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The Bank Street Thinkers: Foundational Knowledge to Support Our Roots and Wings

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Foundational Knowledge to
Support our Roots and Wings



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Bank Street College of Education
610 West 112th Street
New York, NY 10025
www.bankstreet.edu

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Barbara Biber
Claudia Lewis
Lucy Sprague Mitchell
Edna Shapiro
Agnes Snyder
Charlotte B. Winsor

Edited by Kristin Freda
Director of Library Services
and
Peggy McNamara
*Chair, General Teacher Education Department,
Bank Street College of Education*

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Introduction

Peggy McNamara

As we approach our centennial year Bank Street College is taking time to pause and reflect on the work of progressive educators who came before us as we consider our trajectories into the future. Bank Street Thinkers are a series of papers and lectures that were digitized in 1999 in an effort to preserve and share a glimpse into our foremothers' work with children, families, teachers, and administrators. Over some forty years I have maintained a relationship with the College. My story is not unique. The longevity of connections to the College is a strength that has nurtured and fostered individuals as well as the institution itself over these hundred years. In addition, the values, theories, and practices shared in Bank Street Thinkers have served as foundational knowledge.

With these ideas in mind, this pamphlet has been organized according to themes. We begin with some **Bank Street history** as Barbara Biber provides her perspective on what she views Bank Street to be in 1973. The next two articles explore **the concepts of teaching and teacher preparation**. Biber and Snyder invite the reader to examine the elements of good teaching while Lewis and Windsor narrate how the Bank Street Teacher Education program addressed the need for teachers during the 1950's. Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Charlotte Winsor relate critical aspects of **our long history of social studies teaching and curriculum development**. Mitchell ruminates on the complexities of definitions when analyzing social studies and Winsor describes how a social studies curriculum was enacted at City and Country, a private elementary school, which has been connected to Bank Street over many decades. The role of **language and play** in young children's growth process are elucidated through Claudia Lewis' story of kindergarteners' language play and Biber's

theoretical and practical analysis of the role of play in the lives of children. Finally, Edna Shapiro cautions the reader about the dangers of describing **competence in schools** therefore “...becoming an omnibus concept” that does not effectively communicate anything useful to educators. Through the creation of this pamphlet and salon experience, I am taking an opportunity to introduce Bank Street Thinkers through my multiple lenses as alumni, cooperating teacher, professional developer, adjunct instructor, core faculty and administrator. I invite readers to engage with these papers in whatever ways that make sense for them in their current educational contexts.

The first essay in this publication recounts Biber’s attempt to answer the question “*What is Bank Street?*” at the 1973 Bank Street Graduate School of Education convocation lecture. My story began in 1975 only two years later. But instead of asking “what” I asked “why,” as I contemplated the graduate school that would guide me in my journey to effective teaching. Many of the descriptions of theory and practice that Biber detailed I saw firsthand when I encountered Elsbeth Pfeiffer supervising a teacher at Riverside Therapeutic Nursery while I was completing an undergraduate independent study. Through my observations of Elsbeth with special needs children and their teachers, I experienced the ways in which an advisor modeled how, as Biber wrote, “the teacher guides the children toward creating a network of relationships that bind the discrete elements of experiences” helping them to develop their own “sense of competence.” In addition, I was intrigued as I participated in debriefing conferences where theory was used to make sense of “perplexing classroom realities” and challenged when questions arose that did not match theories. In my view, Biber’s analyses of Bank Street’s work with children, families, and teachers affords the reader with the roots and wings of Bank Street’s educational perspective as she framed our broad institutional responsibility “for the development of the whole person—his affective and social as well as his intellectual development and our commitment to repeated cycles of innovate, observe, study evaluate, and revise” in order to use our “private, independent learning environments as laboratories for the development of optimal learning settings for children and adults and as a base for making an impact on the direction of public education.”

In the next two articles about teaching, Biber and Snyder investigated when it is possible to know a teacher is “good” and Lewis and Winsor evaluated a different way in which Bank Street supervised beginning teachers during the 1950’s baby boom when the need for teachers increased dramatically. In each of these articles the authors approached the education of teachers by considering teachers’ strengths and needs and the social context in which they were teaching. I have used these articles in a literacy coaching class to provide a historical view on teaching and teacher preparation. Biber and Snyder’s writing presented my class with ways to observe, analyze, and evaluate for themselves “when a teacher is good and what good teaching is” and how this relates to being a literacy coach. As they speculated about the ways to support colleagues with their coaching, they appreciated the articulation of teachers’ and children’s needs. The identification of knowledge, skills, and dispositions rang true for them. Most poignant to their own teaching practices was the description that a teacher “need[s] to be so secure within herself that she can function with principles rather than prescriptions, that she can exert authority without submission, that she can work

experimentally but not random...” These words affirmed the ways in which they had been supervised by their Bank Street advisors. Reading about the significance of the advisement process in Lewis and Winsor’s *“Supervising the Beginning Teacher”* linked them to a seminal teaching professional practice in a deep and thoughtful manner. Some of the literacy coaches in my class who were confronted with rigid school environments related to the idea that “with understanding supervision” they could be “helped to reorganize” their “values, rather than discard them.” They acknowledged that their advisors supported the group from “intoxication with difficulties,” by asking them to consider “How can you make the program (curriculum content) work for you as an organizing element in the classroom?” Lewis and Winsor’s article was pivotal in making the advisement processes more visible to these literacy coaches. It also served as a model for coaching that focused the teacher and coach on what was occurring for the children rather than teaching as a performance.

Whether as a nascent elementary special education teacher developing curriculum and or as a seasoned doctoral student analyzing other teachers’ integrated social studies curriculum, I relied on Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Charlotte Winsor’s foundational ideas about social studies. Mitchell’s *“Social Studies and Geography”* furnished me with important questions and insights related to the concepts of human geography. I investigated the ways in which trips promoted students’ understanding of the geography of the urban environment as they observed the interactions of people. In addition, Mitchell pondered how social studies could teach about the “other fellow” or the people who are not part of our natural group. Citing the influences of her time in the 1930’s, she questioned the power of the curriculum tools for studying relationships so “we shall understand the ‘other fellow.’” During my dissertation research Charlotte Winsor’s “Child Growth and Learning in Social Studies Experiences” served as a framework to examine integrated social studies practices in three elementary classrooms in a school where the “program [was] built on social experiences available to the school in its community and appropriate to the understanding of the child.” Winsor affirmed my observations of the importance of teachers being seen as curriculum makers when she asserted that “only as teachers develop awareness of and are excited by the broadening base of their responsibility will profound changes in school program be truly understood...”

The teachers in my study viewed their role in social studies curriculum development as active as they planned meaningful learning experiences based on their knowledge of child development so children would have the “social attitudes, relationship thinking, study skills, and creative expression” that would prepare them for “active participation in the adult society.”

As a young pre-kindergarten teacher I connected the importance of play in my own life as I watched children construct environments in the block area and reconstruct some of their life experiences in dramatic play. Unsure of my role, I instinctively observed carefully, asked clarifying questions, and waited to be invited into the play. Since these 2½-3 years olds were not very verbal, I learned how much their play could inform me about their inner and receptive language. While re-reading *“Play As a Growth Process”* in the current educational climate, I am challenged to use Bibber’s timeless text to support the efforts of early childhood educators to document the various ways that play is a natural tool for children as they learn about the world and seek an outlet for complex

and conflicting emotions. Most importantly, Biber employs the reader to question, “How much shall the teacher get involved in children’s play?” Then she inspired teachers to think about their roles in offering new ideas and materials into play, balancing stimulation and independence.

Since my early days of teaching and through my work as an advisor and professional developer, children’s language has delighted and fascinated me as I listened to the variety of ways in which children made sense of language. I have often asked “How do they learn to say their ideas in such unique ways? And what can I do to encourage this process?” Claudia Lewis’ “*Deep As a Giant – An Experiment in Children’s Language*” revealed the mystery of her kindergarteners’ language complexity as she led them through a systematic and playful investigation of language with metaphor. Through her inquisitive and accepting teaching style, she quickly discovered the multiplicity of ways her five and six year old students can use language in inventive and creative ways. Her article published in 1938 concretized for me the critical role that teachers can play when they observe, record, and encourage children’s language development in productive and clever ways.

Edna Shapiro’s “*Reassessing the Criteria of Competence in School*” explicated assorted and conflicting definitions of competence. Competence depicted as action, capacity, situational, and culturally defined. Analyzing data from two different studies that measured students’ performances, Shapiro concluded that the “concept of competence... is somewhat chameleon-like.” The meanings of competence depended on the context where it was measured. During our current educational time period when public school teachers are being assessed by students’ test scores the nature of competence in school has narrowed to a limited focus. Students are considered competent when measured by common core graded standardized testing. Teachers are considered competent when students perform well on common core graded standardized testing. These current factors emphasize Shapiro’s conclusion that we need a “much more sophisticated research strategy than any that has been used if we are to clarify and differentiate the criteria of competence in schools.”

The process of reviewing and responding to this collection of Bank Street Thinkers has enabled me to look back over my forty-year affiliation with the College and articulate the profound impact Bank Street has had on me throughout my studies and professional life. As a recent college graduate in 1975, I instinctively knew that Bank Street would be one of my educational homes. The content of these publications affirm this early decision to become a life long teacher. I hope you find your own connections during your reading process and in our discussions in the salon.

What Is Bank Street?

Barbara Biber (1973)

Self-presentation for an institution seems to be as difficult and fraught with uncertainty as it is for an individual. After presenting Bank Street to you through the beautiful pictures and artifacts, a nagging question remains: do you really see what we are like, underneath the images and the activities, at the level of purpose, values, and commitment? Toward that end we still seem to be dependent on words.

There is, indeed, a coherent system of values, theoretical premises, and designs for implementation underlying the multiple activities and programs of Bank Street. There are, in fact, agreed-on components of what constitutes optimal learning situations for children and adults which these various programs strive to incorporate, wherever they are initiated geographically, whether in the private or public sector.

The farther we go from home base, geographically or ideologically, the greater is the challenge to adapt these principles and practices in ways that do not create a school culture that is antithetical to the family life patterns or to subculture mores of given populations. This process of adaptation is not a straightaway course. There are limits to be watched for if the extent of adaptation is not to violate the essential educational aims. We have found that a great deal of common ground can be established where it might not be expected by explaining, sharing, demonstrating, especially by opening up purposes behind activities, and, of course, by listening and sensing others' intents and meanings. It must be acknowledged, nevertheless, that without some commonality of values about what child-

Lecture originally given at the Bank Street College of Education Convocation luncheon, November 27, 1973.

hood should be and how people and children should live together in school, these concepts and methods for education are not likely to take firm root.

A learning environment

First, I want to review briefly the components of a learning environment for children toward which we aspire. Our own Children's School is the closest approximation, but it, too, is constantly in a process of change since the implementation of goals cannot stay put certainly not so long as school life remains sensitive to the vicissitudes of social change and not so long as changing theory and new research findings point to new ways of understanding and guiding learning and growth in childhood.

We aim for an abundance of experience and encounter for the children, of the kind that will increase the range and depth of sensitivity to the world around them. We aim for a variety of situations to which the children need to accommodate and plenty of alternatives from which to make choices. Direct contact with phenomena and people takes priority over the vicarious; the salient situations for learning are outside the classroom as well as inside. Emotional resonance to the doing, making, and thinking aspects of learning is very much welcomed.

We aim for actively involved children acquiring competence and a sense of their own competence. We do not see the need for contrived techniques to motivate children; instead we find a healthy fund of curiosity and a drive to produce an effect on the environment. Satisfied curiosity and the intrinsic rewards of mastery are powerful generators of renewed motivation. Active investigation, independent pursuit, learning through discovery are dominant in the learning climate, but we respect and honor the kind of content for which pre-structured information or formal instruction may be more efficient and, in fact, satisfying, in its own way. The curriculum of activities is kept flexible but there is a planned framework of what basic knowledge is necessary for effective functioning at different stages of development and what skills are needed to acquire it.

The teacher uses every opportunity to foster intellectual mastery, to promote cognitive power by creating a pervasive climate of why and wherefore and wherefrom kind of thinking. The ongoing experiences of school life, rather than specially designed materials, are the primary source for stimulating a conceptually organized universe, adapted to developmental levels. The teacher guides the children toward creating a network of relationships that bind the discrete elements of experience. In the earlier years, thinking is stimulated in terms of similarities and differences, of the orderly passing of time or the transformations of growth and growing up, or the mastery of spatial reality in the immediacy of a school building; and later, in the symbolism of map thinking, for example. Gradually, thinking moves toward the intangibles—the relations between behavior and motivation, between evidence and proof, between fact and opinion.

It would be a pity to restrict the growth and majesty of the human mind and spirit to the rational processes served by cognitive powers and we deplore the educational schema where this, in fact, occurs. In our philosophy and practice, we feel responsible to nurture equally the intuitive processes, the capacity for feeling and emotion, for reflective as well as goal-directed thinking in order to bring the totality of imaginative, productive functioning to its highest power. We provide therefore, ample oppor-

tunity, equipment, and encouragement for many forms of symbolic expression, for reliving experience by representing it in personally meaningful terms, for fantasizing as well as reasoning, for synthesizing the subjective and objective aspects of experience. For example, over the years, we have developed spontaneous dramatic play and creative play making as a component of curriculum through which children create this synthesis for themselves, with the support of teachers aware of the complexities of the processes involved.

A classroom embodies a way of life among people. We attempt to build a social environment in which children are known and responded to as individuals, where the interaction between adult and child and between child and child is supportive of learning, and where the children come to identify with the teachers' goals for their learning. We expect teachers to carry dual roles of support and control, to exercise that measure of understandable authority that is essential to a functioning learning environment. We want the children to be aware of themselves as initiators in their learning roles, to establish their individual identities, and at the same time, to grow through the emergence of the self in the cooperative, collective group experiences of play and learning. We see a full-bodied school life as a prime source of pleasure and challenge in childhood.

We welcome the ways in which the open education movement resembles this concept of a learning environment, as far as it does. At the same time, we worry that it may suffer from a too-rapid, precipitate enactment without sufficient recognition and investment in the tremendous task of preparing teachers to carry these new roles. Our own Children's School and its faculty is an essential instrument for our whole program. It is the expression of theory in reality and as such is used extensively by our programs for the education of school personnel.

Preparation of teachers

How do we develop people who can create and function in this kind of learning environment—teachers, guidance workers, principals, supervisors, teachers of teachers? I will limit myself to comments on our master's degree program for the preparation of teachers, which is oldest in our history and has been the theoretical paradigm for later programs.

At the base is a three-part concept of a competent teacher: first, an extensive reservoir of knowledge and specific skills for the teaching task, based on psychodynamic concepts of learning and growth in childhood; second, capacity for meaningful communication and relationship with adults and children of varying backgrounds and life-styles, and third, enough personal insight, maturity and resilience to make the currents and cross-currents of emotion contribute to a quality of depth in the learning climate. Our staff is now engaged in specifying and codifying this broad formulation as part of the movement toward Competency Based Teacher Education in this state.

In our master's program for the preparation of teachers, we have had a long established pattern for integrating theory and practice. Responsible apprentice teaching, from the beginning, is concurrent with mastery of developmental theory, teaching techniques, and educational principles. Major time is allotted to work in a variety of classrooms. Continuous cross-referencing between study about teaching and really trying to teach is stimulated: how does theory make perplexing classroom realities more

understandable? Conversely, where do these realities seem to challenge and upset going theory? This is what we might call third person thinking—analytical, conceptual, probing—asking what factors condition children’s learning, what deflects developmental sequences, how does one sort out social-political issues from the educational issues that are the center of the critique of education in our times?

On another plane, we are equally interested in advancing the student-teacher’s self-knowledge as it pertains to building an individually viable identity in the teaching role. For many, the training experience, the harsh realities of classrooms in an urban setting, the exposure to a new philosophy of education and the values implicit in it, the scary expectation that one should be able to function autonomously, democratically, and even imaginatively, becomes a deeply stirring personal experience. What is aroused is a full measure of first person thinking – greater awareness of one’s own strengths and weaknesses and the search for the best functioning match between one’s own talents, uncertainties, life-style, and the image of the teaching role for which one is preparing. What is expressed is often a heady blend of anxiety and exhilaration.

We consider it essential that there be support mechanisms to make this an integrated program of personal and professional development, to make it possible for the students to experience deeply the interplay of cognitive and non-cognitive elements as part of a learning experience of their own. Our advisement program is the way we meet this need. Subgroups of 10 or 11 students work closely with an advisor in weekly conference groups for which there is no set agenda. The conference group becomes an intimate forum for exchange of experience—an opportunity to express reactions, criticisms, perplexity, and to engage in give and take of ideas with peers. The advisor, an experienced educator, accepts the relevance of individual reactions in this setting while channeling the content toward more generalized problems, issues, techniques of interest to the group as a whole. In addition, the advisor meets with students individually, in bi-weekly conferences, visits them in their classroom placements, and becomes the key figure in coordinating the student’s development toward competence in the teaching role and consolidation of the student’s identity as a teacher.

There is, as you might suspect, a hidden curriculum. We have assumed for many years that, beyond the structured curriculum that is provided, the students internalize the pervasive qualities of the learning environment we try to create for them—that the qualitative characteristics of their own teaching styles will reflect, later, the qualities of their own personal experience in learning to become teachers. It is gratifying that, in a recent study of the Cary Fellows Program, this assumption is borne out.

This basic paradigm for preparation of school personnel is necessarily adjusted to differences in our multiple programs—to full-time vs. part-time study, to the various roles involved. But in all, there is a common factor: we control the conditions of the learning environment and each program is not an isolate. It is part of the total Gestalt of the institution.

Programs for change

Our third orbit of work comprises programs of action for change in the sector of public education where we move in to the way things are. The approaches are varied. Some are geared toward making an impact on a broad scale without engaging intimately with the educational processes per se. Among these

are the production of materials for teachers—the *Bank Street Readers*, films, learning tools such as the *Early Childhood Discovery Materials*, or acting as consultants to the designing of pioneer programs such as Head Start or the Child Development Associate program or taking part in national assessment programs or participating in conferences or contributing to the educational and psychological literature.

By contrast, other activities in the public sector are active ongoing cooperative ventures, located within a given school or school system or as part of community-based operations such as day care. In these instances, members of our staff maintain continuous important working relations with the school personnel. Principles, goals, and methods of the in-depth programs for children and teachers are adapted and paced to the realities of each situation and especially to the delicate condition of being the outsider coming in. In the early days of our public school activities, our focus was on bringing about change through working primarily with teachers under generally benign but non-participant principals. In recent years, we have extended our work to include organizational structures and those in leadership positions, recognizing that teachers alone can be expected to be successful heralds of the new, only if they are part of a larger structure of support.

The Bank Street Follow Through program, now in its fifth year, is perhaps the most highly developed paradigm for our way of functioning as change agents in the larger educational scene. The distinguishing feature, organizationally, is the focus on total staff development. Toward this end, the training design works in two ways: one, through one-to-one conferences for dealing with the concrete interests, problems, suggestions of individuals; the other through group sessions which include people carrying varying roles with different degrees of authority and different kinds of vested interests in the children's school experience—from principals to parents. These mechanisms have been developed for the sake of establishing mutuality of purposes and understanding of what is being undertaken among all those involved.

Equally essential in the design of this program is the analytic process that proceeds through use of systematic techniques for studying children and curriculum and for self-study by the adults engaged in the work. Once again, third person and first person thinking appear as a dual approach for facilitating feedback, from deepened understanding to revision of school practices. This combination of methods—highly developed person-to-person interaction plus systematic analytic procedures—represents our conviction that basic change will not occur or last through distribution of learning tools and techniques or through dissemination of ideas unless attitudes, perceptions, and commitment of school people at the grass roots are part of a fundamental change process. This takes time, lots of time, and deep involvement of those who undertake—maybe presume is a better word—to be change agents in an established system.

Our educational perspective

At this point, I would like to sum up briefly the overall educational perspective that governs our institutional priorities and shapes the designs of our multiple programs.

The school as a social institution has broad responsibility for the development of the whole person—his affective and social as well as his intellectual development. The quality of experience

in school can have a differentiated impact not only on the proficiency of intellectual functioning but in shaping the feelings, the attitudes, the values, the sense of self, the images of good and evil in the world about and the vision of what the life of man with man might be. True, the school is only one part of a constellation of influences—the family, the impact of poverty and discrimination, the prevalence of market-place values in our society—but it dare not forsake its responsibility nor lose sight of the extent of its potency.

The school is not neutral ground. Educational goals are inevitably value-bound. In our perspective we value the kind of effective, autonomous individuality that, in maturity, evolves toward social commitment. We work toward the kind of democratic intra-group functioning that is built on non-authoritarian forms of control, participation of the governed in decision-making and especially on non-predatory modes of interchange among people at all stages.

We have a theory of the learning process derived from several sources - from the developmental theory of Werner and Piaget, from the psychodynamic thinking of Hartmann and Erikson, and from educational thinkers: John Dewey, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Harriet Johnson, Susan Isaacs. Essentially, it means that cognitive functions cannot be separated from personal and interpersonal processes; that curriculum and method should be adapted to developmental sequences and patterns, as these are conditioned by varying life circumstance; and that the optimal educative process is one that maximizes the child's interaction with the materials, the ideas, and the people of his environment. We have lately christened it—the **Developmental-Interaction Approach**.

We are committed to repeated cycles of innovate, observe, study, evaluate and revise. Toward this end there is, and has been through the years, a pervasive informal climate of experimentation. There are also now systematic evaluation studies geared toward formative more than summative techniques. There is an organized program of research in which the roster of studies reflects our involvement in probing the depths of the learning-teaching processes—for example, studies of the psychological impact of contrasting school environments, non-verbal representation in early childhood, cognitive aspects of play, personality aspects of the teaching role, teaching and learning styles in city schools, and the social organization of Head Start centers.

Finally, we are committed to using our private, independent learning environments as laboratories for the development of optimal learning settings for children and adults and as the base for making an impact on the direction of public education. How to do this had its beginnings in Harlem thirty years ago and is right now being reformulated in the light of extensive, varied experience in the intervening years.

I would like to close with a self-searching remark—for the Bank Street self, that is. We are well aware that our increased size, number of activities, programs, and staff in recent years are means for increasing the scope of influence of an institution. We are equally aware that expansion brings a degree of slippage from our core educational perspective, which needs careful monitoring. Still, we are not the only institution that needs to face the struggle between size and integrity of purpose or between idealism and solvency. So—we keep trying.

How Do We Know a Good Teacher?

Barbara Biber and
Agnes Snyder (1948)

The answer to the question asked in the title is approached in two ways: an analysis of a possible concept of good teaching and a discussion of the problems involved in evaluating good teaching. Conclusion: there is no such person as the good teacher but it is possible to know when a teacher is good and what good teaching is.

What good teaching is and how to recognize when a teacher is good are closely related problems, as baffling as they are persistent. Except for those who claim an intuitive power of knowing the instant they step into the classroom whether or not the teaching and teacher are good, supervisors and administrators under the necessity of passing such judgments are faced with truly bewildering dilemmas.

Here, for example, is a teacher who obviously violates most of the accepted principles of good teaching. But year after year his pupils return to visit him with affection and appreciation.

Here is another teacher whose pupils score high in all achievement tests, who learn to read better and more quickly than other comparable groups but who seem to develop very little in social attitudes and relationships.

Here is a teacher, warm and understanding, whose room is a veritable bit of life with birds singing, white rats peering out of cages, geraniums blooming in window boxes, children happy and

Childhood Education. 1948. Reissued 1962, 1965. Reprinted by permission of the Association for Childhood Education International, Copyright 1948 by the Association

contented. But her pupils show a general sloppiness and lack of accuracy in the tool subjects that are definitely disturbing.

Here is a teacher whose pupils become identified with problems of the community and even of the world. They correspond with children in war-devastated countries; they serve on traffic patrols; they send letters to their congressmen. But when they are confronted as individuals with anything requiring a steady, concentrated effort, they seem utterly incapable of settling down.

Here is a teacher who believes in discipline; who proclaims aloud that “order is heaven’s first law,” and gets it. Her teaching techniques are almost flawless but the children do not learn.

On the upper levels, here is a teacher who proudly points to the fact that practically all of his pupils go on to high school and college, and make good records. In contrast, here is another teacher whose pupils marry early, settle down into happy family life, and occupy obscure positions in the social scene.

And we ask—how are we to judge in the last analysis which teaching is of most worth?

Difficult as it is, every educator responsible in any way for the education of teachers must, to the best of his ability, stake down what he, out of his experience, thinks a good teacher is.

What is expressed in the flowing paragraphs is by no means a complete account of our concept of good teaching but it may be sufficient to indicate an orientation toward a way of thinking about the problem. In any event it would be impossible to draw up a set of criteria without regard to the needs and goals of a particular situation.

A Possible Concept of Good Teaching

We are accustomed to the idea that a teacher should be someone who loves children. In fact, many a novice thinks she has done extraordinarily well when in answer to the question, “Why do you want to become a teacher?” she answers with feeling, “I love children.” It’s a disarming answer, especially to the interviewer who may have given the question a considerable amount of thought. It’s a good thing that she loves children, that she realizes that loving children is an asset in a teacher. But if she thinks that is the end rather than the beginning, she has a long way to go.

Children do need to be loved and accepted by their teachers. The young teacher who naturally warms to children has the fundamental ingredient of acceptance, but her growth as a fine teacher will depend upon her ability to reach deeper and deeper levels of acceptance. What these are can only be briefly suggested:

- accepting children on the basis of enjoying their vitality, their charm, their freshness, their creativeness
- being able to handle the expression of raw emotion occasionally involving negative feeling toward the teacher, especially in younger children
- appreciating differences among children with respect to ratio between potential and overt accomplishment
- including the concept of children-within-families but not with the attitude of pointing an accusing finger at the family for what the child may lack.

In fact, it is probably true that a deeply accepting teacher is involved almost not at all in the process

of blaming either the child or the family. Instead she is always looking for ways into rather than ways out of her responsibility as a teacher. “What makes you think you would be a good teacher?” often brings the direct reply, “I get along very well with children.” One might hope for a reply that included the idea that the teacher gets along well with people, and children are people. Teachers are happiest and most successful when they are natural communicators - personalities who realize the best in themselves through their interaction with other human beings. Not all professions are equally dependent on this quality. To be in rapport with children is essential but good rapport is not the same for all stages of growth, nor is there any one formula for what it should be at any one stage. Teachers can get into rapport through:

- offering warmth, protection, unspoken understanding (most essential in the younger years)
- establishing an atmosphere of camaraderie that keeps feeling a little under the surface (important to children of the middle years)
- being themselves happy, positive people in whose presence it is natural to feel good about life
- having great resources of knowledge and experience which they can transmit without exerting pressures
- their talents for helping children to discover the intricacies of the world around them
- being able to teach others how to learn for themselves, thereby establishing confidence in the child’s sense of his own prowess.

It is interesting that few candidates for teacher education nowadays justify their choice of a profession by laying claim to enjoying the life of learning. Many of them probably think such an idea would sound old-fashioned to the modern “progressive” educator who is set to make something less intellectual, less didactic, less academic out of school experience.

Actually, the modern educator is deeply concerned with learning. He has broadened the concept of learning so that he talks of growth as much as he talks of knowledge. But it is an error to assume that knowledge—functioning, meaningful information—and the processes by which knowledge is attained and absorbed are not essential in his system of goals and values. The good teacher needs:

- an organized reservoir of knowledge of the world in which he lives - its physical nature, its work processes, its social forms and problems, its historical background
- as much awareness of the concrete, here-and-now environment as of the sources and origins which are remote in time and space
- understanding of the conceptual development of children in order to judge intelligently the kind of information which children can absorb at different stages of their growth
- to have his own information so deeply absorbed and integrated that he can draw on it imaginatively and freely without being too bound to lesson plans and courses of study

- knowledge of the psychological nature of the learning process so that he teaches within a framework of basic principles such as:
 - children like to learn unless something interferes with their motivation
 - children learn most successfully when they are identified with their teachers as people
 - children learn best through a wealth of direct vital experience which can be supplemented in gradual doses with vicarious experience as they grow older
- facility in the tools of acquiring knowledge—the three R’s in the early years; the skills of research, reference and organization in the later years, and in modern methods for helping children acquire these skills
- an approach to problem-solving that has the scientific attitude at the base, a willingness to search for evidence behind opinion, a high threshold for prejudice
- delight on his own adult level in clarifying confusion and an equal delight in the dawning of understanding on the part of children and in their growing ability to fathom ever more complex relationships.

Briefly one might say, as Lucy Sprague Mitchell has so often said to her students and her colleagues, a good curriculum is based on sound knowledge of children on the one hand, and the world on the other. The psychologically-minded have, in recent years, laid emphasis on love of children in addition to understanding what they are like. No one disputes the importance of this latter-day emphasis but it is time to become concrete and emphatic about still another emphasis: *the importance of developing teachers who not only know the world in which they live but also love it and all the manifestations of life on it.*

In a matter-of-fact age one hesitates to make statements that seem to border on the sentimental. The danger of such hesitation is that we will omit the large areas of feeling, devotion, idealism and be left with a relatively barren and seriously ineffective system of values. In saying that the good teacher needs to love the world she lives in there is no thought of acceptance of the status quo. Quite the contrary. A genuinely positive attitude toward life almost inevitably carries with it a critical attitude toward the many distorted forms of modern living and a deep protest against the far-reaching injustices and the pitiable depths of human waste which are part of the fabric of society. A genuinely positive attitude, a love of life, holds within itself an abiding though not foolish optimism concerning man’s progress.

Children need teachers who have:

- sensitivity to all the ways in which life experiences can be re-expressed by children
- experience with expression through the arts on their own level
- developed values concerning the life-problems which each growing generation rediscovers and struggles with for itself
- beliefs, ideals, and quality of devotion to a way of life that is transmitted to children in the atmosphere which the teacher creates

The good teacher needs to bring a fine blend of strength and delicacy to her job. She needs to be a person so secure within herself that she can function with principles rather than prescriptions, that she can exert authority without requiring submission, that she can work experimentally but not at random, that she can admit mistakes without feeling humiliated. In her role as a teacher she has to maintain an intricate system of delicate balances between:

- giving support, sympathy, comfort, protection, *and* nurturing reliance, independence, growing up
- clearing away confusion, being the agent of reality *and* remaining sensitive to the importance of phantasy in wholesome growth
- allowing a full measure of freedom from restraint and prohibition *and* establishing clear limits and boundaries of acceptable behavior
- being efficient, orderly, careful and not becoming rigid, exacting and executive
- being soft, understanding, yielding *but* not sentimental or sloppy.

Problems in Evaluating Good Teaching

Even though only suggestive, the characteristics of good teaching as discussed above are never found in completeness in any one good teacher. Only a paragon would embody them all and, fortunately, children thrive very well with something less than paragons for teachers.

The deeper one probes into the problem of evaluation of teachers the more insurmountable the obstacles become. Should emphasis be placed upon the teacher's performance? If so, on what—methods, techniques, attitudes, relations, evidence of scholarship? And how should these be weighted?

Or, should emphasis be placed upon children's performance? Again, if so, on what - knowledge, skills, human relations, attitudes toward self and others? If emphasis is placed on performance, a certain immediacy is assumed: that evaluation can be made on what is happening in the classroom in the present. But, is it the present that matters after all? Isn't it results that count? If so, how long must one wait before being able to appraise the worth of, say, a year's work in the classroom?

Growth is very slow; there are plateau periods in which the growth that is taking place is far from apparent. And yet who knows but that some of the most profound changes may be taking place in these quiescent periods? Again, if judgment is to be postponed as to the value of daily classroom teaching, where is the emphasis to be placed—upon honorable mention in the community, on happy family living, on the success in college and profession?

Of course none of this is an either-or proposition. Combinations of these criteria must be made. But how can they be determined? And by whom? Situations vary so greatly that it would be totally unreasonable to expect on one what might be expected of another. Needs, too, in situations vary, and good teaching that meets the needs of one situation might be totally inadequate in another. These considerations have led to certain conclusions:

First, before any evaluation is attempted, the hypotheses on which the evaluation is being made must be clear or there will inevitably be widely divergent opinions as to the worth of the teach-

ing. That is, there must be consideration of the kind of world that is desirable, of the kind of society that it is assumed will make for the fullest development of the individual, of what constitutes the good life, of whether reliance must be placed primarily upon force or upon the infinite potentialities of human nature.

The second conclusion is a corollary to the first. Since values are not here regarded as absolutes, the values upon which the evaluation is to be made must be agreed upon by those to be evaluated and by those doing the evaluating. These values must be constantly re-articulated because the point of view of even the same group broadens and deepens. Unless this common base is established there can be only divergent opinions as to the worth of teaching and a feeling of frustration in all concerned. Procedure on the opposite base—the base of absolutes in traits of teachers and characteristics of the teaching function—is responsible for much of the failure of past efforts.

Appraisal in terms of all-inclusive standards should seldom be attempted. Instead, it is concluded that appraisal should be made in terms of specifics. Once having established the point of view from which evaluation is to be made, the next step is to determine the specific goals toward which the teaching is to be directed and hence, evaluated. What these goals should be, how simple or elaborate, how few or how many will grow out of the situation and the values of the people in it. The important consideration is that the values be clear and real and that they be accepted as significant by all who must work toward their realization.

Fourth, the setting of goals needs to be followed by decision as to how to determine when the goals are achieved. If, for example, the goal of greater participation in group discussion is set, it would mean that ways of recording the participation should be made. Or, if more freedom of expression in the use of art materials is the goal, dated samples of the children's work would be kept. Or, if speed and accuracy in arithmetic are desired, tests for measuring speed accuracy would be agreed upon. Or, if more cooperative behavior is the goal, the anecdotal behavior record would become the instrument of measure. Or if participation in community activities is aimed at, records of such participation are necessary. Such measures are in terms of child performance and child growth. They all presuppose continuity of evidence in terms of periodic testing, dated samples of work, dated anecdotal records.

But what of the teacher? Is he or she to stand or fall as a teacher solely in terms of child growth and performance? Certainly it is the results in such terms that count the most. But here again we cannot divorce the act from the environment. Hence along with all evaluations there must be consideration of the situation for, without question, some situations are more conducive and some less conducive to child growth.

Again, the measures suggested are more or less immediate. They do not seem to take into consideration what eventually happens to the child when he becomes an adult. Must this future goal be abandoned except in expensive long-term research projects?

Most certainly not. Any school can contribute to long-time evaluation of its efforts if it will merely repeat the process suggested here and keep year after year statements of the point of view from which the evaluation was attempted, of the goals set, of the measures used to accomplish

them, and the records of accomplishment.¹ In fact, it is not until the school assumes such responsibility that it will ever have any valid way of knowing if its accomplishments are consistent with its efforts, financial as well as intellectual and spiritual. Out of the cumulative records of years, too, will come some measure of fair evaluation of the teacher. Similarly will come the possibility of a broad evaluation of the effect of the school upon the community.

Finally, the conclusion is reached that evaluation is just an inseparable part of the total educational process. It cannot stand alone. It cannot be performed apart from the situation. It must follow clarification of point of view and goal setting. It must have regard for the fundamental principles of democracy in that it is participated in by the “governed and the governing.” The process must be regarded as continuous and an essential factor in healthy growth.

There really is no such person as *the* good teacher. Instead, there are many kinds of good teachers and many kinds of good teaching. They are good only in terms of the environment in which they exist.

1. Editor's Note: By way of illustration see “Through a Cooperative In-service Program” by the faculty of the Ohio State University School. *Childhood Education*, October 1947, 24:73-81

Supervising the Beginning Teacher

Claudia Lewis and
Charlotte B. Winsor (1959)

Described here is an attempt to reduce the period of student teaching by a supervised work-study plan.

For 27 years Bank Street College of Education has been preparing liberal arts college graduates for nursery and elementary teaching, in a one-year course of intensive graduate study. The premise has been that personal maturity together with a disciplined educational experience are proper requisites for competent creative teaching. The program has, of course, undergone many changes since its inception in the early '30's, but none of these has been more far-reaching in implications than the recent revisions undertaken as a result of the growing teacher shortage and the "great debate" in education, often most directly related to teacher education.

About five years ago, Bank Street College—along with other teacher training institutions in this area—came face to face with this urgent social-educational problem: Is there a way to put more teachers into elementary classrooms sooner without the loss of effective learning for teachers?

"Is teacher education necessary at all?" is a cry heard all about us. For school people the answer is a resounding "yes" but a soul-searching examination of method may be in order. The outlines of a new training plan began to take shape in our thinking. Could we reduce the period of student teaching and offer qualified candidates the opportunity to teach *under our supervision* in a

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combined work-study plan within the year of training? We knew that supervision on the job is the usual pattern in the allied professions of social work and medicine. There was no doubt in our minds of the often desperate need for support from the training institution, experienced by new young teachers in their first days in the classroom. We had long been convinced, also, that two semesters of student teaching, for some students, represented a questionable postponement of the assumption of teaching responsibility. Our students, it must be remembered, come to us as graduates of liberal arts colleges and are more mature, better educated, and more highly motivated than the usual student entering a four-year teacher training program.

Aims of the Project

In the fall of 1955 we were able to initiate an experimental training program with the support of a grant from the Ford Fund for the Advancement of Education. Our purpose was threefold: (a) to experiment with a plan involving in-service supervision for beginning teachers, with relative reduction of preservice training; (b) to evaluate the results; and (c) to introduce changes gradually into our total program, so that we could eventually be in position to offer a variety of training programs suited to the increasing variety of individual talents, experiences and needs of our students.

Our practical task, as we inducted 12 students into the experimental program in the fall of 1955, was to find a way, in the course of one academic year, to give teachers in training an opportunity to experience the whole range of the process of becoming a teacher.

Entering in the fall as novice students without previous teaching experience, they ended in the spring as teachers carrying full responsibility under our supervision. The question was essentially this: Could we locate the most advantageous cut-off point in training?

The program at the college included a fall semester of intensive course work and student teaching under the supervision of an adviser who worked closely with each student not only in the classroom but in individual guidance conferences. In addition, weekly group conferences were held for the students, for free discussion of problems, feelings, questions, and special interests. In the spring semester, the students were placed in full-time jobs, a majority of them in elementary classrooms in the New York City public schools. The adviser became the classroom supervisor on the job, at the same time continuing her personal guidance and leading the group conferences as during the first semester. Course work was completed during the spring and summer semesters.

There was no expectation that the students should complete their Master's projects during this intensive year. For all students at Bank Street College, a three-year period is permitted for completion of the project.

Role of Adviser

The advantages of the experimental program were obvious from the start. The adviser, visiting and helping in the classroom, was often able to spot at once the sources of those initial difficulties that almost always beset the novice teacher who hesitates to admit need for help to the supervisor for fear that failure is announced thereby. For instance, the supervisor could suggest simple details of

room arrangement and teaching techniques which made for more efficient management and more constructive work. She could help the teacher adjust her curriculum to the age level and the experience and needs of the children there before her in the class - for rarely does a new teacher find herself with a group of children who are comparable in every way to those she has worked with as a student teacher.

Most important, the adviser was in a strategic position to continue her personal guidance, and to help the student master the problems of classroom control stemming from her own uncertainties, her lack of confidence and experience in carrying the adult authority role in relation to young children. Again and again in the course of our work we were impressed by the fact that teaching does indeed demand a great deal of maturity at a stage when young teachers are not yet completely mature adults. Just out of college, just beginning to establish their own independence, these young women are in a transition period in their lives, and their problems as authorities with children can be legion. The adviser, through her personal relationship, could often help the student teacher toward a better grasp and resolution of such problems.

Our basic aim, and that of our students, was to get on as quickly as possible with the real business of teaching, which is curriculum development—a business which can be gravely impeded if a novice teacher has to struggle along alone to learn the ways of classroom management. Our supervision in the classroom by no means worked a magic which made expert teachers of our novices overnight. Indeed, many of our students were struggling with classroom conditions which would have seriously challenged the most seasoned teacher. But in spite of such struggles, and in spite of the inevitable failures and difficulties involved in taking first steps, our students proved able to plunge into *teaching* in ways that impressed their school principals. No one of our experimental group of students was content simply with “good management” as something apart from curriculum and meaningful relationships with the children. All made efforts to bring really rich programs into their classrooms and to stimulate learning through appropriate materials. Even the two students who had the least degree of success with their classroom controls attempted trips and projects of which more skillful teachers might have been proud.

Evaluation

The self-evaluative statement made by one of our students at the end of her semester of supervision on the job reveals how well she had in this short time come to see what teaching is all about, and how well she had worked with her adviser toward improving her skills and broadening her goals. Actually, at the time of writing, she was already a competent teacher. It was heartening to us to see with what courage and zest she was envisioning her further development:

When I began teaching, my curriculum wasn't always suited to the children and was much too rigid and teacher-imposed. I think I need to work very hard on ways of meeting individual needs through curriculum as well as personal relationships with group and individual. I need to know a great deal more about the inner workings peculiar to

the different age levels and how to meet interests of a given group in terms of curriculum that will teach them not because they *have* to learn, but because they *want* to learn... I need to relax and treat children the way I really think about them—as people, and never as threats... Basically, I need what most of us beginning teachers need—the confidence that is required to give more, try more, and be more effective.

We are convinced that our students were able to develop in this way, holding onto their ideals and deepening their goals, partially because of the support we were able to give them in those first critical months when a beginning teacher hits the hard realities of the classroom. Often she finds that the ideals she carries with her from her training institution simply cannot be put into practice in her particular school. With understanding supervision, she can be helped to reorganize her values, rather than discard them. Also helpful to our students at this crucial time were the weekly group conferences at the college, where there could be free sharing of feelings and dilemmas with peers. These sessions needed skillful guidance to keep students from group intoxication with difficulties. Constantly the question to return to was: What can you do about this in *your* classroom? How can you make the program (curriculum content) work for you as an organizing element in the classroom climate?

How did our supervision differ from that of the principal or Board of Education supervisor in the school system itself? It supplemented without supplanting; it offered what the best-intentioned principal could not offer, because its dynamic was of another order. A principal must be on the side of his school and the school system; his relation to his teachers inevitably includes evaluative, ranking components. The advisers from the training institution, on the other hand, develop from the very beginning a relation with the students which is supportive, nonjudgmental, and evaluative only in the sense that evaluations of performance are arrived at through a joint process of work on problems. The recent introduction in some of the New York City schools of the “helping teacher” to work both with students and beginning teachers may represent a recognition of the productiveness of the nonjudgmental type of supervision.

Influence of the Program

Thus far we have emphasized the advantages of our supervision-on-the-job program to the novice teacher herself. The advantages to the training institution are similarly tremendous. Advisers who go to the grass roots of classroom situations are in a position to see the needs of the students at firsthand, and can avoid the pitfalls of theoretical formulations that lack a realistic basis. As a matter of fact, as a result of this experiment in training, our program at the college has been greatly revised. We have introduced new courses, new emphases in the basic child development and curriculum courses, new experiences in student teaching placements.

It would be a mistake, however, to imply that we did not face many dilemmas in connection with the experimental program, and are not still facing them in the program of supervision on the job which has now become one of our regular offerings. In the first place, there is the dilemma of se-

lection, early in the training program, of those students most likely to succeed in the role of teachers by mid-year, at the same time not to invest such a selection with the aura of honors. The faculty advisers feel strongly that for some students of outstanding ability the longer, slower process of preparation is nevertheless indicated. Sensitive communication is called for and not easily accomplished. Then there is the dilemma of job placement, especially for those students who enter in September and are ready to teach in February. The positions open in February are often the least desirable, and it has become only too clear to us that placement in a difficult classroom gives the novice teacher only half a chance to master her skills and put her ideas into practice.

Confronted with the needs of the novice teacher to “get through the day,” to be momentarily competent, the training institution can easily err on the side of equipping the teacher with methods and skills - since she is going to need them so soon—at the expense of educating her toward an understanding of the teaching-learning process in depth. We are convinced that the student profits in both the short and the long run if she is not short-changed in those aspects of the college program which give her a fundamental point of view about children and their needs. The comments of students themselves—some of them young women whose early days of teaching under our supervision were full of stress—bear testimony to this: “The Bank Street program gave me an attitude towards children and their development which is basic; gave me a more knowing approach into the meaning of behavior than I see in my colleagues.” “...Bank Street gave me a good over-all view; I know what I am doing and why.”

But how does one strike such a balance? The problem of finding the most effective material experiences and relationships to offer students in this program remains our challenge. Indeed the questions which have been raised by this program are no doubt significant to the whole field of supervision and curriculum development. Childhood and teacher education will benefit from further study of such basic problems.

Social Studies and Geography

Lucy Sprague Mitchell
(1934)

As I look at the above title suggested as a subject for an article, it starts at least four elaborate thinking mechanisms whirling inside me. The word “social” starts one set of wheels; the word “study” another; “geography” starts a third, and the whirr is particularly loud and insistent because it runs into my teaching job. The fourth set is started by the implicit assumption that the thinking is to be applied to children and schools. I have no serene confidence that these four sets of thinking within me have made the subtle adjustments to one another which will insure the integrated total approach necessary for curriculum planning. I am convinced, however, that these four kinds of thinking must stop careering around the world or my head in the separated fashion of the four rings in a Barnum circus and must assume organic relations to one another for the good of all four. To make them do this will be my bold attempt in the few following pages. May I be forgiven, in view of the complexity and hugeness of the task, for beginning with a brief separate look at each of these four sets of thinking, though my main purpose is to consider their interrelations and to present them as an organic unit rather than as a circus? And may I be further forgiven for short-cutting to conclusions which I think most teachers in progressive schools have reached through their own experiences and which for them, can be assumed without presenting much evidence?

II. First, take, “studies.” What do we in progressive schools mean by a study? We mean, of course, getting into contact with factual data. But we mean, do we not, something considerably

69 Bank Street Publications, Reprinted from *Progressive Education*, v.11, Jan. 1934, pp. 97-105

more than this acquisition of informational content? The word trails a method of work—a first-hand laboratory approach, an experimental attitude, a handling of sources, a discovery of significant relations within the data, a situation that permits genuine thinking on the part of the children of the type which characterizes investigators—not the type which characterizes antiquarians. Our studies are not always carried on by this method, because compromises are distressingly well known inside progressive schools, just as they are outside. But the laboratory approach is our aim. We carry it out where we are smart enough to lay hands on first-hand data and tools for studying them. And we fret over our compromises, our inadequacies, in our classroom techniques.

If the word “studies” were changed to “sciences,” as it often is, still another of our work attitudes would respond. Science deals with generalizations which are based upon many concrete observations. “Water seeks its own level.” “Living things need food.” “Congested cities depend upon outside workers for their food.” If every known, concrete instance behaves in a certain way, we call the behavior (animate or inanimate) a law. A law—whether natural, social, economic or what not—is a generalization based upon experiential evidence. To jump ahead to children for a moment, we shall not expect generalizations from them until they have accumulated enough experiential evidence to recognize the common element in the spread of data. Or, to say the same thing with an inverted emphasis, we shall try to supply them with experiences before we talk to them in generalizations. Thus the idea that scientific generalizations have a basis in experiential data affects our methods of study.

Our method—or rather the method we believe in—goes back to a conception of the learning process as an active, aggressive performance rather than a merely receptive one, based upon experience rather than upon report-about. The slogan “learning by doing” can be interpreted in very fine intellectual doing as well as in leg and finger doing. Discovering that lack of refrigeration in the Middle Ages led to spiced foods, and that to a search for trade routes to the spice countries, and that to an age of exploration and discoveries, may be “learning by doing” as genuinely as making a boat. Both situations involve a first-hand active attack.

Now if we naively apply our thinking about studies and the learning process to social studies, we are confronted with two questions. First, what first-hand social data are available? Second, what tools have we for their study?

This plunges us directly into the confusing second set of wheels started by the word “social.” The word connotes many conflicting things, often within the same individuals. Always however, there is a sense of group relations. We attach the word social to a wide variety of situations, and each one brings its special flavor, according to the thinking in terms of group relations with which it is tied up. Social adjustment, social worker, social institutions, social good, social studies. Sometimes it means the adjustment of the individual to other members within his group—the child to other members of the family, to other members of his school group, and so on. This personal adjustment within the group is never satisfactorily made by some individuals who remain what we call “self-centered.” Every child begins with himself, and others assume importance in relation to him. To think as a member of any group instead of as an individual indicates a tremendous social growth.

The boundary of loyalty is thus moved outward from the individual to “our set”—the group whose taboos and approvals we accept as ours. It may be that social growth means the extension of these boundaries of loyalties. Thus it comes about that the word social sometimes connotes relations of the individual to others within his set, sometimes connotes just the opposite—relations with “the other half,” “the other fellow,” the group that is unlike us. The connotation depends upon the relative emphasis we are placing upon individual or group thinking.

To regard the “unlike us” as inferior is following historical precedent. Barbarian meant outsider. The inferiority may not be the other fellow’s fault; nevertheless, he tends to be considered a damaged article and is often characterized as “poor.” I have known people and schools to whom “social thinking” or “social responsibility” seemed to mean giving financial support to the “poor Armenian” or some other damaged group remote enough not to impinge upon their personal lives. This is really only a variation of the “our set” psychology, with the smug addition that the superior being must be helpful to the inferior. The inferior is then expected to be grateful or humble, and if he is, is further stigmatized as “servile.” Witness the Negro and southern gentlefolk. If both groups identify themselves with the superior, we have the stage set for conflict with a sense of abuse and indignation on both sides. Witness so-called labor and capital.

What are the relations which bind human beings into groups which we wish the word social to connote in our social studies? What relations do we wish to dignify through studying them? Concerning what relations do we wish social source materials? For the moment let’s try to face this frankly, as adults, without a consideration of suitability for children’s study. And let us make our answers ideal and accept the necessary compromises afterwards. Let’s steer our Fords at a star—to put Emerson’s grand simile into modern terms.

Ideally (and modestly!) we should like to understand the groups of which we are members and all the groups of other fellows and all the interrelations between the groups! Understanding involves, does it not, an ability to project ourselves into the place of the other fellow and view the situation through his eyes? If this ideal is abhorrent to any of my readers, if they think of their group whether it be family, nation, race or what not, as the only group worthy of study, we might as well part company here. For any attempt to find a method by which we may experience the other fellow vicariously will not interest them. If we think over a few of the groups to which most of us belong, which recently have come in for special attention, we shall surely hit upon the family. Is there a mother in a progressive school who has not worried over her relations to her children? If there is, she had better keep it dark or the “helpful” school will seek her out, not to mention the psychoanalyst. Who understands the place of the family in the American culture of 1933? We turn eager eyes to history, for we have been told that we can learn from the experiences of the past. There, quite recently, we see the family—the husband the wage earner, the wife the home-maker—functioning in response to innumerable cultural needs, attending to the care and nurture of children, their education, preparation of their food and clothes—a cooperative unit sharing work and income with all the emotional loyalties which usually accompany interdependence. And now the outward shell is the same, but most of these functions have passed from the home and the family to outside in-

stitutions. But children are still born young and dependent even in the most modern of families. A situation queer enough to delight the most demanding psychoanalyst!

Another group to which all of us belong, somewhere along the scale from super-wealth to poverty is gathered together on the basis of income. Does the size of your income tax return also condition another loyalty? Are the other fellows above and below us in the economic scale slightly inferior—barbarians? Then there is the occupational group into which each is born; that is different from the mere family institution and different too from the income group. Was your father in the professional group, an artist, a farmer, in trade, and if so, was it wholesale or retail? Did the family fortunes go up and down with the stock market, with the weather which controlled the crop you were raising, with technological improvements? And were your sympathies with any change conditioned by the advantages or disadvantages to the occupational group to which you belonged? Is it still, though you may be out of that group now and in a job group of your own, bringing its own allegiances? School and college groups, local community groups, church and club groups—most of us have belonged to some or all of these close-corporation circles at some time, if not now. Still wider groups—nation, race, mankind—we belong to each. Which is most precious, commands most loyalty, most conditions your feeling of “our set” and the “poor” outsider, who is either to be pushed out as an unworthy companion, or to be helped as an unfortunate inferior, or envied as a lucky dog? How many of us are there who are not stuck in the clan thinking and clan interest of some group whose mores have become to us “the right way?”

Cutting across or including all these social groups which we are born into or take on in the course of our careers is one universal group. We all belong to the same biological species. Like it or not, we are all in the same boat when it comes to basic needs. We are all human beings, which economically puts us all into the class of consumers. The variations in specimens within the biological group (size, good bodies, beauty) may bring a sense of being different and superior. But our sympathies usually transcend these smaller group barriers, unless they are terrifically strong and identify us with the larger group. Few people fail to respond to the other fellow if he is in need of food or air or some other necessity. Think of the public emotion over three miners caught underground! We understand another’s basic needs, for they are the same as ours, but his racial group or his occupational or family group may be alien and “queer.”

What I glean from this complex of ideas concerning the problems of social studies is, first, that nobody can see the group he belongs to, with even approximate disinterestedness, while his experience is still bounded by that group, and before he has had sufficient experience with other and differing groups to see his own affiliations as a group phenomenon and the loyalties which come with the group as a part of the phenomenon. Recognition of an environmental pressure does not necessarily mean breaking the tie that has bound. But if the allegiance continues, it is on a voluntary, conscious basis rather than of the unconscious puppet type. Loyalties, the bases of which are understood and accepted, are far more precious than blind loyalties. And their emotional quality may even be enhanced if they are accepted with open eyes. Second, it seems that since our basic needs are shared, each can respond as a member of the group of consumers (of essentials), and the

relation of consumer to producer (of essentials) may become a common concern. Of course, in practical life, any individual may be, and usually is, more dominated by his membership in the family or income group than by his membership in the biological-consumer group. Nevertheless he retains the avenue to understanding the other fellow as regards the satisfaction of basic needs.

The geographic wheels are now beginning to whirr within me, particularly those associated with the word “human” geography. For human geography deals with the interrelations between the needs of human beings and the outside environment in which they must satisfy those needs. One half of human geography is what people do to modify the earth’s surface; the other half is what the phenomena of the earth’s surface do to condition men’s activities, most of which are concerned with their work. I like to use the expression human geography because it has not yet been spoiled by misuse or overuse as so many educational slogans have. Indeed, it is a comparatively new word. The thinking behind it is a part of a larger environmental approach which has recently affected history, economics, sociology, and even literature. The environmental approach appeared in biology (evolution) before it played a large part in the social studies or geography. It seems now to be increasingly important in the so-called social sciences.

III. At this point for myself at least, the four rings of the circus—social, studies, geography, children—begin to fade, and an organically related unit begins to take shape. It is not quite a curriculum yet - but it has many curriculum implications. With some experimentation I think it might be made the foundation of a curriculum in the social studies. Where there has been experimentation—in the younger years—it has proved a valid attack, though much still needs to be done to turn “an environmental approach” into concrete classroom techniques. But with the beginnings of adolescence the experimentation has grown faint-hearted and the thinking less organized.

Perhaps the fact that human beings are biologically one big group explains, in part, why work habits, by which basic and therefore shared needs are met, make such a universal appeal. The appeal seems to persist through the gamut of maturity levels and to transcend time and space. The first “not-me interests” that children manifest are in how somebody or something else gets fed, where he sleeps, and so on. A child’s slender experience with the other fellow’s habits makes him attach the work habits of his narrow personal environment indiscriminately to whatever he encounters. A city five-year-old, unused to horses, puts a toy horse to bed under blankets and feeds him steak and milk from a bottle. When a country ten-year-old who had never been in a real train tried to dramatize himself in a Pullman, he told the engineer to stop the train as it was “bed time for the passengers.” Early study of work habits are primarily an exploration of one’s personal environment as it is literally extended to a distance. There are very few self-contained units left in this world. Few children are brought up in families which depend only upon their own activities to supply their food, clothing, and shelter. The family work pattern has changed from self-contained to tied-in-ness with other workers. The same is true of community work patterns. Even rural communities are not self-contained in the old sense except in the few remaining pioneer fringes. And suburban and city communities are obviously dependent on distant workers for meeting their basic needs. With the new speed in transportation and communication, with the enormous development of roads of every

sort—highways, railways, waterways, and airways—the world has taken on a complicated interdependence of work patterns which is not usually realized even by adults whose own basic needs are being thus met. Consequently any genuine exploration by any children of how they get their food, how their houses function—which means water, light, heat, as well as food and beds—leads directly to other parts of the world and to other workers. And the way they are connected with the other parts and with other workers is literally through roads of some sort or through communication. Consequently if we begin with exploration of the way their own basic needs are met, for instance in their own kitchens, and follow backwards step by step, we have the foundation for a curriculum leading from the here to the distant, inherent in the present-day interdependence of work patterns. The other fellows - the long procession of workers from farm to kitchen (and this includes hundreds of specialized groups) - become an extension of themselves, and as such are interesting, particularly to young children who need the personal tie. Here, as always, exposure is not enough. The children need tools to help them organize their experiences. Though so vital part of curriculum planning, this tool aspect must be hurdled here. This is one of the necessary short cuts I referred to.

In the same way fairly young children (from seven on, I should think was the usual age) can best extend themselves to long-ago situations when those situations deal with the same basic needs that they themselves experience. The simplest excursion into the past is through the former work habits of the very environment which the children have explored around them. The English, the Dutch, the Indians of Manhattan, for instance, met their basic needs according to the work habits of their particular cultures, but utilizing or overcoming the same geographic forces at work in New York's metropolitan area in 1934. This is history; but again it is the environmental approach of human geography. Primitive man must be presented through human geography, and I believe that fact is largely responsible for his popularity in schools. The way he got his food and shelter, the way he protected himself, the way he developed one tool, one art after another, to help his native endowment in conquering his environment is all close to basic needs. The laboratory approach can be approximated in dealing with distant and past work habits if the conditioning geographic factors are given to the children, who then, for themselves, discover the relationships between the environment and men's use of it. I do not mean to suggest that no secondary sources can be used—that is no interpretation of the facts. But I do mean that factual evidence for the interpretation is necessary. All this ties up with methods, tools, images, and much which is vital to curriculum building but omitted here for lack of space.

Children get the work pattern aspects of primitive man long before they do the elaborate institutions of taboos, of marriage, of property, the myths, the attitudes towards the deity—in short the mores of primitive peoples. For here they have nothing with which to make comparisons. They are not yet outside of their family group; they are still bounded by the attitudes around them and consequently still take them unthinkingly as “right.” They are interested in the social mores (other than work habits) of alien peoples, but with the secure feeling that the contrast is as between barbarian and themselves. They like adventure—contact with the unknown. They can take the most extravagant flights—project themselves into every conceivable or inconceivable position

and fight their way through. But in their personal lives they still like the security of belonging to the familiar. At adolescence there comes an enlargement of interests. I do not think they outgrow the interest in work habits, any more than they outgrow their basic needs. But the emphasis shifts from *what* work habits to *what price* work habits? That is, the other fellow gets more significantly into the picture. When they begin to scrutinize their childhood group, when they begin emotionally to climb out of the family group and emotionally to ally themselves with other or larger environmental groups which have found more or less for themselves instead of accepting them as part of the protecting family or school circle, when the other fellow becomes terribly important and the long to see behind his eyes—then new environmental forces are at work and the curriculum must do something about it.

IV. But what? It is here that our curriculum experimentation has practically stopped. But need it? If we try to answer this question naively, continuing to draw upon what our experience has made us believe concerning “social” and “studies” and the learning process and applying these benefits to the maturity level which is characterized by an urge towards new groups, new loyalties, we may develop a method of studying our own and the other fellow’s mores. In the first place, we shall say that the curriculum should continue the laboratory method, which means it should furnish the children with as many first-hand experiences with the mores of other groups as possible; that it should supplement with vicarious experiences gained through source materials; that it should supply source materials relating to their own mores from the point of view of historic origin, present functioning, and comparative method; that the children should have more than a passive, absorbent role; that they should do something to their data.

Naive thinking with a vengeance! And yet has the naive joining together of these several kinds of thinking made only a disjunctive patch work? Is there not a genuine educational approach indicated? No curriculum could be launched until the following points had been considered: What first-hand experiences with other groups is possible in adolescence—possible from the point of view of maturity level rather than of practicality within our present educational systems—and how thoroughgoing can the experiences be?

A few stray experiments come to mind. I give them for what they may be worth. An increasing number of schools base their curriculum for younger children on trips in the environment, usually stressing work habits. I know of trips with older children which have included such environmental groups as churches of various religions—Protestant, Roman and Greek Catholic, Jewish, and so on—or sections of a city occupied by different nationalities. Many colleges are now planning environmental trips for their students. I have known city schools which took their children into the country for part of the school year, not for health but for educational purposes, and I have heard country schools discuss the desirability of reversing this process, even of swapping children and school plants. With young children this gives a contact with differing work habits. With older children it holds the possibility of joining—not merely of watching—other groups at work. Traveling school groups are not unknown. The ordinary tourist, of course, sees largely the “recreational industry” of each country. The experiments in International Living have joined American young people with

young people of similar age in the country visited and made a united traveling group who live part of the time with families. Some high schools, particularly abroad, have their children work in neighborhood factories or farms part of the time, not for vocational training but for enlargement of social experience. This combining of work and study has, of course, been tried in this country by Cincinnati University and Antioch College. On a less thoroughgoing experiential scale, there has been considerable experimentation in making contacts with other living groups through correspondence, exchange of local products, pictures, and the like.

And for vicarious experiences, what social source material have we, either genuine sources or secondary sources? Museums and exhibits and pictures—each brings us a type of source material that is pretty generally used by progressive schools. The much-condemned movie makes a real contribution through its films of other lands and other peoples. But these, valuable as they are, are very small entering wedges into the understanding of current mores, either our own or the other fellow's. Of written sources, what is there? Very little that is not wrapped up in technical language or buried deep under interpretations. But there is enough to suggest possible lines. There are historic sources like Scribner's *Original Narratives*. There are original studies made by the city planning groups, or like *Middletown* by the Lynds, *The Arctic Village* by Robert Marshall, or the case studies by Brunhes in his *Human Geography*. The recent large crop of regional novels indicates the increasing interest in the environmental approach but can hardly be classed as source material. There are ethnological studies like *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead and race conflicts studies like Mrs. Millin's *South Africans*. There are budget studies of expenditures for different-sized incomes and social statistics such as the census report. There are general studies of mores like Sumner's *Folkways* and Frazer's *Golden Bough*, which give historic source material. But these are not brought down to date. Could they be? President Hoover's Research Committee on *Recent Social Trends* took current history into account. Could the institutions under which our present-day culture functions—family, marriage, divorce, property, race discrimination, church, school, art, law, the state, to mention a few of the most important—could these institutions be better understood if we knew their historic origins? Veblen gave most of us a jolt in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Perhaps we, too, might discover some historic lags in our institutions! And if to the historic, we added the comparative method—these same institutions as they function in differing groups—we might discover some clan-thinking in ourselves or our set!

The situation is not easy for the adult nowadays and worse still for children. There seems to be little that one could put into the hands of high school children tomorrow. But much might be dug out, assembled, selected, organized, even written, if there were a demand. Such a demand would have to come from the schools.

What tools have we for studying relationship if we could command sufficient sources? This important curriculum question cannot be touched here. Suffice it to say that the raw data are not enough in social studies, any more than they are elsewhere. They must be organized—and that is something else again.

Though the pioneer fringes on the globe are shrinking, the pioneer fringes within the curricu-

lum are expanding. Pioneers, if they are to survive, need more than an empty country to move into. They need to explore the new territory for strategic situations, for natural resources; they need tools for overcoming obstacles. They need to take the old and adapt it to the new. Educational pioneers need the same. Good luck to those who are fortunate enough to have the time and opportunity and courage to explore the uncharted country of social education and show us the way from the slavery of clan-thinking to the promised land where we shall understand the other fellow!

The Bank Street Program Child Growth and Learning in Social Studies Experiences

Charlotte B. Winsor (1952)

Changing concepts in social studies curriculum

“Today curriculum breathes in a wider and more friendly atmosphere. Our very vocabulary in curriculum discussions has changed. We speak of ‘flexibility,’ of ‘building,’ of ‘children’... we talk about ‘environment,’ ‘experiences,’ ‘activities’... ‘research’... ‘social thinking,’ ‘social studies.’... These words mean that today schools are thinking in terms of curriculum that contains much more than subject matter and training in adult ways.”²

Experimental private schools have worked and played with these ideas for some time now. They have gone further and put into practice educational programs implementing these newer concepts and carrying them to the classroom. Although approaches have been wholesomely different from school to school, philosophy and purpose are essentially in agreement.

In New York City, several private school groups, representing many years of experimental education experience, have collaborated with the Board of Education on its vast program of curriculum improvement. The Bank Street College of Education has worked in one school district bringing to teachers and children ways of implementing newer concepts in classroom practice.³

In describing this program of in-service training, William H. Bristow of the New York City Board of Education says, “The Bank Street group has applied group processes to the training of teachers... they have developed... practical techniques which helped teachers to carry forward instructional

69 Bank Street Publications, no. 79. Reprinted with permission from *Social Studies for Older Children: Programs for Grade Four, Five, and Six*. Loretta E. Klee ed. Washington, National Council for the Social Studies, 1952.

programs... Building on the premise that a program of improvement begins where teachers now are, their method of work has progressed to the point where it has significance for all schools concerned with the democratic process and with better ways of working with teachers and with children.”⁴

This paper deals first with the formulation of principles of the Bank Street group, particularly as they relate to the social studies, and then develops in some detail the program of one experimental school, which is basically in agreement with the Bank Street group.⁵

While it is patently impossible to present an educational philosophy in a paragraph, it is important to establish principles upon which a program develops. Fundamental to the curriculum thinking of the Bank Street group are (a) understanding of the new and growing field of child development which includes a knowledge of maturity levels and needs, and (b) a belief that the environment (physical, social, cultural) offers the material of curriculum making. This group believes that the middle years of childhood (roughly the years of elementary school) are a crucial time in personality development and perhaps most important of all, that the curriculum or school life plays a major role in clarifying for the individual his role in society. It is not surprising, therefore, to find here a conceptualization of a school program built on social experiences available to the school in its community and appropriate to the understanding of the child.

Viewed in these terms social studies have indeed an encompassing scope. They become a study of man in a given time and place; his land and technology determining his goods; his past laying the pattern for his language, art, and music; and the ways in which his social forms develop out of his past and within his environmental needs.

How much of this seemingly abstract material is appropriate to the needs and interests of the child in the upper elementary grades? We must turn to the child for our answer. In the middle years there is not a complete putting aside of the interests of the younger child. Instead the child builds upon his earlier experience in terms of his newfound maturity, his recently acquired symbolic skills (reading, writing, using numbers) and his broadening social base. He is seeking knowledge, the answers to how things work, how they came to be, and wonders perhaps if everything is all for the best in the best of all possible worlds. As he turns his eyes towards the adult that he is to become, he begins to participate in the standards and ideals of the world around him.

Too often school programs lose sight of the values of teaching children in these years through *new* kinds of experience. They fail to give the child opportunities for dramatic interpretation of the world as he is coming to know it. They deprive the child of emotional affirmation of his intellectual adventures as his world becomes filled with the wonders of the long ago and faraway.

This need not be. In method as well as in philosophy we need to seek sounder and more appropriate ways of meeting child needs. The teachers and psychologists who are the Bank Street group lay no claim to the discovery of any new axioms in educational practice. They have invented no method, no device, no gadget that opens magic doors to learning. What they have done is to establish principles based upon the needs and purposes of children, related to the world in which they live, and reaching for the social ideas which are inherent in the educational objectives of this group of educational workers.

The development of good social attitudes and appreciative understanding of the world in which we live may be considered the purposes of the social studies. Attitudes are not taught by a verbalization of a social, moral, or ethical code. But children can be given within their own experience numerous opportunities to practice good social techniques and to have such practice pay immediate dividends in the smoother functioning of their own group. Situations can be developed in which children find it necessary to assume roles of leadership, responsibility, and contribution. Teaching can be such that the excitement of learning is real and the technique for seeking knowledge is constantly being developed.

In the elementary schools it is not possible to “cover” all the facts of the geography of the world or the history of man. We must, therefore, make selection and inevitably we do this in terms of our values. In the very choice of content in social studies, and in teaching methods we have available the materials with which children can build sound social attitudes.

The geographic concept of man and his world, how he adapts to his world, and how he adapts it to his use can be taught in a variety of ways. Our textbooks are filled with the story of the Eskimo as a blubber-chewing creature sewed into his furry garments—queer and inferior. But Eskimo life also can be taught as a fine demonstration of the cleverness of man in using what he finds in his world to meet basic needs for food and clothing. The Eskimo is still different from us to be sure, but he becomes a person of astuteness and ingenuity.

The story of mankind may be taught with the present a perfect culmination, hardly to be improved upon by the future. Children’s history books state facts but often neglect the underlying reasons and relationships. Democracy springs full-bloom from the wigged heads of the founding fathers, and one closes the book on the president who happened to be in office at the time of its publication and that is that. It is conceivable that a social studies program even for young children can teach our culture as an on-going process, its roots deep in the ways of people who lived in earlier times and distant places. The elementary school child needs to be encouraged to conjecture about the future since we know with certainty that it will be vastly different from our present.

Government organization can be taught as the cooperative answer to needs which man cannot meet individually. Fairly young children discover that in a large city it is not expeditious for each family to dig its own well and so citizens turn to our government for water supply and pay taxes accordingly. Children begin to understand that man needs to relate to man very early in his social functioning; survival itself calls for group effort.

The most difficult concept of all, a sense of being rooted in the community, can and should be taught without chauvinism. The pattern and plan, even the dream of our way of life is appropriate material for children in the middle years of childhood. But the essentially experimental quality of a democratic philosophy need not be missed. Perhaps a final goal of the social experiences and learning should be that children are so taught that they come through the elementary years with group values that are positive but not absolute.

Granted agreement on goals, purposes, and even on methods for achieving optimal social growth in children of the upper elementary grades, schools have nevertheless developed widely dif-

ferent approaches to their social studies programs. The City and Country School in New York City, where curriculum is so thoroughly an outgrowth of experience that social studies are rarely if ever referred to as a subject matter area, has worked for many years on programs based on experiences provided for children through school services.⁶

In this school, children may enter at an age as early as three years and participate in a program carefully planned toward social maturing of the individual. They come to the middle years with a long experience in group life, and orientation in the work-life patterns of their community, a background—even a developed skill and technique—in dramatic play. Throughout their school life rich opportunities for expression in the arts are basically integrated into the total program. Where subject matter begins or experience leaves off is hard to determine in such a program.

This school believes that (a) children in the upper elementary grades need firsthand experiences in order to learn; (b) living and playing out community patterns have validity if the situation is one which provides for the genuine needs of the school world of the child; (c) seeing similar needs in the small school community and in the larger world is not only possible but sound learning; (d) identification with the people who make and do relates children emotionally as well as intellectually to our culture and its roots. The school believes that vitality of learning through the recreation of experience need not be ended with block play nor even with the doll house or play stores of the first and second grades. Finally the child is ready and eager to learn ways of life remote from his own through the written word.

Group play-work life is built into the school program. Class jobs, which the children assume as their responsibility according to their age group and within the school tradition, form the base for social studies experiences. For many years now the third graders have run a school post office, the fourth graders a school supplies store, the fifth and sixth graders the school print shop.⁷ The fifth graders are responsible for the hand printing of posters, signs, lunch menus and even the reading charts for the beginning readers. The sixth graders operate a press printing shop which turns out all the business forms for the school, some special jobs and, at least once a year, a magazine of the children's writings.

These class jobs are important in the total curriculum of this school. The possibilities for integrated teaching of skill subjects are practically unlimited and the teachers do not waste their opportunities. For purposes of this discussion, however, consideration will be given to the job program as it relates to the social studies—a part of school curriculum that must build into the child's life and personality more than a residue of facts and skills or it has failed dismally in its purposes. Children appreciate the values of truly meaningful learning experiences.

The third grader who returned to the classroom flushed with excitement after delivering an unusually heavy batch of mail stated the case when she said, "Gosh, I love to be eight.⁸ We're so important, you know. I don't know how this school would ever get along without the post office." Here is a child achieving responsibility on her own level, zestfully in a play-like situation but with real school life obligations fulfilled. The ten-year-old who offers to make a special price on a print job when ink smudges appear "because our prices are really for perfect work. They charge less for

damaged things in the stores, don't they?" is developing an attitude of social responsibility as well as good standards of work. The sixth graders who beg permission to come to school on Saturday in order to get out the rush orders on Christmas cards recognize their obligation and revel in their contribution too. "This is more fun than soccer," they tell themselves after a morning of determined work.

But how does all this become social studies? What about content? Does the school set up a curriculum? How closely are teachers guided by it? How is the children's learning evaluated? These are some of the questions which the teachers, who, with the children, are the curriculum builders, constantly ask themselves.

Some answers can be given—directly. It is in the philosophy and purpose of this school to provide social studies content in each year's program. The adult goal is laid down in broad outline to be filled in by the needs and interests of the children in a particular group. There is a sequential pattern, recognized as a basic outline but not rigidly adhered to. Learning is evaluated in terms of social attitudes, relationship thinking, study skills, creative expression, and group living. It is hoped that the class job will provide the shared group experience which makes exploration of the social studies content valid, even necessary, from the child's point of view.

The American story, as it grows out of our land, our Western European heritage, our technology and social philosophy, can be made available to the understanding of the young child. If we strive for understandings rather than for the accumulation of facts, if we give action to ideas, if we underpin intellectual concepts with emotional reaction, we can so live with children in a social studies experience that an ambitious dream becomes a reality. And this in essence is the curriculum outline for the school.

Content areas as set up for each year are:

Eight-year-old children who know their "here and now" world through firsthand experience, dramatic play, construction materials, and creative opportunities, use their post-office experience as a springboard into the study of the far away and long ago. They may discover how mail is carried in other parts of our country nowadays and why, or they may find out that messages were carried quite differently long ago. The children arrive at the major understanding of inter-relatedness of peoples, their common needs, and even an appreciation of differing ways of satisfying needs in terms of the time and place where people live.

The nine-year-olds find in their store any number of possible lines of social studies investigation. The focus may be trading and trade routes leading to an elementary study of world geography. The goods sold in the store may be traced back to their source so that the children study paper making and lumbering, or the hot jungle lands where rubber for erasers grows. Again emphasis is on relationships—man and his environment, physical and social, scientific and artistic. The frame of reference remains our own community. The likenesses and the differences among peoples are constantly examined against the pattern of our culture. A way of life as an adaptation to man's environment is the major concept stressed and developed.

The roots of our culture pattern—language, law, art, music, religion—become appropriate

material or study as these ten- and eleven-year-old children work at their printing jobs. With teacher guidance and stimulation, children ask, “Why do we make an ‘A’ like this? What is an alphabet? What good is it? Who invented it anyway? What kind of people were these and how did they live?” Perhaps they even dare to ask, “Did people always have our kinds of religions? And who made our religions and why?”

They learn to wonder at the artifacts and the arts of people who lived so long ago. They begin to understand steam, electric, and atomic power as the cornerstone of our era. One group of ten-year-old children related the facts of a slave culture—the many toiling to produce for the few—as basic to a man and muscle power age.⁹ They could see our democracy as related to the technological revolutions of past centuries. And being young they could even project the scientific upheavals of our times toward a future which uses knowledge with wisdom and love for mankind.

One needs to emphasize and underscore the child-like quality of the experiences in which such learnings take place. A discussion of method, however brief, may serve to do this. The first weeks of school for any class carrying on a job program are largely devoted to setting up the job, practicing the new skills called for, getting the group organized as special individual abilities manifest themselves, and carrying the responsibilities of the job as the school community swings into action and materials and services are needed.

All this happens so naturally and is so germane to the purposes of the group that teacher and children could hardly articulate the experiences as a unit study in social living, but it is easily recognizable as such.

Role of the Teacher. The teacher plays an extremely active role at this time, though often not overtly so. She watches her group closely, spotting those children who can carry responsibility easily, those who need help, staving off a too-rapid crystallization of roles within the group, enjoying and appreciating with the children the grown-up quality of the new program. Having planned for the general area of social studies content beforehand with the whole staff, she is now trying to find in the children’s interests leads into her program. A ten-year-old’s question about why the difference between capital and small letters as he prints a sign may be her cue. The hieroglyphics on the obelisk in Central Park observed on a fall picnic may serve. And sometimes the children present interests far from the teacher’s plan, and she needs to relate and use their material for setting the program in motion.

Resources. The teacher, working closely with a well-stocked and expertly staffed library, makes available to the children a variety of readings, mainly stories—what one might call the historical novel on the child level—set in the time and place of the program that is getting underway. She will sometimes read aloud to the whole group a particularly fine story or original material like the *Odyssey*, stories from the Bible, or even excerpts from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. She encourages interruptions for questioning and discussion. She is also searching the community for resources that provide concrete experience. This particular program depends on museums, films, pictures, and most important, the evidences in our lives of the contributions of older cultures.

Utilization of Individual Differences. Sooner than one would expect, questions that need special

research arise and children, individually or in groups, begin to read, take notes, make crude maps, and sometimes make reproductions of tools, buildings, clothes, weapons. The child working on a model of an Egyptian tomb in the carpentry shop or the child reproducing a costume in the classroom is as truly engaged in research for a ten-year-old as the more verbally oriented child who is searching the library for factual answers to his questions. And such a program has a place, even a need, for all kinds of research. When a group is really soaking up the climate (not only temperature and rainfall) of people's lives there is validity to encompassing the *things* of its culture, as well as its manners and modes.

The time soon comes when the children are ready for creative experiences. They want to use their art media—music and language as well as paints and clay—to help them in recreating the ways of life of these strange faraway people. Sometimes there is a synthesizing of all these aspects of the study into an original play, which calls for everyone to contribute facts for a plot, knowledge of dress and artifacts for costumes and properties, architecture for scenery, music and dance for atmosphere.

Growing Sense of Values. The value of the experience often becomes apparent within the process of revealing through expressive media what has been absorbed. When children become earnest searchers for pictures so that costumes will be accurate, when they begin to talk in the vocabulary, even the cadences of the people they are studying, when they hate to put aside their roles and costumes, and want to go on “being” their parts after the play is over; in short, when they identify with a larger experience than the purely personal, increasing their stature thereby, the social studies would seem to have done their part in educating the child. One ten-year-old group expressed much of the relation to a growing world through a beautiful frieze depicting a series of maps from the earliest times to the present. Their high sounding title “Man’s expanding knowledge of his universe” gave the teacher some real insight into the emotional as well as the intellectual satisfaction that the children had gotten from the work—a kind of stretching forward—one could almost hear them growing.

Conclusions

A changing concept of the role of education has brought into sharp focus the need for a broader formulation of curriculum goals and purposes.

A knowledge of child development and growth provides the base of modern educational thinking. The program stems from the needs of the child, which includes in the elementary school years the need for becoming a knowing and functioning member of his group.

Active participating experience provides an optimal climate for learning.

It becomes the school's responsibility, therefore, to seek out learning opportunities, to provide materials, and to develop methods by which the child in living out these planned experiences functions successfully at his own child level and receiving techniques and tools which equip him for intelligent, active participation in the adult society in which he will live.

Sound social goals and attitudes are learned in our schools, but only as programs call for the

practice of good social techniques and as the climate of the classroom demonstrates their value.

Experience, activity, and participation are important in teachers' learning also.

Only as teachers develop awareness of and are excited by the broadening base of their responsibility will the profound changes in school programs be truly understood and the "new" education become a working reality.

Notes

2. Mitchell, Lucy Sprague. *Our Children and Our Schools*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950. p. 31.

3. The first three years of this program in action are described in Lucy Sprague Mitchell's book, *Our Children and Our Schools*, to which reference has already been made.

4. *Ibid.* p. viii.

5. The school is chosen not because we find the answer here but rather because of the writer's own teaching experience and curriculum building opportunities in the programs discussed.

6. Pratt, Caroline. *I Learn from Children*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949.

7. This school takes the children through the eighth grade. The school services carried out by the older children may vary, running the gamut from making toys for the nursery school to a book review magazine for the upper grades. Social studies themes for these grades follow broad outlines to make possible the consideration of group interest from year to year. But whatever the point of departure, it is the planned goal of the school to give these older boys and girls a sense of the major movements in American history.

8. At City and Country School groups are identified according to the age of the children rather than by grades. Roughly the "eights" as they are called would be third grade, "nines" fourth, etc.

9. This discussion followed a trip to the museum to see the Egyptian rooms, most of them filled with the burial vestments of the great—the gold encrusted mummy cases, the fabulous jewels found in the tombs. But the teacher-guide took pains to have them see also the reconstruction of a slave's grave with its poor little clay pots to appease the gods and its measly burial cloth around the skeleton.

“Deep as a Giant”

An Experiment in Children’s Language

Claudia Lewis (1938)

Four- and five-year-olds think that water can be “deep as a giant,” that some things are “slow as you grow up” and others as “quiet as you cut cotton.” Delightful, imaginative concepts which give sparkle to living.

Elizabeth, five years old, stood looking at the large boat she had built of boxes and blocks in our school play yard. “The water around my boat is deep as a giant,” she said.

This concept of deepness surprised me. I realized that if I had been called upon at that moment to describe the water around her boat, I probably should have said, “Deep as anything.”

When we went in from the play yard to our classroom, I told the whole group of children—about eight of them—what Elizabeth had said, and suggested that they all think of some other deep things. “We might write the deepest story in the world,” I said. “What is the deepest thing in the world: Deep as... “

“Deep as sand down in the ocean.”... “Deep as dirt under the ground.”... “Deep as from the sky down!”

These, and many more, the children poured out, shouted out, with zest and delight. And so began a year-long experiment on my part, a game on the part of the children—a game of playing in this way with our concepts, our speech, for the fun of it.

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One day I stopped a child who had just said, “Oh, it’s easy as pumpkin pie!” and asked him and the others to think of what was *really* easy. It was hard for me to jot down fast enough the thirty or so easiest things in the world that came tumbling out of their mouths, ranging from “Easy as drinking water,” and “Easy as wind blows paper all around the sky,” to this epitome of ease: “Easy as when you wash your face in the morning, your cheeks get red.”

The next step was to concentrate on the difficult things. First came: “Hard as catching a train when you come up late and it’s just leaving.”... “Hard as to break your hand.”... “Hard as to cut your hair like a barber.” Then these four lines followed inevitably one upon the other:

*Hard as to hear when you’re deaf,
Hard as to see when you’re blind,
Hard as to talk when you’re dumb,
Hard as to walk when you have a broken leg.*

Again, we tried to think of what was fast and what was slow. To a five-year-old a wink apparently is not the quickest thing in the world, nor is a snail the slowest! But fire burning paper is fast, and an electric fan is fast, and so is a fireman sliding down a pole. One clear-visioned little girl said simply and casually, “Fast as you see yourself in the mirror.”

When we turned to the slow things, we found: “Slow as your new teeth come in.”... “Slow as clocks.”... “Slow as you grow up.”... and this last, which is so painfully slow that even I find it hard to conceive of: “Slow as one man building a bridge.”

“Flat as fishes,” “Flat as a button,” and “flat as a necktie,” came as welcome variations of the well-worn pancake.

But what seemed to please us all the most was the Quiet Story. The children recurred to this again and again, spontaneously offering more suggestions from day to day. Not one among them mentioned that a mouse was quiet. Instead, they said: “Quiet as you close your eyes.”... “Quiet as sunshine comes out.”... “Quiet as a thermometer goes up.”... “The sky moves very soft and the whole world.”... “Quiet as you cut cotton.” And it was Elizabeth who startled me again with, “Quiet as a splinter comes in.”

I didn’t always ask for these more or less abstract concepts. One day, during a heavy snowstorm when the flakes were coming down crisscross, as I should say, I asked the children to look out and tell me how the snow was falling. Martin saw his analogy right away: “The snow looks like darn-ing,” he said. Another child looked for a while, then said, “I feel like *I’m* going around and around in a circle.” Cynthia puzzled me for an instant, so unaccustomed were my adult eyes to such fresh ways of seeing: “The snowflakes go like a kitten’s tongue.”

Another time we were watching our pet white mouse: “His nose looks like a little church, a sharp little church with the point up.”... “His tail looks like pink linen.”

Once when we had turtles in our room, I asked the children to tell me the difference between

turtles and people. To help them organize their thoughts I gave them a pattern, a form, beginning: "Turtles have eyes, just like people, only... " They carried it on: "Only their eyes are small as bugs." We went on:

*Turtles have mouths, just like people,
Only their mouths are as small as my fingernail.*

*Turtles have heads, just like people,
Only they have stripes and we don't.
They don't have hair.
The stripes are their hair!*

I have said nothing of another angle of the language game of ours, concerned with the rhythm and sound of words. It seems to be as natural for children this age to coin their own words, especially words representing sounds, as it is for them to see the analogy between the snow and the kitten's tongue. "Hear them shattle, shattle," said Betty, speaking of the familiar clinking of the milkman's bottles in the bottle carrier.

To give the children opportunities for using this talent for hearing has been a part of my experiment. These words of their own coinage seem to come when the things they are talking about are brought vividly before them - when the children are looking, listening, touching, or when they are vividly remembering sights and sounds.

One windy day we wrote a windy story. It was relief and a joy to all of us to get away finally from an interminable series of "The wind blows this," and "The wind blows that," to "Sometimes the wind goes *bumbling* over like a wave," and "The wind blows papers fruffle, fruffle, fruffle."

As with sounds, so it is with rhythms. When I helped the children recall clearly, with all its noises and motion, the steam shovel we had seen, I found that we could get some of its ponderous swing in our speech:

*My big dipper moves
Down to the dirt,
Then swings around,
Around in a circle.*

We could make a word picture of our hungry, nibbling pet mice, a picture that gives the quick little rhythm of the movements:

*Shake, shake and nibble, nibble,
Wiggle, wiggle tail,
Wiggle, wiggle nose,*

*Wiggle, wiggle ears,
Down and up and down and up, little feet,
And all around the cage they go,
And nibble up again.*

To conclude, perhaps I could do no better than to quote Ann's reply, when I asked her how we might bring our train story to an end. Said she abruptly, "Caboose! It's ended!"

Play as a Growth Process

Barbara Biber (1951)

What do we have in mind when we think of play? What do children do when they play? Children's play has the quality of intense, absorbing experience, a bit of life lived richly and fully. There is zest and wonder and drama and a special kind of immediacy that is without thought for the passing of time. There is nothing to be accomplished, no sense of what is right or wrong to check the flow of spontaneity, no direction to follow. Whatever is at hand can become the suitable materials for play. The essence of the play experience is subjective, something within the child that may not necessarily become obvious to the one who observes the course or the form of his activity.

Play as an activity may take any one of numberless forms. It may be just physical activity, an overflow of energy, of exuberance. Besides running, skipping, hopping, children like to slide, seesaw and swing. Although these play experiences require a degree of patterning in coordination, they belong among the natural playful uses which a child makes of his body. If his play is as free as his energy is boundless, he is likely to embroider the basic patterns: he soon finds it more fun to hop on one foot, to slide down on his belly instead of his bottom, to swing standing up.

Playing may be something quite different from the lively expression of physical energies. It may take quiet, delicate forms such as playing with sounds and words. The chanting of younger children, the nonsense rhyming of the older ones are play forms.

The child is playing when, with his hands, he impresses himself on things around him. He

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pounds the clay and smears the paint. He creates with blocks even when he is only stacking them high or lining them up low. He makes the mud take shape. He fits things together and takes them apart. There is pleasure and satisfaction in what one's hands can make of the physical world and the child, in his playful re-making of the world around him, lays the cornerstone of his feeling about himself in relation to that world.

Now we come to the world of play that is most challenging and enticing: dramatic play. Here the child can take flight. He needs no longer be a child. He can make himself over and be a wolf or an engineer or a mother or a baby who is crying. He can re-create the world not only as he really experiences it but even in the strange aspects that symbolize some of his deepest wishes and fears. It is this kind of play—or rather the values that it has for growth—that I would like to talk about most today.

What do play experiences do for child growth? If a child can have a really full wholesome experience with play, he will be having the most wholesome kind of fun that a child can have. For a child to have fun is basic to his future happiness. His early childhood play may become the basic substance out of which he lays down one of his life patterns, namely, not only that one can *have* fun but that one can *create* fun. Most of us as adults enjoy only a watered-down manufactured kind of fun—going to the movies, shopping, listening to a concert, or seeing a baseball game—and do not feel secure that some of the deepest resources for happiness lie within ourselves, free of a price of admission. This is one of these securities that compose a positive attitude toward life, in general.

In dramatic play, children also find a sense of confidence in their own impulses. There are no directions to follow, no rules to stick to. Whatever they do will be good and right. Wherever their impulses lead them, that is the way to follow. This is the freedom children should have in their play, an absence of boundaries and prescriptions that we cannot grant them outside of their play lives.

Another important by-product of play is the feeling of strength it yields to the child, a relief from the feelings of powerlessness and helplessness that many children feel keenly as junior members of our well-ordered adult world. In play we give them an opportunity to counter-act this powerlessness to a degree. It is the child's chance to lay plans, to judge what is best, to create the sequence of events. Dramatic play is one of the basic ways in which children can try out their talents for structuring life. The fact that they deal with symbols rather than realities does not detract from the sense of mastery.

As you watch children playing, you see the ingredients of the child world spread out before you, differing in complexity and elaboration according to the level of maturity. When a two- or three-year-old plays train, he does so simply. The train goes. It makes sounds. Just a block and a child saying "choo" may be Johnnie's idea of a train but very soon he meets up with Mary who has been very much impressed with the odd way that people sit in trains, looking at each other's backs. To another child in the group a train is not a train unless it whistles. Soon, a composite train emerges: it goes, it says "choo," it whistles intermittently, people sit in it one behind the other. Children, at all levels, pool their ideas in free dramatic play, expose each other to new impressions, stimulate each other to new wondering and questioning. Can we fail to recognize this process as learning? Can we

neglect to notice that here is learning going on in a social atmosphere full of pleasure and delight? In re-living and freely dramatizing his experience the child is thinking at his own pace with other children. He is learning in the best possible way.

More than that, the ways of the world are becoming delicious to him. He is tasting and re-tasting life in his own terms and finding it full of delight and interest. He projects his own pattern of the world into the play and in so doing, brings the real world closer to himself. He is building the feeling that the world is his, to understand, to interpret, to puzzle about, to make over. For the future, we need citizens in whom these attitudes are deeply ingrained.

We would be seriously in error, however, were we to assume that all play of young children is clear and logical. Horses are more likely to eat lamb stew than hay and what starts out to be a boat often ends as a kitchen stove without any obviously clear transitions. Often when play violates the line of adult logic, we can see that it has a special kind of coherence all its own—perhaps the coherence of an action rather than a thinking pattern. Playing dentist may take the form of sitting on a keg and whirling one's feet around because the wonderful dentist's chair is the outstanding recall for the child. Teeth and drills may be altogether omitted while the child accentuates through his play what impressed him most. It makes sense in child terms even though it may not to the adult who is told that the children are playing dentist when what meets the eye looks like a crowd of whirling Dervishes. To understand children's play we must loosen our imaginations from the restrictions of adulthood and the limitations of logic that is tied in within literalness and objective reality.

If free play is to yield these values in terms of children's growth needs, it requires a skilled guiding hand, especially where children are collected in groups as they are in nursery schools. There is a way of setting the stage and creating an atmosphere for spontaneous play. Most important in this atmosphere is the teacher's sensitive understanding of her own role. Sometimes the teacher needs to be ready to guide the play, especially among the fives, sixes, and sevens, into channels that are beyond the needs of the nursery years. But she must guide only in terms of the children's growth needs. Her guidance may be in terms of her choice of stories, materials, trips, experiences. It may function through discussions. Without skillful guidance, a free play program for successive years can become stultified and disturbing to children.

One of the main problems with respect to play which we are working through as teachers is—how much shall the teacher get involved in the children's play? Shall she correct, suggest, contribute, participate? I don't have the answer, but I hope teachers will continue to think about and talk about this problem. We have left behind the stage of education in which the teacher was relegated to the background. We have still to discover what are the optimal points at which the teacher can step in, offering new material or ideas to enrich the play. In our teacher training institutes, we encourage teachers to have imagination and use it, but if you teach this too well, the teachers themselves (and this goes for parents, too) will be expressing themselves in the play, and before you know it they will have taken away the play from the child. This, naturally, is closely related to teacher personality. Some people intuitively know when it is best to withdraw and take a passive role, when a new idea will not be an intrusion and when stimulation had best be indirect. It behooves us

all as teachers to think: are we becoming so active that the children are overwhelmed and restricted by the flood of our bright ideas?

Day in, day out, we affect children's play by the things we provide for them to play with. We choose equipment and materials with care and thought and have accepted the premise that a good share of play materials should be of the "raw" variety—things like clay, blocks, paper, mud which the child can freely shape to his own purposes and upon which he can impress his own pattern. These are in contrast to the finished dolls and trains, trucks and doll dishes which come in finished form and are adapted, as established symbols, into the flow of the child's free play. One of the interesting questions in education today has to do with what balance shall be kept between raw and finished materials, recognizing that each kind serves a different function with respect to play and may meet varying needs of different individual children. This is an area for study and experimentation in which we have made only a fair beginning.

To return briefly to the point that children's play cannot always be understood from the vantage point of logic and realistic accuracy. The inner coherence of play is as often based on emotion as it is on logic or action. If it seems incomprehensible, rambling, or slightly insane, it is because we cannot read the deep emotional life of children, because we do not understand adequately how feeling can transform thought, at all ages.

We know that children are full of feeling—deep and good, hard and strong feeling. They get mad and glad with intensity. Their feelings are as quick, as volatile as they are deep. This vital aspect of their life experience needs outlet through play quite as much as their developing curiosities and their effervescent energies. Many of us who can accept play as a child's way of interpreting life intellectually, often stop short at allowing children full freedom in expressing the feeling aspects of their lives. Or else we make the error of thinking of emotional expression of this kind in terms of negative feeling, of avoiding repression of hostility and such. This, to be sure, is an important aspect of wholesome growth. The chance to express negative feeling through play can save the child considerable anguish. The dolls he is allowed to hit leave him more able to face his real life troubles successfully.

But there is the positive aspect of a child's emotional life which should not be overlooked. Covering the doll lovingly with layers of blankets is as deep and important an experience as the smacking and the spanking. What we must remember through all of this is that the child does not necessarily play out what his actual experience has been. He may instead be playing out the residue of feeling which his experience has left with him—quite another dimension, psychologically. It has been possible only to indicate this latter point briefly.

Summing up, we can say that play serves two different growth needs in the early years—learning about the world by playing about it (realizing reality) and finding an outlet for complex and often conflicting emotions (wherein reality and logic are secondary). We, the adults, need to understand this process more deeply than we do and to continue to improve our techniques for providing experiences through play by means of which the child can freely express feeling and creatively master reality.

Reassessing the Criteria of Competence in Schools

Edna Shapiro (1973)

There is something very attractive about the concept of competence, perhaps partly because it offers ways of thinking about positive and effective aspects of human behavior. But there is a danger of its becoming an omnibus concept, and thus losing its power to communicate. Before turning to what competence means in school—therefore, to how we can think about and try to assess it—I would like to set some limits on what the concept of competence embraces.

Competence has both a technical and a lay meaning—these are often used interchangeably, and they do overlap. Most investigators follow White's (1959) lead in applying the concept of competence to the individual's actions upon the environment, actions which produce or lead to an effect of some sort. Thus, Charles Wenar looks at "executive competence": the toddler's transactions with his physical environment (locomotor, manipulative, visually regarding); his initiation of action, the ability to sustain it; the complexity and intensity of his involvement; his self-reliance. And Carol Eckerman points to the infant's and toddler's exploration of people as well as of things, their growing competence in using things to initiate and sustain interaction with people. In these (and other) studies, then, competence is taken to involve action; which is to say, overt, observable behavior. The competence is the action.

It is to be distinguished from non-observable behavior, like contemplation, which, by nature internal, is not included in the concept of competence. Only its behavioral consequences, if any, can be assessed in terms of competence.

This paper was presented at the symposium Early Competence: Data and Challenges, at the American Psychological Association meeting, Montréal, Québec, August 1973.

Perhaps the most common way in which competence is used these days - at least in developmental psychology—is to distinguish it from performance. Competence by this meaning equals capacity; it refers to the underlying capability which may or may not be manifested in the individual's performance or action. We have to thank the linguists for highlighting the significance of the discrepancies between competence and performance, for reminding us that performance is a sign of but not a synonym for competence.

But don't we have a dilemma, a contradiction, here? On the one hand, competence is said to constitute action upon the environment, or at least interaction with it; on the other hand, actions are singled out as imperfect indicators of the competences they derive from.

There is another meaning of the term competence that I think deserves mention: competence as adequate and sufficient, but not great performance. The distinction here is between competence and talent. If we call a painter a competent painter, the term suddenly becomes derogatory. Instead of praise, this is a putdown, because it describes his skill by delimiting it. It means that the painter has *merely* mastered the medium.

When a child is said to be competent in school, the implication often is that he is better than merely adequate—a competent reader is not just a child who can read, but someone who is *good* at it; a child who is competent in math is not only able to manipulate the number system, but to do it well.

As soon as we think about competence in school, we have to think about a special set of competences—those defined by, and considered appropriate to, the school setting. Which means that they are culturally defined. Of course, social and cultural variables influence early competence, too. Early locomotion depends not only on the child's developing physical control but on environmental conditions; development of fine motor control is facilitated by opportunity for "contingent learning"; the use of language is influenced by the ways adults respond to vocalization and early verbalization. But to a considerable extent, these competences are emergent. As the child matures, he will, unless impeded, inevitably crawl, creep and walk. He will achieve increasing facility in coordinating his movements, and he will talk in the language the family uses. The timing and form of his competence in school, on the other hand, are almost entirely mandated by the culture.

Schools mandate not only what the child should learn, but also how, in what sequence and at what time he should learn it; and the curriculum and the Daily Lesson Plan are only a portion of what he learns in school. He also has to learn how to get along in the school world. That includes learning when to sit and when to stand; when to be quiet, when it's safe to whisper; how to fake attention; and how to take tests. He learns to wait, to ignore distraction, to be alone in a group. Much of his competence depends on how well he can negotiate the school culture. Some of the things he learns may turn out to be useful in other situations; many are institution-specific. Some are strictly cognitive, others strictly social, calling for special kinds of personal and interpersonal competences. In the school setting, cognitive competence is inextricably bound up with social competence. In different kinds of schools, there are different mixes, but a mix is inevitable. I do not mean merely that since schools are social institutions, interpersonal competences are necessary for survival, but that being judged competent in school requires as much social competence as cognitive.

Another sense in which the concept of competence needs to be bent in order to be applied in the school setting is that a good deal of competent school behavior requires restraint from action—not running, not talking, not getting out of one’s seat, not drumming on the desk—that is, withholding action to avoid an effect. This is the converse of action-on-the-environment, for the child’s goal is to produce as little effect as possible (to keep a “low profile”).

If we try to pull these ideas together to talk about competence in school, we face head-on a basic problem in psychology—the interplay of psychological processes and contextual factors. It is certainly not new, rather it has “long been a kind of shadow issue in psychology,” to use Cole and Bruner’s (1971) phrase.

It seems likely that in the behavior of the very young child there is a greater correspondence of performance and competence. Action is the young child’s medium. The inhibition of action, or the simulation or distortion of his response requires considerable developmental maturity. His performance, therefore, which is what he does, is a pretty good indicator of what he can do. Leaving aside the effects of high tension - hunger, fatigue, fright—the situations in which performance and competence are discrepant in the young child are fewer in number and relatively easily recognized: mother absent vs. mother present, unfamiliar vs. familiar, and so on.

When we are dealing with the older child in school, contextual factors become increasingly complex. There are two classes of variables that have to be taken into account: first, social-situational variables, and second, task-related variables. Again, neither of these is new. But we have to do more than mention them in passing. We have to find ways of studying them specifically, and of incorporating them into the fabric of research. I want to talk about these two kinds of contextual variables using two studies to illustrate the problems.

The Importance of Situational Factors

Usually what is assessed is not so much the competence of the individual child, but the differences between children who have been involved in different kinds of educational programs. This is usually done by giving tests designed to measure the behavioral outcomes of the program(s). Studies vary, of course, in the precision, imaginativeness, and range of measures used. But it is safe to say that, in general, the assessment of the impact of educational programs has not shown the expected differences in performance on conventional outcome measures.

I speak as one who has recently been burned. I conducted a pilot study of the effects of participation in a Bank Street sponsored Follow Through (FT) Program.¹ The subjects were first grade children in each of three FT schools and three comparison schools which were not involved in FT or any other enrichment program. (The N was 150 children, all poor and black.) We observed the children in their classrooms; and in each of the three pairs of classrooms. The variety of the curriculum and activities, the general atmosphere, the quality of relationship between teacher and children and among children was strikingly different. The FT rooms were characterized as lively, vibrant, with a diversity of curricular projects and children’s products, and an atmosphere of friendly, cooperative endeavor. The non-FT rooms were described as rather uneventful, poorly equipped, with a narrow

range of curriculum, uniform activity, and a great deal of “seat work”; both teachers and children were quieter and more concerned with maintaining or submitting to discipline. The programs and teaching methods of the non-FT classrooms exemplified a traditional educational ideology, with its emphasis on the prerogatives of adult authority and conventional standards of achievement.

The teachers in the FT classrooms were themselves learning new ways of teaching and interacting with children. The Bank Street program has a comprehensive approach with multiple goals for both children and teachers. Teachers are expected to embrace new ways of teaching which go beyond the mere introduction of specific instructional materials or methods.² It is not a way of teaching that one learns in a few weeks. Still, the FT teachers were offering the children opportunities to explore and experiment, to express ideas and raise questions, to act autonomously, and to work cooperatively. They took a much broader view of competence than did the teachers in the comparison classrooms.

Given these dramatic differences in the classrooms, it was something of a shock to find that there were no significant differences in the children’s performance in individual test sessions.

Of course it matters a good deal exactly what tests were given, what measures derived, what were the conditions of testing, and what kinds of rapport were established. I have described these in detail elsewhere (Shapiro, 1971). Briefly, the tests used were not aimed at assessing factual information, nor personality functioning, but attempted to probe attitudes and expressions of feeling about the self, about school, about learning; they were measures of divergent rather than convergent thinking, tapping the disposition to respond rather than the response per se. Although I tried for diversity in task requirements, much of the data depended on the child’s verbal responses. (This, of course, is not unusual in studies of this sort.)

We all know that psychology is built on significant differences, not on negative findings. We cannot explain but can only speculate about equivocal findings. Nevertheless, the striking discrepancy between the two sets of evidence—the observational data and the test data—suggests, demands, that we take another look at the rationale of studies of this kind.

It is important to note that the children were responsive. Some talked more than others, but no one was resistant. Both the comparison and the FT children were able to respond adequately to the questions and tasks. They were polite, docile six- to seven-year-olds, newly inducted into the culture of the school, prepared to talk to the testers who were friendly but nevertheless outsiders. We asked them about school. They like it. What do you do in school? In school we: “work.” My teacher: “is nice.” In a strange and artificial situation with no clear guidelines about what was expected, they responded like well-socialized children with superficial, often cliché responses. They conformed so well that the uniformity of their responses was overwhelming.

If we examine the role of classroom data and test data and the relations between them, we find an unnatural emphasis has conventionally been placed on the test data. Psychologists have tended to dismiss the validity of the child’s behavior in the classroom because it is contaminated by situational variables. We have generally acted as if the standard test situation was free of social variables. On the contrary, the fact that a situation is pared down and restricted does not remove it

from the social domain; rather it defines the types of situational constraints that are operating. This infatuation with standard testing has led us to forget that the findings can only be generalized to an extremely narrow range of social situations. The traditional classroom is actually a situation which is very similar to the testing situation. Here too, the subject child is politely coerced into attendance; the adult asks, the child responds. But *when* classroom practices are more open, *when* teachers respond to children more informally, *when* they encourage questioning and experimentation, *when* they offer more heterogeneous experiences, the scope of appropriate behavior is broadened. Children learn that there may be more than one answer to a question; that they can initiate, and terminate, activities. *Then* the classroom and testing situation have fewer common aspects.

We don't have the time, nor is this the appropriate forum, for an extended critique of standard testing. I, as well as a number of others, have discussed some of the issues more fully elsewhere (see Shapiro, 1973).

What is relevant to our consideration here is, I think, the narrow band of behaviors being sampled in a severely restricted situation. We look at performance measures as indices of competence; yet in the test situation what we often get is how competent the child is in coping with a strange adult and a strange situation. This may be especially true when we are testing children of minority backgrounds, as in the study I've described. And although the testers were also black in this study, they clearly came from another world. These considerations are important because the assessment of children's performance in test situations is almost invariably taken as evidence of their competence or lack of competence, in general terms.

Dell Hymes' (1971) concept of communicative competence is, I think, extremely useful—briefly, communicative competence requires the ability to switch between parts of one's verbal repertoire, to be fluent and facile in many domains. Cognitive competence also requires effective functioning in different domains, the ability to respond to the requirements of different situations, flexibility in dealing with different kinds of content, and in different modalities. We have to differentiate the concept of competence in school, in terms of cognitive domains as well as developmental appropriateness; then perhaps we can devise differentiated indices and methods of assessment.

The Importance of Task-Specific Variables

I wish to illustrate the importance of task-specific variables, the importance of the task medium, by briefly describing another study which concerns children's abilities to recognize and reproduce simple two-dimensional geometric forms.³ I began with the idea of investigating discrepancies between perception and performance. Now it seems clearer that the study is of consistencies and discrepancies among different kinds of performance, and among performance with different materials or in different media. A task requiring visual recognition of different geometric forms was expected to give baseline data. A chart with 13 geometric forms is shown. We show the child a small card with one of these forms on it and ask him to find the one on the chart that is just like it. The children, aged four through nine, make very few errors; as is expected, the younger children make more errors.⁴ The errors make sense: the plus and the "x" are confused, as are the triangle and the upside-down

triangle. The major source of error (that is, 52 percent of all errors) is the confusion of two figures: a square with a diagonal going from upper left to lower right, and a square with a diagonal going from upper right to lower left.⁵

But now, when we ask the children to copy a square with a diagonal, many of those who were confused in the recognition task can make adequate copies: only six children reverse the direction of the diagonal in their drawings. Later, we ask them to construct a square with a diagonal out of rods; and later still, we construct a diagonal made of checkers on a checkerboard and ask them to copy it. It does not necessarily follow that the child who confuses the direction of the diagonal in the (baseline) recognition task cannot make an accurate construction or copy in the later two tasks. Nor is inadequate performance on any one task necessarily associated with inadequate performance on another.

The point I want to make is simple: there are realms of “performatory activity.” Each has rules to be learned and techniques to be mastered. The child has to be able to cope with multiple rules simultaneously and to know which rule to apply when.

Performance, says Jacqueline Goodnow (1972), entails selection from a repertoire of behaviors. A competent performance requires the selection and adequate execution of the appropriate behavior or action. It involves narrowing the range of possible behaviors to match what is appropriate: applying the correct selection rule. Of course, the individual has to have the relevant behavior(s) in his repertoire.

When a child does not understand a given concept, successful performance on any task and in any medium relating to that concept is unlikely. When a child has a firm understanding of the concept, he can represent it in a wide range of media. The understanding is not specific, but general. When the child is in a stage of transition between no understanding and full understanding, his performance is more likely to be medium-specific and he may perform adequately in one medium and poorly in another. His transitional stage position makes him more susceptible to the influence of contextual factors.⁶ Perhaps some of the confusing and equivocal findings in psychological and educational research can be attributed to poor timing—the fact that we are assessing children’s proficiencies just at the time that they are most susceptible to contextual variables.

I have reviewed some of the definitions and usages of the concept of competence; it is somewhat chameleon-like—its meaning changes depending on the context in which it is applied. I have tried, using two different studies, to illustrate two kinds of contextual factors which, in my view, are crucial to any attempt to describe, analyze or assess children’s competence in school. Clearly we need a much more sophisticated research strategy than any that has yet been used if we are to clarify and differentiate the criteria of competence in school.

Notes

1. This study was supported by the Follow Through Branch of the U.S. Office of Education.
2. We have tried to spell out the basic assumptions of this approach elsewhere and have described it as a developmental-interaction approach to the education of young children (see Shapiro and Biber, 1972).
3. This study has been supported by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, grant #MH 21808. Since data are presently being analyzed, I speak about findings with considerable tentativeness.
4. Four year olds make 3-4 errors (range: 6-13 correct, M = 9.6). Five year olds make 2-3 errors (range: 8-13 correct, M = 11.4). Eight and nine year olds make practically no errors (range: 10-13, M = 12.4, 12.3, respectively).
5. The proportion of errors made on the diagonal, as expected, increases with age: 4 year olds = 30 percent; 5 = 53 percent; 6 = 50 percent; 7 = 90 percent; 8 = 77 percent; 9 = 87 percent.
6. Flavell and Wohlwill (1969), in their analysis of the determinants of performance in cognitive tasks, also point to “the instability, inconsistency and lack of generality of concepts during the period of their formation” (p. 110). They consider task attributes as presumably responsible for the horizontal décalages in Piagetian (and other) research on cognitive development. But décalage seems a misleading term; it literally means un-wedging, suggesting the separation of what was once unified.

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