

### THE DALTON PLAN III

*By Helen Parkhurst*

There are thousands of teachers in elementary, public, and secondary schools who have freedom in their souls, if not in their schools. They have done their work faithfully. To-day a changed society demands that the teacher get at the problem in another way. The Dalton Laboratory Plan changes the pupil's attitude. It points out a way of taking the first step. I hope that the teachers in the middle and upper schools may not only see how the curriculum which confronts them can be accomplished, but that they may see how, at the same time, the pupils may be free to live and serve as true members of society.

If the curriculum is mastered step by step the pupil will have a body of correlated knowledge to serve as a foundation for his vocation later on. It will serve also as a ballast for adolescence. The fundamentals, or "tools of knowledge", are best acquired during pre-adolescence; all that is learnt afterward is but an elaboration of those same fundamentals. The germs of organization should be acquired while the child is still *in* the middle school, and before adolescence is upon him. Organizing his work and materials aids greatly, but it is also necessary that he begin to learn to organize his own time and be responsible for it.

By giving him his work in the form of a contract and permitting him to be responsible for it we permit him to feel a dignity of purpose. In addition to the responsibility of a problem, we must set aside for his use a given amount of uninterrupted time. We cannot *make* him responsible and expect that he will accomplish the work contracted, instead we must permit him to *feel* himself responsible. In trying to *make* him responsible we would but drive him. In saying "This time is yours, to use as you think best for your needs," we not only gain his respect but his mental attitude is changed by feeling our confidence. Then he looks upon a piece of work in its entirety. It is the whole that commands his attention. Under such conditions he has no desire to escape the disagreeable parts which accompany the pleasant. It is possible to give almost unrestricted freedom to children in infancy if they are provided with a proper environment, because they are restricted by their very immaturity. In pre-adolescence, were this same kind of freedom persisted in, the children of riper powers and more initiative might easily go off at a tangent and persist in chasing their interests of the moment. Not only would anti-social characteristics be encouraged, but sooner or later the pupils would find themselves without a preparation and foundation for their real interests.

#### A FEASIBLE JOB

Another kind of freedom is possible which appeals greatly to boys and girls alike in pre-adolescence when they are all young Robinson Crusoes and Robin Hoods, full of adventure and curiosity. This is the freedom embraced in the idea of a "job," where there is an opportunity for responsibility. It is not the job in itself but the challenging spirit of the job that commands the entire boy or girl. Any boy will work untiringly when apprenticed to a real workman if he feels he is getting at the job. The very job has a halo. It awakens the inner child, a spiritual leaven begins to work; he feels the unfolding of his own powers, and he becomes self-disciplined by harnessing these same powers. He uses them to accomplish anything set before him. The best we can do is to encourage him and not interrupt the direction of his entire personality as it attacks first one thing and then another. A thing which is uninteresting one hour commands, in proper order, his entire attention the next hour. Subjects of a curriculum are like his food. What he finds not to his liking to-day he will like

to-morrow.

One teacher is not sufficient for the child *in* the middle school. He is such a complex personality that he needs an entire staff to satisfy his needs. The Dalton Laboratory Plan, by creating laboratories, makes it possible for him to have at his command an entire staff of consultant specialists. As a voluntary agent he approaches them for help and assistance in work which is his and which he has made himself responsible for.

As the child does not know how to work in the beginning, we must ascertain that the job in its entirety is not too far out of reach. His versatility, resourcefulness, and general efficiency will be developed if his job is within the comprehension of his mental powers. Mind as well as body are more properly exercised by a proper reach. The job must be determined by the limitations of his experience. He can see completely around, he can survey a limited project; he can plan for its accomplishment, take all of its parts into account, and be ever conscious of the relation of parts. This job within reach permits the growth of his creative powers.

A month's assignment affords sufficient mental reach at the start. We must take into consideration the fact that, although in the past only one or two subjects have proved of interest to the child, it is because he has felt free only along these lines; we must remember that he now sees, not one single subject of interest, but a contract in all its parts. Regardless of what that contract contains, the appealing, compelling thing is the idea of the contract and the fact that he is in the *rôle* of voluntary agent to carry it out. He is custodian, not in custody, and he focusses his complete energies upon the task at hand.

The view point permitted at each step makes him conscious and concerned not only with what he has accomplished on the contract, but of what remains unfinished. His intellect is sharpened; the old mental habits which eliminated need of thought are broken by his consciousness of the contract as a job. One has to look ahead before going ahead, and a goal within reach is excellent to make one reflect and seek counsel. We have but to inquire into the inventions of the day to find that it is the combined experimenting of many minds projected upon a common problem of interest which is productive. Specialists have a common interest. Common interests act as great magnets in life outside of school. In order that the school may be more productive, we must create conditions of freedom which permit a pupil to get at his interest. We must organize environments which not only act as magnets but which are equipped with proper tools to permit the pupil to work uninterrupted on the job from his own view point. This makes not only for speed, but efficiency. The released energies flow freely.

### **PURSUER OR PURSUED**

The special subject laboratories have equipment at hand to serve the child's interests effectively as he applies himself to one subject after another; the heads of these laboratories, the staff of expert consultants, command his respect and attention when they assist him in his work. The pupil who is inclined to waste an instructor's time seldom wastes his own. If he feels that it is the teacher's job or responsibility to see that he accomplishes a piece of work, if he recognizes the teacher as a pursuer, he loses interest and tries to escape, whereas if he feels himself in charge he continues to pursue.

Let us consider those subject laboratories further. The text-book library of the school is, according to subjects, distributed among the several laboratories, so that the proper books are always accessible. The science books are in the science laboratory, the history books in the history laboratory, and so on. So far as possible it is well to have a few standard texts and increase the number of reference books. We should add to our laboratories the kind of books that pupils oftener find in their homes than in school. I mean those well-written books by standard authors which are too little read outside of school because of "too little time," and which have not been enough used in schools because they have been crowded out by commercial school texts made to fit any school in any land, it is little wonder that children

reject this commercial product as mental food. Literature will one day be considered not *only* a part of English, but of geography, history, and all the fundamental subjects. A mountain peak will be the more impressive because of some poem or inspired description. The pupil will clothe each real mountain he sees with appropriate language. Our public libraries are filled with splendid books suitable for this work which still remain " unused and respectable." That a set of complete editions, like the family Bible, "Lasts a lifetime" is a common expression. Let us put them in their proper places and wear them threadbare. Let us make it possible for the young to become acquainted with them and regard them as friends of a lifetime. To get opinions from different authors on any subject and to weigh them one against another and draw one's own conclusions is most valuable. To form an opinion and have it dislodged fairly by a fellow-pupil collaborator is valuable experience.

Supposing that any single form sets as a minimum reading requirement 10 books for a year. Let us say there are 40 pupils in such a form. That means that 400 books are to be purchased by the pupils or the school, but the 400 represent only 10 pieces of literature. In an English laboratory we could reserve a series of shelves for the books of each form. Instead of 400 books for a single form, we could economize and buy 200 pieces of literature corresponding to the age of the pupils and permit them to read any 10. Any two children reading a different 10 would, under laboratory conditions, get the substance of 20 books.

Much duplication of equipment will also be saved. *In* the ordinary school it is often necessary to provide a lower form with some of the equipment of the next higher form. This is to make it possible to review *a* subject and to prevent delay or confusion, among form teachers who may be teaching the same subject at the same time. Maps, globes, measuring sticks, special texts, all illustrate this point. In any subject laboratory a finer special equipment can be acquired which will better serve the needs of the work and will save duplications.

It will facilitate organization to place a notice board, on which to hang the monthly assignments, just outside of each subject laboratory. For example, on the history notice board will be placed the separate monthly assignments for each form in history. Each monthly assignment is mounted on a coloured card. Different colours designating the various forms help a pupil to select his own form requirements quickly without the necessity of examining all the other requirements on the notice board. The monthly requirement is not one long requirement covering the twenty-day period of a given school month, but is sub-divided into four weekly assignments. This is to permit the pupils the stimulus and satisfaction which comes with the completion of a unit of work. On the form card there are four sheets of paper on which are written or printed the first, second, third, and fourth week's assignments respectively. This arrangement indicates that the assignment comprises more than the mere designation of pages in a book. A later article will deal with the character of assignments, giving concrete sample assignments for illustration. Here it is sufficient to say that they are more in the nature of a syllabus which lays the work required before the child, emphasizing important points, references, and so on. Thus the child knows at the beginning of the month exactly what is expected of him in each subject. The collection of subjects comprises a month of his school curriculum.

As subject laboratories are to be substituted for form rooms, I recommend that a series of small lockers for note-books and so on be arranged for each form in some convenient hall space, to prevent pupils who may want to get out their personal equipment from disturbing the work atmosphere of any laboratory.

Some schools using the Dalton Laboratory Plan devote the entire day to work in laboratories. Others have taken their first step by using the morning for laboratory time and the afternoon for oral lessons until the staff convince themselves that the work of the curriculum can be accomplished and thoroughly mastered with a minimum of oral lessons. Personally, I have convinced myself regarding this point, but I realize that the " reach " of each teacher does, in

the beginning, vary. The experienced teacher who has strength and foresight to take the first step will, I am sure, be keen and quick to change.  
*(To be continued.)*