

THE DALTON PLAN II

By Helen Parkhurst

What should be included in the school curriculum, or what special methods of instruction should be used, was left out of the Dalton-Laboratory Plan entirely. The curriculum of any individual school should vary and depend upon the needs of the pupils, although in many schools it oftener strictly accords with some academic purpose for which the school has been established, even long after the purpose has been justified and although new needs have arisen. Just what shall be put in or left out of school curricula will be a matter of debate until the educational world awakes to the fact that the curriculum is not the chief problem of general concern, and that we have been viewing things through the wrong end of the telescope. We now know more of subjects—mathematics, for instance—than can possibly be included.

As for methods, who ever heard of a good teacher who did not have "a method all her own" that acted like a magic wand when she was pursued by the learner. We want teachers with methods sufficient to answer the needs of each individual. Let us free teachers from the yoke of method and system and make it possible for them instead to use their own good judgment. The originator was concerned with a "way" of doing things, a way that will make more things possible for the child, in that the "way" attempts to help teachers to get at problems of the school from the viewpoint of the learner.

AN EFFICIENCY MEASURE

As the Plan does not impose a special or arbitrary curriculum, it is possible that some schools may use it as an efficiency measure for accomplishing their own curricula. Others, further along in progressive channels, may find it a useful means to achieve not only the "tools of knowledge" but for launching social projects. As an efficiency measure the "contract" entered into by the pupils will more or less take the form of assignments of work. In the field of real projects the plan will permit a way for original pupil problems to be executed. Regardless of what one's purpose may be for using the Plan, the use means a "freeing process" to the school. This is the hope and the objective in presenting the Plan. It is but a way to operate sound principles. The principles operative will accomplish the freeing. The extent of freeing depends upon whether or not the conditions created in the school give an opportunity for self-development and expression.

The Plan puts emphasis upon the way in which the child lives, while doing his work, the way in which he functions as a member of society, rather than upon what he does or the particular method he is to employ. We provide the stimulus and food for his growth in community experiences. It is the sum total of these experiences that determine his knowledge and power. Experience is valuable. It is the experienced man in any given work or profession who is in demand, and who is held at a premium. It is by experience that we develop and our powers ripen and bear into fruition. Experience tries out the powers, tests the moral fibre, and corrects our practices; it shapes and tempers our thoughts, it makes us tolerant and at the same time versatile. It sharpens our judgment by making us stand off and view a thing from all angles, it reserves our sympathy without warping our judgment. To work a thing out for one's self gives one experience, and to associate one's self with others in common pursuits means experience in attainment as well as experience with one's fellows. Let us, therefore, bring these elements of value into the daily lives of children; let us give zest and purpose to their living, both in

school and out.

Out of School Life

Out of school life a child is held responsible for the execution of a task in all its parts, lie is judged by his ability to execute a task, after instruction, without supervision. lie learns by doing. His judgment reduces waste effort to a minimum as he finds the short cut by being forced to make a plan. He is himself unselfconscious because the pursuit is purposeful and because the goal eclipses his ego. His energies are set free, he corrects his mistakes by discovering that he cannot obtain his self-set objective because there is a flaw in the plan he has made. He must make a new plan—he finds it profitable to consult his fellow-workers. More points of view help to clarify his ideas and also his plans of procedure. The finished job takes on a halo because it embodies all he has felt and lived. This sort of life is not pretending, it is being; not subjection, but creation; it develops initiative and versatility; unknown obstacles cease to hold any terror. His school is experience. We often hear "too many advantages" being spoken of as ruinous—we should question the kind of advantages rather than the number. Each new opportunity and advantage is justified if it provides experiences for further development. A man's ideas unused are useless, they torment him—his ideas in operation become experiences. He matures only through experience.

Before going further, may I use a quotation from Emerson which clearly pictures certain spiritual assets of the *Plan*.

"The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he shall know, what h¹ shall do. It is chosen and foreordained. and he only holds the key to his own secret. By your tampering and thwarting and too much governing he may be hindered from his end and kept out of his own. Respect the child. Wait and see the new product of Nature. Nature loves analogies, but not repetitions. Respect the child. Be not too much his parent. Trespass not on his solitude.

But I hear the outcry which replies to this suggestion: Would you verily throw up the reins of public and private discipline ; would you leave the young child to the mad career of his own passions and whimsies, and call this anarchy a respect for the child's nature ? I answer: Respect the child, respect him to the end, but also respect yourself. Be the companion of his thought, the friend of his friendship, the lover of his virtue, but no kinsman of his sin. lie makes wild attempts to explain himself and invoke the aid and consent of the bystanders. Baffled for want of language and methods to convey his meaning, not yet clear to himself, he conceives that though not in this house or town, yet in some other house or town is the wise master who can put him in possession of the rules and instruments to execute his will. Happy this child with a bias, with a thought which entrances him, leads him, now into deserts, now into cities, the fool of an idea. Let him follow it in good and evil repoit, in good or in bad company; it will justify itself; it will lead him at last into the illustrious society of the lovers of truth.

Cannot we let people be themselves, and enjoy life in their own way ? You are trying to make that man another you. One's enough.

Or we sacrifice the genius of the pupil, the unknown possibilities of his nature, to a neat and safe uniformity, as the Turks whitewash the costly mosaics of ancient art which the Greeks left on their temple walls. Rather let us have men whose manhood is only the continuation of their boyhood, natural characters still ; such are able and fertile for heroic action ; and not that sad spectacle with which we are too familiar, educated eyes in uneducated bodies.

I like boys, the masters of the playground find of the street—boys, who have the same liberal ticket of admission to all shops, factories, armories, town-meetings, caucuses, mobs, target-shootings, as flies have ; quite unsuspected, coming in as naturally as the janitor—known to have no money in their pockets, and themselves not suspecting the value of this poverty;

putting nobody on his guard, but seeing the inside of the show—hearing all the asides. There are no secrets from them, they know everything that befalls in the fire-company, the merits of every engine and of every man at the brakes, how to work it, and are swift to try their hand at every part ; so too the merits of every locomotive on the rails, and will coax the engineer to let them ride with him and pull the handle when it goes to the engine-house. They are there only for fun, and not knowing that they are at school, in the court house, or the cattle-show, quite as much and more than they were, an hour ago, in the arithmetic class. They know truth from counterfeit as quick as the chemist does. They detect weakness in your eye and behaviour a week before you open your mouth, and have given you the benefit of their opinion quick as a wink. They make no mistakes, have no pedantry, but entire belief in experience.”

Industrial workers resent "socialized days" set aside in the form of workers' annual picnics, &c, where they are the recipients of patronage. They want their whole "job," their work socialized in order that they may win respect and merit commendation by their own intelligent contributions. Children are industrial workers who are quick to appreciate and measure up to responsibility. It is not sufficient for them that we socialize an occasional recitation, for they, too, must have "jobs" demanding their complete attention—jobs which command the play of all their powers. Their "jobs" must be socialized. To be most productive their "job" must include their entire work, their mode of work and their mode of living.

An Elastic Scheme

The Dalton Laboratory Plan may be used in several ways. It may be used as an efficiency measure to accomplish the required work of any standard, or it may be used to accomplish the work of a freer curriculum composed entirely of projects set by the pupils themselves. It may be applied to the entirely middle or upper school, or any portion of either, regardless of whether the school be elementary or public. The terms "elementary" and "public" as here used apply to English schools. American schools are classified differently.

Let us consider (the Plan first as an efficiency measure for the middle school, remembering (1) that the Plan is a "way"; (2) that the way involves reorganization of school living, not a change in standardization, curriculum, or method; (3) that such reorganization is vital because it is economic, both socially and in the matter of equipment; (4) that the purpose of the Plan is to bring about a "freeing process" in the school, permitting the individual pupils of any form to distribute the hours of a portion or all of the school day according to need, as disclosed by their individual subject difficulties. The use of the Dalton Laboratory Plan is not advised below the middle school.

Change in school procedure means an adjustment for both pupils and teachers. Given the right attitude with an appreciation of child development, experienced teachers, because of their preparation, can easily make the adjustment required. The curriculum affords the same problems, but they are attacked differently. Pupils who can read easily and intelligently, and who have mastered the simpler mathematical processes, can easily make their adjustment. Children without a preliminary foundation in the fundamentals would be inadequately equipped and handicapped. It is the ability to make quick adjustments that tests teacher and pupil efficiency.

In infant schools where freedom of work is permitted the teacher prepares and presents a gradation of stimuli in the form of materials. The careful presentation of these materials at the time of need is sufficient to lead the child, step by step, through the various subjects of a curriculum. It is evident that in such instances the teacher can really be the controlling lever. The extent of control, and the benefit derived by the children, is determined and measured by the character of the materials placed in the environment. When we come to pre-adolescence the problem is slightly different. Here it is necessary that the pupils not only continue to be

free and have a selected equipment, but that they begin gradually to play an important part in initiating and organizing their own pursuits. Their developed energies and their power must be used to achieve some purpose of which they are conscious. Achievement is determined by the pupil's ability consciously to organize his work, to organize his materials, and to organize his time continually to better advantage. All these things mean organizing his life.

Concentration in infancy is demonstrated by prolonged work, whereas in pre-adolescence concentration is of high power and often of short duration. Less time is taken to initiate interesting pursuits than uninteresting ones, because interest lends zest to application.

As an efficiency measure for the middle school, elementary or public, let us take (a) the academic and (b) the social reorganization separately.

Academic laboratories are established for each subject of the curriculum. With a small teaching staff two subjects may be carried on in a single laboratory. The morning time after scripture until the session ends is set aside as time for uninterrupted individual work, or it may be used for voluntary group work. The afternoon time may, at the discretion of the headmaster or headmistress, be used for standard form lessons, the number of oral lessons per subject varying with the different subjects, according to their difficulty. It may be necessary to devote more periods per week to the oral lessons in a foreign language, for instance, than to other subjects. I am inclined to believe that we must devote more, not less, time to subjects which are not native to us if we wish really to achieve in them. We use the name "conference" for the oral lesson because the character of such a lesson is bound to change with the maximum of individual work and development which the plan brings about.

The pupils of the middle school will, for convenience, remain members of standard form groups, permitting the individual pupils of any standard form of this part of the school to work voluntarily as individuals, or with others, on any part of the work required for their own form, in any one of the several laboratories during the time set aside as "laboratory time."

As individuals, the pupils are responsible for their laboratory time; it belongs to them to use for their needs, and they divide it accordingly. An individual pupil devotes less time to the subjects in which he is strong, and more time to those subjects in which he is weak. This permits him to round up his subjects and give breadth to his accomplishment.

A complete month's work is mapped out for each standard form, subject by subject, in separate, assignments of work. Each individual pupil of the middle school accepts the work of his standard form as a contract. He signs a form slip as follows :—

I,....., pupil of.....standard form, contract to do the..... assignment.

Date.....

He, as an individual pupil, is held responsible for the entire contract in all its parts. The number of each contract assignment corresponds to the 'number of the school month, *i.e.*, whether it is the first, second, or third month of the school year, and so on. The pupils refer to the assignment as a "contract job."

When a pupil completes all of the work of any one contract job he may request the next contract. It is given to him if, after inspection, he is found to have satisfactorily completed all of the work required in each subject for the month. So little is required of a pupil in the middle school that there is no reason why the work should not easily be mastered if the pupils as individuals are permitted to divide their time according to their subject difficulties. This wastes neither time nor pupil effort. A pupil is not permitted to do more than the month's requirement in a single subject, *i.e.*, go on to the next month's requirement for that subject, before he completely finishes the month's requirement in every other subject of any given contract. Thus, a pupil is not permitted to be one standard in two of his subjects and a standard lower in the remainder.

A pupil naturally does not find all subjects equally difficult, but the difficulties of all are equalized if he divides the entire time at his disposal according to the several subject needs. More time given to a subject helps to eliminate that subject's difficulties. A child in pre-adolescence has many difficulties. What we desire to do is not to help him to escape these difficulties but to find a way so that he may solve them, so that later when he selects a vocation he will have a firm foundation for his talent. Step by step, a body of correlated knowledge is necessary. Teachers have believed this fact always and they have strived hard to measure up. They have felt that freedom was a good thing but conscientiously have not seen a way to combine the two things. On every side they have heard the comment, "The children must be free. You must free them." They ask themselves, how is it possible. They have received no practical answer which points the first step.

(To be continued.)