have far more use for many forms of measuring and dealing with money than for abstract calculation.

It is difficult to express the facts of a child's intellectual development during this period without making generalizations that are too sweeping, but the following statements can be tested by teachers of children of this age, and undoubtedly should be considered when the curriculum is planned.

(1) Between seven and eleven, children's interests widen and increase in number. The child of seven is still exploring his surroundings, and though he will listen to stories of other lands and past times, his main interest is with here and now. Thus, though his interest in his home port or dock may lead him to build a fleet of tramp ships with which to trade with Greece, Greece is only in the main interesting as a place to which to send his fleet.

By ten the world in which the boy is interested has stretched—probably with his maturing capacity to interpret the written and spoken word. By now, for example, he is eager and willing to reproduce in his drama the stories of distant times and places; he will conduct a tourist agency, and use a time-table and guide books with professional zeal and efficiency. He often has almost a craving for facts—not only for how the things he uses are made or where they come from, but for simple accounts of the lives and doings of his ancestors and those of other peoples. It is this interest in living creatures (including man) and their habits and their occupations that, if satisfied, makes the foundation for future work in geography and history.

(2) Another way of stating the same fact is to say a child's imagination grows and to some extent alters in character. The child under seven works out imaginatively his hopes and his fears, and finds compensation for his weakness and submission to elders in his day-dreams or fantasies; and as language is not yet by any means an adequate means of expression to him, we must get our knowledge of his inner life from his games and drawings. So true is this statement that child psychologists like Dr. Lowenfeld 'cure' maladjusted children by letting them play freely.

(3) The child of nine to eleven does of course also day-dream, and does in his games work out his hopes and fears, and how often their games show their love of action. Whoever expects a child to play at being a Greek scholar? If he plays at being a parson, it is that he may rig up a pulpit and preach or conduct the marriage or burial service; a teacher, that he may boss other children and often punish them; a ticket-collector that he may be the most important person in the group tram. Nevertheless, the very fact that at this age he enjoys playing with others of his own age ensures to some extent more realistic play. He plays out many social situations, and the nearer he can get to a real situation the better. Because of the desire to live according to knowledge rather than fantasy he is more scrupulous about detail. Thus, a five-year-old will use any piece of paper for a ticket, a seven-year-old will use the discarded 'bus tickets he collects from his friends, while the eight to nines of whom I have just heard made their tickets because when the inspector came he would insist on their being available for a given stage of a journey. It is this desire for accurate detail that is the motive for the acquisition of many techniques (including the three R's) and their hunger for knowledge about 'real things'. Zeal for the facts of life grows throughout this period—and to such an extent that by the time the last year in a junior school is reached the boys and girls will

very likely look on the activities of the earlier years as childish. The higher they get in the school the more willing they are to do the 'real jobs' of the community—the shopping, keeping accounts, repairing and making furniture, making books that will be useful and toys and clothes for the younger children. In the words of the Primary School Report, they are 'little workmen'.

Their day-dreams do not disappear though they are more knowledgeable about their own powers and capacities, more socially conscious and so more nervous of criticism. But these ambitions, dreams, and fears must have an outlet, and children find it if left to themselves in all sorts of dramatic game, of which the most characteristic is play-making and play-acting. Such plays sometimes portray the life of the heroes they meet in story, but if they live in a bookless home and their school does not satisfy their need for romance they will find it for themselves in their own way. Thus, two boys of ten plus, who go to a good but formal village school, have organized a flying corps. For this purpose they have supplied themselves with motorists' goggles from Woolworth's which they insist on wearing pushed high up on their foreheads. They have no space at home and the village is too full of critics, so they have found an entrance into a disused 'bus garage and office. There, by the light of torches they disport themselves, using the office desks from which to start their flights. Questioned as to whether they made aeroplanes or bought them—they said that they could not make ones in which they could fly, so it was better 'to lark about'. The whole escapade is secret, and the gang has a name that was not disclosed to me—indeed, I was only confided in because I no longer live in the village, and they wished to show courtesy to a friendly guest.

(4) Through the need of the children of this age to satisfy their innate tendencies and appetites even without any formal education, they grow or mature, and intellectual needs are more to the fore than in the earlier years.

It is the age of collections, and the gangs and societies—as a marked result of their social growth—often need a complicated ritual and such accessories as a secret post office and the use of a code. Thus a boy of ten taking an intelligence test as part of a scholarship examination found the decoding of a few words—a common test for children of this age—far easier than the code used by his secret society, but nevertheless said it had given him an 'idea'.

School education at this period, especially for children over nine, can easily be made valuable and practical, for whether these people's ambition is to be an explorer, an airman, a mechanic, a builder, an actress, a cook, or a princess, books can be of enormous service to them. But what changes would need to be effected in many school libraries!

STANDARDS OF ATTAINMENT

Though the above description has been given in general terms, I think most people who know children as individuals and not as 'classes' will agree that it is substantially true, and those who wish for further and more precise information should use the data collected and used by such psychologists as Susan Isaacs and Jean Piaget, etc.

It is these children we have to deal with in the junior schools, and the more we can use their physical energy, their growing social feeling of comradeship and responsibility, their desire to grow up, their practical common sense, their omnivorous interest in men and in all active living beings, their gaiety and barbarity, the more they they will respond to teaching and the easier will our task be.

It was, however, stated earlier in this chapter that the limiting factors of our work were what the children were like at seven, and what they should be when they enter their next school at the age of ten plus.

Requirements of the Board of Education. For the most