HOW TO TEACH THE FUNDAMENTAL SUBJECTS

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE authors of this volume of the series have had unusual opportunities to study the methods and results of competent teachers, and to note wherein beginning teachers and those with little training are most frequently deficient. They have also been largely concerned, for many years and in important places, with the preparation of courses of study, teaching plans, and the supervision of instruction. The results of their experience and observation relating to elementary-school instruction they have embodied in this book, presenting these results in that simple, direct, and unadorned language which is calculated to render a maximum of assistance to both experienced and inexperienced teachers.

For one cause or another many teachers have not been able to obtain that careful preparation for teaching which the best professional standards of the day require. Moreover, there are many teachers, and often those of some training and experience, who are so situated that they cannot have that aid and inspiration which come from the frequent visits of a helpful supervisory officer. Such teachers will find this volume of much value in bringing to them the expert advice which teachers in our more progressive school systems to-day receive. The discussions herein pre-

sented on the teaching of the common-school branches will be found to be helpful and practical. Those who are preparing to teach will also find in the volume a good presentation of the best methods of instruction in these fundamental studies of the elementary-school course.

Every teacher faces more or less the danger of having her work gradually sink into a lifeless routine. When this happens, ineffective instruction and educational waste usually come to characterize her teaching. There are a number of means for preventing the coming on of such a condition, but two of the surest of these are the daily contact with an inspiring supervisor, and a maintained familiarity with the best working plans and the most successful methods employed by members of the teaching profession elsewhere. It is believed that this volume, written as it has been by two of our most successful supervisors, offers such a presentation of working plans and successful methods, and with such a belief it is herewith presented to the teaching public.

ELLWOOD P. CUBBERLEY.

PREFACE

THIS book discusses the teaching of the common fundamental subjects found in elementary schools. It also contains suggestions as to what should make up the course of study in these subjects, and it attempts to set forth some of the principles that should underlie methods of instruction and determine the selection of subject-matter. It is essentially a book for the use of teachers and supervisors of schools and for those who are preparing to be teachers.

The subjects discussed consume by far the greater part of the time of both teachers and pupils in the elementary schools. To say that the teaching of these subjects should be as skillful as possible is a commonplace. Because of the difference in the quality of teaching, one class exercise in reading is of infinitely greater value than another class exercise. For the same reason, one school may be found to be inferior to another school, even in the same system.

To secure better teaching in the plain things of the course of study is one of the needs of the schools, and therefore one of the supreme objects of school administration.

"Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well" is as true of the teaching and study of spelling, English composition, and arithmetic, and of the other activities

of the school, as it is of the business of life itself. To the extent that the teaching of the fundamental subjects is well done, to that extent is good use made of the greater part of the pupils' time. Moreover, there is the insistent public demand for good results in these subjects.

The interests that engage the attention of the public schools have rapidly multiplied during very recent years. The administration of schools, never a simple matter, has become a complex affair — largely because of changes in our social and economic life. Only a partial enumeration of new fields of work either forced upon or undertaken by public-school authorities includes the use of school-buildings as social or community centers, industrial training of various kinds, the vocational guidance of pupils, the training of mentally defective children, the growth of parent-teacher organizations and others of similar character, the broadening of the scope of physical education including medical inspection and the teaching of safety, the better enforcement of compulsory education laws, the establishment of different kinds of schools for different types of children, better appointed schoolhouses, the increase in the number of special days to be observed, the establishment of summer schools, and playgrounds. This list readily might be extended. By their entrance into social and industrial fields the schools have enormously increased their usefulness.

All this, however, should cause, and need cause, no

diminution of interest in the substantial teaching of the fundamental subjects. Indeed, when these activities are properly directed and coördinated with the fundamental subjects, better results in the latter may be expected.

Two other considerations may be mentioned which influence the work of teachers in the elementary field. One is the very great expansion of knowledge; the other is the better understanding of children. The first offers a temptation to attempt too many things; the second reveals the necessity of modifying some of the traditional ways of teaching. It is hoped that in the following pages teachers may find suggestions that will help them to meet the complex requirements of their profession.

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CHAPTER I

THE POINT OF VIEW

EVERY teacher is asking daily two questions, "What shall I teach? How shall I teach?" Some answers each teacher must give to these questions, and in a variety of ways each is answering them every time a lesson is planned, assigned or taught.

The local course of study is a general guide for the teachers. It states, for instance, that South America or division is to be taught in a certain grade. It directs the teacher to select carefully the material for study. It recommends methods of instruction. But these general suggestions must be interpreted and the methods must be adapted when they are applied in the education of different individuals and classes. If only important facts are to be taught, the teacher must have standards by which the value of facts may be measured. If instruction is to be effective, the facts taught must be related to the pupils' present interests.

Inasmuch as teachers are engaged in a public service and not in a private business, it is important that the answers that they make to the questions, "What

shall I teach? How shall I teach?" be in harmony with the point of view that is prevailing at the present time. That the great body of teachers is earnestly searching for present-day answers is evidenced by the study they are giving everywhere to education.

It is true that final answers cannot be found for these fundamental educational questions. But teachers are as much under obligation to search for them as the sociologist, the physician, the electrician, the biologist are under obligation to search for the undiscoverable answers to the fundamental questions in their fields of interest. The search will carry each one nearer the truth.

If, then, one looks out into the world to discover the influence that is now at work there, he cannot fail to see that in government, in business, in religion, in science, in fact in every phase of human thinking and action the "practical" point of view is controlling. If he transfers his study to the field of education, he will find the same influence there also, and he will discover that it is somewhat rapidly modifying school practices from the kindergarten through the university.

So much has been written and said regarding this influence that no full discussion of it will be attempted here. But inasmuch as the treatment of each subject that follows is made from this practical standpoint, it will be well for the reader to have in mind at the outset a few of the educational implications involved in it, that are now very generally accepted.

These implications are as follows: —

1. Only those subjects and those parts of subjects should be studied which are useful in everyday modern life.
2. The emphasis given to a subject or a topic of study in school should be determined by its relative usefulness in the community.
3. Having selected the material for study and determined the amount of emphasis to be given each subject and topic according to the preceding two principles, the distribution of subjects and the assignment of topics should be governed by the learners' abilities, aptitudes and experience.
4. Methods of instruction and of study should conform with the nature of the learner and of the subject taught.
5. Methods of instruction should involve as far as possible immediate practical application of knowledge, that has a two-fold result: first, a useful product that is worth while in the view of the learner, and second, skill in performance.

The acceptance of this point of view and of these implications does not turn every school into a trade school. It does not discard, even from trade schools, art, literature, music, or any other subject useful in life. That is not alone useful which contributes to mere existence and its physical comforts. That is also useful that raises living to a higher plane, and that gives it in any particular a new or greater value. Education that is planned to realize the practical ideal, purposes to take into account all the values in life and to relate them in living processes, in harmony with and reinforcing the biological process.

Where this point of view is the guiding principle, all subjects and parts of subjects that have no present-

day value will be eliminated from the curriculum together with those subjects that have been taught as an end in themselves, or for disciplinary purposes only. Courses of study will be differentiated as soon as individual abilities or inabilities become so well developed that they are safe educational guides. Each school will have an individuality of its own, creating each for itself a peculiar school life, making use of the materials and opportunities that are at hand, accepting the limitations established by the social and economic conditions of the pupils and by its situation. The rural school will not copy the city school, but each will have the equipment, each will evolve the program of work and play and each will apply the methods that experience proves to be most effective in realizing the practical ideal.

The acceptance of this point of view carries with it the acceptance also of the fact that knowledge in the abstract and unrelated lacks a very large part of its significance. That Froebel recognized this is demonstrated by his gifts and occupations. There are many common illustrations of its truth. The tables of measurements, for example, are by themselves meaningless. They acquire meaning as they are objectively applied. English words whose meaning and use are unknown are as foreign to pupils as Sanskrit or Chinese words, and the study of their spelling is as profitless in the one case as in the other. The formula for mixing cement has only a potential value which is

realized when the formula is applied in an actual mixing process. Because abstract knowledge is futile, the education of doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, business men, is to-day fifty per cent practice; that is, application of the knowledge found in books and received in the lecture room. It must therefore come to pass that methods of elementary instruction will include increasingly practical, concrete use of knowledge by each pupil. The more fundamentally important the knowledge, the more imperative is the need for experience in application.

Although the growing acceptance of this point of view is evolving a very different type of school from that of the nineteenth century, there are minor details on which there is no general agreement. For example, it is now agreed that useless mathematics should be eliminated from the elementary school curriculum; but there appears to be a difference of opinion regarding the practical value of the cube and square root of large numbers. There is general assent to the proposal to omit all grammar that is not directly useful in bettering a child's talking and writing; but all do not agree to omit a study of the infinitive. Self-control and self-direction are universally recognized as qualities that determine successful living, but people judge differently in particular cases regarding the amount of external control that is desirable to cultivate these qualities successfully.

But, even if there are differences of opinion in many

details, nevertheless the acceptance of the practical point of view will make of the five implications previously mentioned determining influences in the construction of courses of study, and guides for the teacher in interpreting the course of study, in adapting methods of instruction, and in regulating the life of the school.

COLLATERAL READING

1. *On discipline:* —
   Education. Ralph Waldo Emerson.
   Chapter I, pages 26–34.

2. *On work and play:* —
   How We Think. John Dewey.
   Chapter XII, pages 161–69.

3. *On the importance of the concrete and practical:* —
   (*a*) *Education.* Ralph Waldo Emerson.
   Chapter IV.
   (*b*) *The Concrete and Practical in Modern Education.* Charles W. Eliot.
   Chapter I, pages 1–8; 10–16; 34–39.
   Chapter II, pages 56–57.
   (*c*) *Interest and Effort.* John Dewey.
   Chapter IV.

4. *On individuality:* —
   (*a*) *Genetic Psychology for Teachers.* C. H. Judd.
   Chapter V, pages 129–33; 138–44.
   (*b*) *How to Study.* F. M. McMurry.
   Chapter X.

5. *On effort, thinking, and motivation:* —
   Interest and Effort. John Dewey.
   Chapter III.

6. *On the course of study:* —
   Culture, Discipline, and Democracy. A. Duncan Yocum.
   Chapter VII.

7. *On dramatization:* —
   The Dramatic Method of Teaching. Harriet Finley Johnson.
   Chapter I.

3. *On school conditions and mental training:* —

(*a*) *How We Think.* John Dewey.
Chapter III, pages 43–44.
Chapter IV.

(*b*) *How to Study.* F. M. McMurry.
Chapter XI.

(*c*) *Genetic Psychology for Teachers.* C. H. Judd.
Chapter IV.

Also the following books: —

Changing Conceptions of Education. E. P. Cubberley.
A brief résumé of the history of the American public school, showing its evolution to the present time.

The School and Society. John Dewey.
A modern educational classic.

CHAPTER II

ENGLISH

THE study of the English language may relate to any one of the six phases: reading, common speech, composition, grammar, spelling, and penmanship. In this order these subjects are discussed in the following pages.

Reading

There has been a generally accepted theory that "reading is getting the thought from the printed page," but in practice much of the reading in schools consists in orally reproducing the *words* of the printed page. "Good expression" in oral reading commonly receives first and most careful attention. Systematic search for the thought is often omitted or slighted. In fact, not infrequently oral reading and reading have been treated as equivalent.

It is true that oral reading is an important part of *teaching* to read, but it should be realized that the ability to recognize and say words, even to say them with a semblance of understanding, is not a proof of ability to read. One may do this and yet be quite unable to read with intelligence or appreciation.

Dr. G. Stanley Hall appositely says: "True reading