

THE DALTON PLAN IV

By Helen Parkhurst

May I be permitted to summarize the fundamental principles upon which the Dalton Laboratory Plan is based ?

The first principle is freedom. The child who merely "does as he pleases" is not a free child. Such a one is likely to be arbitrary, selfish, and unwilling to cooperate. If so, he is in need of means with which to become a harmonious, well-rounded, responsible human being—free from selfishness to such an extent that he will consciously lend his strength and talent to cooperate with others in the attainment of a common good. We are agreed that freedom of movement is necessary for his physical well-being, but we must also permit him freedom to exercise his mentality; freedom to develop his resourcefulness and versatility ; freedom to initiate his pursuits; and freedom to organize his work.

If we desire to test a child's power to accept a piece of work as his responsibility, we must not first of all rob him of responsibility, or there will be nothing to test. We must check our own meddling, or, as Emerson, said, " He will be hindered from *his* end and kept out of his own." In a certain musical comedy, one scene portrayed a gentleman with several of his friends about to dine. All the friends were of different nationalities. The first course was served, but before they could even taste it the orchestra-played the host's national anthem. Everyone stood, but when they were again seated they found the course had been removed. Another national anthem was played with the coming of the second course, and in like fashion they were denied four courses. The host was presented with a bill for a meal which had been perfectly served, but which they had not been permitted to enjoy. I beg that this characteristic musical comedy procedure which plays too important a part in our schools, be removed from education. A pupil must be free to work upon a subject or a pursuit when he is most interested, because at such a time he is mentally keener and more alert and more capable of clearing up his difficulties. He must be free to go quickly or slowly according to his own rate of mental speed, because only by so doing can he go thoroughly.

The Second Principle

The various groups of the school must be brought into such constant interaction as to make the school a real community. Only through reorganization of school procedure can we bring such social conditions into the school. The work of separate or special departments must be inter-related and co-related. The very organization of school procedure must make it impossible for any one teacher to isolate himself or to escape sharing the problems of others. The teachers must realize that although they may be specially equipped with talents which permit them to serve in some special capacity, they have a common responsibility, and if the school community is to be benefited it will be necessary for them collectively to focus their minds upon each problem of the school. Under the Dalton Plan, if the Plan is really in operation, the laboratory heads cannot escape doing this. They have a common problem, because each instructor in any one part of the school (lower, middle, or upper) has the same pupils to deal with. The work of any single form must be correlated through the assignments. The checking-up devices used for measuring quantity and quality of work, should be identical in the various laboratories; the individual instructors must lay importance and stress upon the same academic values and upon the same social values; there must be a common aim. Naturally any instructor will understand his own checking-up devices; he may possibly know and understand those used by every other member of the staff. That is not the point—

we must remember that the Dalton Laboratory Plan aims to get at things from the pupil's point of view; for that reason the aims of work, the checking devices, and laboratory graphs must be minimized and of such a nature as to be clearly understood by the pupils. It retards a pupil's work if he has needlessly to adjust himself to cumbersome school machinery, and school machinery is cumbersome when it differs in every department. Such complications make it impossible for pupils to see that there is any general aim.

The Third Principle

A child never voluntarily undertakes anything that he does not understand; he initiates pursuits which he can understand; in initiating his own pursuits he looks at a thing from all angles, and he plans how to carry out his objectives. It is not sufficient to give a boy a shilling and say, "Buy a reel of cotton for me." He might bring back the wrong kind of a reel. We tell him the colour we desire, the number of the reel, and possibly we indicate where it may be purchased and how much we desire to pay for it. We give these directions in order to assure the errand. After receiving the directions he is permitted to proceed as a voluntary agent. When he comes back with the reel we check up his accomplishment according to the way in which he has carried out our directions. In other words, we permit him a view of the problem. Life outside the school makes every child an experienced veteran in pursuits of this nature. In the instance of testing a pupil's achievement, we are inclined temporarily to endow him with our maturity and reasoning powers—but let him desire to initiate his own pursuits, and immediately we consider him too immature and unseasoned to try his hand. We must permit him to have a viewpoint of his school work. We must intelligently lay the requirements and instructions before him and then permit him to proceed as a voluntary agent. Then it will be fair to check up his work according to his fulfilment.

The social reorganization of the Bait on Laboratory Plan takes these three principles into consideration and puts them into operation. The work of a month is laid before the pupils of each form ; they are permitted to view the requirements ; they are given 20 days in Which to accomplish the Work, and are permitted to be voluntary agents in the use of their time.

The Time-table

The first step to be taken towards the social reorganization, the step which makes a community of the school, is "doing away with the time-table." We all know what a dreadful thing the time-table is—as instructors we have all experienced it. The head of any school knows how difficult it is in making out a time-table to deal with the individual members of a staff some of w horn are constantly in fear that their special subject may be slighted. Individual instructors often feel that they are fitted in without proper regard to the importance of subjects. Examination of time-tables shows that the learner is given last consideration. In consequence the learner seldom, if ever, realizes that a time-table is important.

We do away with the time-table to permit pupils to progress at their own rate of speed. Let us consider the following difficulties Which we desire to obviate.

We all know that those pupils who are often inclined to undervalue and waste the time of an instructor are seldom known to waste then own free time. We also know that normally all the pupils of any one group or grade are never all weak in the same subject. The pupils differ in their likes and dislikes of subjects—subject antipathies usually are identical with subject weaknesses. If we give sufficient time to clear up all of the difficulties of a subject we can usually eliminate the antipathy.

A child can master a subject, he is interested in in less time than one which does not interest him. His interests vary according to his health, his emotions, and according to concurring events. If a pupil sets himself at a subject he will get much from it, and he can be expected to retain for a far longer length of time those things which lie gets when he is interested.

There are always some children in a group who of necessity waste time in class, because they have already mastered the subject, or because they are capable of grasping the idea much more quickly than others. Such pupils might better be at work elsewhere.

If from a class of 30 we selected 12 pupils who, after being tested, were found to have the same intelligence quotient, under our present-day class system it would not be possible for them to measure up to the same standard in all of their work. Several of the 12 might be weak in mathematics and very good in history; one of the 12 might be excellent in history, but very weak *in* science, and so on. Yet the 12 pupils are, by the *vary* existence of a timetable, forced all to give the same amount of time to history, whether they are weak or excellent in it. This is true in all of the other subjects. The pupils should, as individuals, have the same amount of time placed at their disposal, but such time should be used according to their subject needs. This arrangement would make it possible for all of the 12 mentioned to master a given portion of the curriculum at practically the same time.

Given any group of children of the same age, preparation, and general ability, their mental speed is bound to differ greatly in different subjects. There are always some slow pupils who are carried along by the momentum of the class, although they need more time to actually assimilate the ground covered. There are the so-called "bright pupils," who should do more lest they fall into slovenly mental habits, but who, because of the class system, only work sufficiently to assure keeping ahead of students of less native ability. This does not encourage sound work habits in the capable children.

Unnecessary time is invariably consumed in interesting pupils in a subject. The time taken for the preparation and presentation, in order to "warm a child up to a subject," might more profitably be used in getting at the subject. This would be possible if pupils could be permitted to be *up* and about their interests. A teacher could then proceed with the business of the school without interruption.

We know that going at one's own rate of speed means thorough work. Division of time according to individual need, by the individual, is fair to the slow child as well as to the bright child. Such progress means ample time for each.

Occasionally I have heard teachers say that the Dalton Laboratory Plan has to be modified for the teaching of some subjects. They do not state the case accurately, for the plan does not say how subjects shall be taught or what subjects shall be taught, nor does it attempt in any tailor-made fashion to say how much time shall be set aside as laboratory time. It suggests an organization which necessitates that the pupil's difficulties be exposed as never before, and then dealt with. The plan points out certain needs and certain ways, and gives an opportunity for common sense to precede method. It suggests that as much uninterrupted time as possible be set aside for a pupil's use in order that he, as a voluntary human being, may distribute it according to his needs—that is, according to his difficulties. Difficulties of a subject are individual, because even for the same difficulties some pupils need less time, some more time. A standard is never attained unless mental speed is taken into account. Eventually normal children can attain the same minimum, but they arrive at even this same minimum at different paces, for the very reason that they are human beings and not machines. It suggests that the amount of time set aside for oral lessons be apportioned according to the difficulties of the subjects, and that such a schedule of time be changed as the demands of the various subjects change.

Unfortunately, any new plan has to assume many school ills, merely through inheritance, although it is not actually responsible for them, in the same way that a man may sometimes be criticized for not getting ahead when perhaps he is wiping out the debts incurred by his family. I do believe that, given time, the Dalton Plan will to a very great extent make work more profitable and pleasurable for instructors and pupils. It will certainly develop resourceful and responsible human beings more capable of contributing to demands of the very much

changed society which is confronting us.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

Different schools have used the plan differently. I will give a concrete illustration showing to what extent one school using the plan did away with the time schedule to bring about a social reorganization. X. School is a day school which opens at 8.45 a.m. and closes at 4 p.m., with an intermission from 1 to 2 p.m. It is a junior school where the pupils study five subjects in addition to certain other accessory subjects taken up in the afternoon,

1. The time from 8.45 a.m. until 12 noon is considered free time. It belongs to the pupils, who organize it in ways best serving their own needs and subject to difficulties. They use it for work contracted.
2. The time from 12 to 12.30 is used for pupil assembly, or special work, committee meetings, &c. It is often used by the academic instructors for faculty conferences.
3. This school uses the time from 12.30 to 1 p.m. for daily " group conferences " which were in the beginning oral lessons. At this time all of the pupils of any one form group report to one of the several academic instructors as a group, for group discussion-conference. They report to different instructors daily so that at the close of the school week they have reported as a group to each academic instructor teaching a fundamental subject.
4. The afternoon time between 2 and 4 p.m. is used for lessons in art, manual training, French, domestic science, music, and games, or at times for excursions.

How the groups are brought into constant inter-action may be exemplified by the case of Donald R. We will say he is 10 years old, classified as a Form II. pupil. His requirements correspond to what is expected of any Standard Form II. student in an accredited school. He has contracted to do a piece of work in 20 days, 20 days corresponding to a school month. The word "contract" is used to imply that he understands and agrees to what he is to do.

NO BELL-RINGING

There are no classes before 12 o'clock, so there is no need of a time schedule, there is no ringing of bells to summon him from one room to another. He selects the thing he is most interested in when he begins his morning work. Donald decides to study geography. From the notice board outside of the geography laboratory he gets the Form II. geography contract-assignment. This assignment covers the work of a month outlined in advance, and is divided into four separate weekly assignments. He goes into the laboratory and after carefully reading the requirements of the assignment he proceeds to carry out the instructions. He goes to that part of the geography laboratory set aside for his form. The instructions of the assignment may be in the nature of references to be read and questions to be answered, maps to be drawn, a route to be outlined, &c, depending upon the phase of geography he is studying. He enters the laboratory without permission and he may leave without permission when he has completed any portion of his work. The time he spends in any one laboratory is determined entirely by his interest span and his fatigue. There is one requirement to be fulfilled before he leaves any laboratory. That is, he must indicate on the laboratory instructor's graph the amount of geography or other work which he has completed.

If he spends most of a morning in the geography laboratory he has spent enough time to have easily done a week's work in geography, the week being five days. A week's work is that portion of the contract assignment corresponding to the part marked " First Week;" This can easily be judged and indicated. If he spends a short time in the geography laboratory, and is not certain as to whether he has done 2-5ths or J of the work required for a week, he may ask the instructor what part of the work has been covered. There is a pupil graph for this purpose. These graphs are a part of the equipment of each laboratory. They are most useful, because an instructor can at a glance see exactly how much ground each individual of any form has

covered, and can tell what difficulties are about to be met, and so on.

Natural Grouping

At any time during his stay in the geography laboratory Donald may have the assistance of the instructor or of any other pupil. If while he is in the geography laboratory several other pupils of Form II come in to study geography, upon discovering that Donald has the assignment, they will all form a group. This group work is extremely valuable. The intimate discussion among; an intensive group of pupils who have of their own accord chosen to do geography precludes any disturbance, and no problem of discipline arises. The various groups feel a responsibility one to another. Each pupil has the opportunity of hearing the subject discussed from many angles. The teacher may enter into their discussion at any time when help is needed or when he feels he has something to contribute. The conduct and atmosphere of a subject laboratory might be likened to that of a well-regulated library conference room. A notebook is kept in each subject. Every pupil in the school has a contract card, and before he leaves any academic laboratory he checks up his progress, indicating ground covered, on this as well as on the laboratory graph. He marks it with a number : if it is the first day of work for him on the contract, on his graph he marks it "1," if previously he has worked four days, he marks his geography "5." Every other subject pursued on the fifth day he also marks with a "5". He may now go to any other laboratory of his choice. Referring to any number at any time will, even weeks after, show him how he organized his time each day.

Interaction of Groups

In a single grade room in many schools to-day it is not an uncommon sight to see even very young children of the same average ability carrying on different activities in various subjects. The persistence native to a young child when initiating his own pursuits, the strength of his ego, make this possible. I feel, however :

1. That older children enjoy the mental companionship provided by working together when interest is uppermost. Much creative work is possible under conditions that compel group work, but which permit group work to be according to interest rather than at a teacher's command.
2. That the different subject laboratories permit the children to enjoy a larger world, in that they come in direct contact with specialists and have a richer environment, conveniently classified for use.
3. That older children need, and should have, every encouragement to persist in completing a difficult piece of work they have undertaken, without the feeling of being driven, and that school organization should assist this persistence.
4. That the feeling produced when working in a "subject community,"¹ with common interests, is helpful to real persistence.
5. That the separate subject laboratories help a child to classify his knowledge and to appreciate sequence to a greater degree, and assure his having the proper equipment at hand with which to pursue a task at a moment of need.
6. That in a subject laboratory pupils of different grade groups (the vertical section) not only assist each other when occasion demands, but are very much helped in turn, without being distracted, the task of a companion being similar if not identical.
7. A special environment can be kept in better order than an environment in which carpentry, gymnastics, &c, are going on simultaneously. There is, for instance, a legitimate disorder in a handwork room which would be disturbing to the atmosphere of a laboratory for the study of English. Besides, it is of greater moral value to the child working out a problem in English which entails carpentry, if he makes his decision operative, by not J only deciding to go but by going to the handwork room.

Decision *plus* action is more purposeful and creative. There is also the conscious con-
elation of work. The pupils appreciate the helpfulness of co-related subject
laboratories. It is taken for granted that the freedom to move about purposefully is of
great benefit to the child's nervous organism. The children are relaxed and move about
in the same quiet manner as in their own homes.

The intimate social contact between pupil and teacher is most helpful. The natural way in
which the pupils work, their joy and pleasure in daily living, and the patience and willingness
with which they do hard work, is a picture almost unbelievable to officers I of the formal class
rule, who find mob spirit when occasions release bottled-up energies. It is a picture which will
not be seen until the interrupting time-table is removed. Only uninterrupted time can be
properly organized.

The Children's Opinions

In order to picture this community life and spirit from the children's view-point, I give some
of the opinions of children from eight to 12 years of age who are working according to the
plan. The children were of 14 different nationalities. The answers were spontaneous and oral.
No previous discussion as to whether the plan of work was liked or not had taken place. The
comments were taken down word for word in shorthand by a stenographer, and they have not
been changed even to improve sentence structure. Only one child was 12 years of age, and his
comment is given first. No attempt was made to encourage favourable replies. An instructor
from another school was present during the discussion. All of the answers given are from
pupils in the Children's University School, New York City. They are all children from many
different schools with different preparation and they came into the school in October, 1920.
Their first work under the plan began at that time. Their expressions as quoted date January
26, 1921.

After a period of four months they had no idea that I was in any way responsible for the
plan. I put the questions personally.

Question.—" We have never discussed the plan of work used by this school since we began to
use it. As I do not know how you feel about the plan, I would appreciate your telling me
whether you like it or not. I am asking for information."

L—, aged 12 years.----"In this school a person that, can't work as quickly as others in a
particular subject just takes that much more time for that subject and finishes all there is to
be done. I like it for that reason. The record cards make each boy and girl do their work
quicker because they can see just how much they have accomplished. They do the work better
because they all want to finish their assignments, and the contract cards keep them in touch
with each other's work. In other schools if you are sent into the mathematics room with your
class, you can't change and go into the English room when you're tired. But in our school, if
you have been doing mathematics for some time you can change; and go into some other
room for a little while and then go back to mathematics if you want to. In other schools you
have to work every minute, and if you try to stop for *a* minute to rest they make you go on.
Here you can stop and rest and then get down to harder work again."

D— aged 10 years.—" If you are doing geography in other schools you take an awfully long
time and don't finish, and then you have to go to mathematics and you just sit there and waste
time because you have done the mathematics already. In this school you can take the time
saved on mathematics and put it with the geography time, and have enough time to get the
geography finished right. If you study home work at night, you are tired in school, and if you
are made to work you don't do it well. Here if you are too tired to work you just sit still and
read, and then pretty soon you feel like doing it. You never do things well that you are made
to do."

H—aged 9 years.—" When you don't get a certain amount of work done in other schools you

have to take it home and study it, and that makes you awfully tired. Here you just go on with it the next day. After a hard day's work at school you don't, feel like studying at home. I like the plan because each one has ample time to do his work in, and if you get tired of doing one thing you can do another thing. I like the work better than I do in other schools. The main reason is that when you are absent you can begin to make up your work the next day. In other schools they may give you 50 minutes to do work, and it doesn't take you all that time, or sometimes they give you too little time. You have to have just enough time to be suitable." G—aged 10 years.—" I like the plan because we can go on and do our work and not be held back by children who are slower, and also because we can work hard and get through quickly and get credit for the work we do well."

W—aged 11 years. — "In some schools when you go into arithmetic you have to do arithmetic for half an hour, and you have to do so much that you get mixed up. Here when you begin to get tired and can't make your mind work right on one thing, you can go into another room and forget all about the first thing, so you don't get muddled up. Later you can do the other thing."

A—aged 9 years—"At the end of the month if you do your work very well you are rewarded by your own satisfaction, and beside that you may be put in a higher class."

Question.—" Wouldn't you like to have some other reward given to you—a medal or a book of something you very much wanted."

A— aged 9 years—"No, that's not necessary, the satisfaction is enough. I'd rather just go ahead."

Question—" At the beginning of the year I don't think you liked the plan at all, and you did not do as good work. What, was the trouble? "

(This question was unfair but it was given as a challenge.)

V- aged 9 years —" We were so glad to get into a school where we could be let alone for a little while that we took a vacation."

E—aged 10 years— At the beginning of the year everybody was thinking more about other things than about the work."

P—aged 10 years—"We did not understand how to work."

G—aged 9 years—"In the beginning we were still a little shy because we did not know the teachers and what they expected of us. We hadn't been used to the way of working here and we had been used to all taking the same subject at once, and then we didn't get the same attention."

J—aged 9 years—"At the beginning they were used to another way and it took them some time to understand."

Question—" Do you feel you need a recess in the morning? " (We call a "break" a recess.)

They all shouted "No." One boy aged 10 years explained : "No, we take a recess ourselves when we are tired. We can sit down and read."

Question.—" You have told all the nice things, what about the faults of the plan? "

The children said they had no fault to find with it. This was unanimous.

One boy was appointed by the other children to come to me afterwards. I was at tea with a small group of people when the child came in. He said, " I beg your pardon, may I speak to you ? " My reply was, " Certainly, what is it ? " He said quietly, " It is something private. May we step into the next room? " I went immediately. Then he proceeded : " I don't want to be rude, Miss Parkhurst, but the children think you do not like the plan. They like it very much and they have sent me to ask you why you don't like it. Aren't you going to get behind it?"

(He meant "support it.")

I assured him that I was interested and would to the best of my ability "get behind the plan." I sincerely appreciated the interest shown in their challenge. It became from that moment more than ever their plan, and I was helped to a better perspective. (*To be continued.*)