THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

VOLUME XII MARCH, 1931 NUMBER 3

NEW SCHOOLS FOR OLD

A New leaven is at work in education at all levels of instruction—elementary, secondary, and higher. This force has been known by various terms such as progressive education, the new education, the child-centered school, the activity program, etc. An examination of the titles of books describing the new methods discloses the elements emphasized, for example, Cobb's *The New Leaven,* Ferrière's *The Activity School,* Rugg and Shumaker's *The Child Centered School,* and Washburn and Stearns' *New Schools in an Old World* and *Better Schools.*

Claims of the Old School

The elements of this new movement in education are six in number—individuality, freedom, self-directed learning, expression through both manual and mental activities, group consciousness or social adaptation, and parent education. Students of education and alert teachers and administrators in general are convinced that the new education is much superior to that of a generation or two ago. However, there are still those who claim that the sort of training given in the so-called little red schoolhouse was superior to that offered in modern schools. Incidentally, the old building characterized as red in color was only a rusty brown due to weathering of the elements rather than to application of paint. As evidence of the effectiveness of the teaching in the school of a generation or two ago some point to great leaders in government, business, and other walks of life who attended this little one-room school. There is a fallacy in this argument, since many men who have become great within the last score of years have *had* to go through the old school. Therefore, they may have succeeded in spite of the one-room school, rather than because of it. In comparing the new school with the old in terms of its human products it is only fair to wait another generation until the children of the progressive school have grown up and have had time enough to achieve the greatness in public life which requires chronological maturity.

In view of the claims made by the so-called progressive workers in education for the new school and by an older generation for the school of a half century or more ago, it seems desirable to make comparisons in terms of teachers, methods of teaching, discipline, pupils, textbooks, organization and administration, and buildings and equipment.[1] Since there is first-hand opportunity for visiting modern schools and observing the methods and materials in use, more attention in this comparison will be given to the old schools. Teachers, of course, are or can be in direct contact with the modern movement, and parents through visiting schools and through their children, who are in attendance, easily may become acquainted with the new education.

Teachers of Another Century

What were the old teachers like? The elementary-school teacher of today has evolved from the weaver, blacksmith, carpenter, wheelwright, artisan, cripple, old

This paper was the basis of a radio address over station W L W (Cincinnati) February 16, 1931, under the auspices of the Ohio School of the Air.

[1]The writer is greatly indebted for illustrative material to: E. P. Cubberley, *The History of Education,* Ch. xviii. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920.

Clifton Johnson, *Old Time Schools and School Books.* New York: Macmillan Co., 1904.

dame, sexton, chorister, beadle, shoe-maker, tailor, barber, pensioner, invalid, church sexton, bell ringer, or grave digger, who did a little teaching in his spare moments to help make a living. The assumption is that except in case of epidemic certain of these groups were not busy all the time. In 1738 in Prussia the tailoring monopoly was granted to elementary teachers in order to help them make a living. Later, Frederick the Great ordered that his crippled and superannuated soldiers be given teaching positions in the elementary vernacular schools of Prussia. It is not likely that soldiers of two centuries ago were appropriate teachers and guides of youth. The character of the teachers in the colonial period was not all that might be hoped, although religious qualifications were stressed especially in New England. In some instances the men transported to the colonies because of convictions for small crimes were sold for periods of greater or less length; when one of these unfortunates could read and write he sometimes was purchased for a school master and teachers of this kind were common in the southern and middle colonies. Not infrequently they were coarse and degraded, and did not always stay their time out as evidenced by advertisements like the following in the newspapers of the period: "Ran away: A servant man who followed the occupation of a school master, much given to drinking and gambling." It is said of one of the colonial school masters, that he was fined twenty shillings by the court for cursing.

Interesting information concerning the salary of these colonial school masters is available. The net salary for the school term in most New England towns, after allowing a moderate sum for board, expressed in modern terms, hardly exceeded $60 or $70. An old contract in 1703 calls for two-thirds of the pay in wheat and one-third in corn. Later, after the opening of the nineteenth century, the master of a district school received $10 or $12 a month, although a wealthy district might, in exceptional cases, give $20 to retain a man of culture and experience. Women earned from $4 to $10 a month. Even after the middle of the nineteenth century standard pay for a woman teacher in many districts was $1 a week.

Methods of Teaching

What about the method employed in the old school as compared with the new? The method of teaching used throughout the eighteenth century was what was known as the individual method. A teacher was a hearer of lessons who tested the memory of the pupils and kept order. Pupils came to the master's desk one by one and recited what they had memorized, being called upon probably once a day or less. Of course, this method was quite wasteful of both time and effort. The time of the teacher was so occupied with hearing lessons, setting copies, making quill pens, dictating exercises in arithmetic, and keeping order, that work as a class group in discussing a topic or engaging in any creative activity was unknown.

Discipline

The chief qualifications of the school master of a century ago were to manage the big boys and to rule the school with an iron hand. Discipline everywhere was severe. Two of the favorite pedagogical maxims of the time were: "Spare the rod and spoil the child." "A boy has a back; when you hit it he understands." Pictures of the old school show whipping posts set up in the classroom and a bundle of switches within reach of the master. A German schoolmaster of more than fifty years' experience estimates that he gave more than two million blows and raps with rod, cane, book, ruler, and hand on the head, ear, mouth, and other vulnerable parts of the body. He made boys kneel on peas

and a triangular piece of wood, wear the "jackass," and hold the rod up. Imagine the spice added to domestic life by his vocabulary of 3,000 scolding expressions, two thirds of which were German and one thousand of which were invented.

It became necessary in bringing about reform in the German schools in 1783 to forbid teachers to put irons around the boys' necks, cover them with mud, make them kneel on peas, or brutally to beat them. Even the poets of the time expressed in rhyme the current attitude toward discipline. In England the poet Crabbe (1754-1832) put these words in the mouth of an early school master:

Students like horses on the road,
Must be well lashed before they take the load;
They may be willing for a time to run,
But you must whip them ere the work be done.

A colonial school master named Dove who was teaching in Philadelphia about 1765 was quite a humorist in employing a variety of methods of discipline. Instead of using the birch in the regular way he stick it in the back part of the collar of the culprit, who was compelled thus to stand in plain view of his fellows. He employed a unique device in preventing tardiness. The late comer was met and escorted to school by a committee of five or six pupils with a bell tingling and a lighted lantern. As a just and fair man, Dove himself, when late one morning, was met in the same way to the great gratification of the boys and entertainment of the spectators.

Since there was a time when young men were publicly whipped in colleges, it is not surprising that discipline was severe in the lower schools.[2]

One New York master had a short ladder beside his desk, and when he called forth a culprit for punishment, the boy had to step up on the ladder to receive his caning. It is related of a certain rustic schoolmaster that he kept a long birch rod with the butt-end resting on his chair, so that he could use it without rising. Another master would sit with his feet on the table and call up all the boys to march around the table in single file. As they passed in front of him he hit them each in turn with his ruler. In this way, though some of the innocent may have suffered, he made sure that none of the guilty escaped. But not all the discipline in the old schools was muscular. Instances are recorded of an offender's being ordered out to cut a small branch from a tree, and when he returned with it, the teacher squared and partially split the larger end and fitted the cleft on the culprit's nose. Pinched and ridiculous, the boy was forced to stand in full sight of the school until the teacher relented.

In the dame schools premiums of gingerbread were now and then bestowed for good behaviour, but these were not a chief reliance in the cultivation of virtue. Most dames had great faith in a thimble tapped sharply on the delinquents' craniums. Whisperers were sometimes compelled to silence by having inserted in their mouths a short stick, like the bit of a bridle, with strings at the ends which could be tied at the back of the head. There were schools where transgressors were made to stand on the benches and wear dunce caps, or huge leather spectacles; or they might have pinned to their persons large labels lettered, "Lying Ananias," or "Idle Boy," or whatever the teacher thought was appropriate to the case.

Pluck and courage were of superlative importance, since a muscular clash with the big boys was almost inevitable and the master who lacked either courage or physical stamina was likely to meet with abject failure. After the big boys had put out of school two or three masters in succession, the school got the name of being "hard" and it was necessary to offer comparatively liberal wages for a new teacher who could overpower the young savages. The record in the state of Massachusetts shows that in 1837 more than three hundred schools were broken up by mutinous pupils or by the incompetence of teachers. However, parents were in general sympathy with the application of the rod and, unless the children were receiving chastizement regularly, felt that they were not learning much. The prevailing belief was that it did not matter what a pupil studied so long as he hated it hard enough. There were a few rare cases when the teacher would not punish by main strength, but resorted to moral suasion. When the pupils of one master became noisy, he would stamp his foot and cry out, "Children, if you do not behave better, I will go right off and leave you," and the pupils would be frightened to orderly quiet-

[2]Clifton Johnson, *op. cit,* pp. 43-45.

ness. The writer has never had the courage to try this method in his own classes. One master, like Samson of old, threatened to extend his arms and push over the walls supporting the roof when pupils were disobedient.

Interesting bits of warfare between pupils and teachers took place in some instances. One master, when he found the doors and windows of his school barricaded against him, climbed to the roof and placed a board over the chimney opening. Within ten minutes the building filled with smoke and pupils were glad to make terms with the teacher.

Pupils

The number of pupils to be accommodated in a district usually was large, although it was never thought necessary to provide more than one teacher. Sometimes schoolrooms not more than thirty feet square accommodated a hundred pupils. Boys and girls were seated on separate sides of the room.

> In a winter school of forty pupils there might be a dozen young men and women who were practically grown up. On the other hand, quite a group of the youngest could not read, and several had not mastered the alphabet. The little scholars were most of the time "busy" keeping still. The backless benches they occupied were commonly far too high for them, leaving their feet dangling in mid-air. Of course they would get to knocking the shins of one another, a whiffet of laughter would escape, and the noise would increase until it attracted the attention of the master. Then down would come the pedagogue's ferule on his desk with a clap that sent shivers through the little learners' hearts to think how it would have felt had it fallen somewhere else. "Silence!" commanded the master, and he gave them a look that swept them into utter stillness.[3]

Interestingly enough there is other evidence that at heart these children of a century ago had much the same mischief-making spirit as those of today. Here are a few of the choice scribblings, which they wrote on the fly leaves of their textbooks:[4]

> If this book should chance to roam
> Box its ears and send it home.
>
> Steal not this book, for if you do,
> Tom Harris will be after you.
>
> Steal not this book for fear of strife
> For the owner carries a big jackknife.
>
> Steal not this book my honest friend
> For fear the gallos will be your end
>
> The gallos is high, the rope is strong,
> To steal this book, you know is wrong.

One of the ditties was considered a very fitting characterization of the school history of a century ago. The writer has always hoped fervently that it would not be applied literally to his own college classes of today.

> If there should be another flood,
> Then to this book I'd fly;
> If all the earth should be submerged
> This book would still be dry.

A somewhat sentimental pupil wrote this in a book:

> You give your heart
> to me and I will give
> mine to you we will lock them
> up together and throw away the key.

Textbooks

Teachers and parents of today are familiar with the very attractive books and other instructional materials used in modern schools. Let us examine the textbooks of a century or more ago. One of the best known of these old books was the New England Primer with its great stress on religious aims and materials. The edition of 1727 contains the alphabet and syllables, lists of words for spelling arranged in groups of from one to six syllables, the picture alphabet with a rhyme for each letter, texts from the Bible and other sources, the Lord's Prayer, The Creed, the Ten Commandments, various religious verses, names of the books of the Bible, a picture of John Rogers being burned at the stake, and eight pages of verses supposed to have been written by Rogers to his children, and a catechism of some forty pages. Can you visualize the use of such material in teaching defenseless six-year-old children to read?

---

[3] Clifton Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-9.
[4] *Ibid.*, Ch. vi.

Noah Webster's blue-back speller, published in 1783, contains some choice bits of information. The following advice would of course be rather inappropriate for youngsters in the elementary schools of today, although it must be remembered that there were grown young men and women in the old schools.

Be cautious in listening to the addresses of men. Is thy suitor addicted to low vices? is he profane? is he a gambler? a tippler? a spendthrift? a haunter of taverns? and, above all, is he a scoffer at religion?—banish such a man from thy presence, his heart is false, and his hand would lead thee to wretchedness and ruin.

Then for married people there are suggestions of this sort:

Art thou a husband? Treat thy wife with tenderness; reprove her faults with gentleness.

Art thou a wife? Respect thy husband; oppose him not unreasonably, but yield thy will to his, and thou shalt be blest with peace and concord; study to make him respectable; hide his faults.

A portion of another speller describing child life of an early period, contains a dialogue not quite in keeping with certain present day statutes:

"Dinner is ready. Come little frozen boys, come get some pudding."

"Will mama give Charles some beer? Yes, Charles shall have some beer."

The old arithmetics placed emphasis on impractical exercises of the puzzle type often stated in the form of a verse or rhyme. This statement may be illustrated by certain examples. Those with farm experience may decide as to the practical nature of the following problem:

What length of cord will fit to tie to a cow's tail, the other end fixed in the ground, to let her have liberty of eating an acre of grass, and no more, supposing the cow and tail to be five yards and a half? Ans. 6, 136 perches.

Here is a problem in rhyme:

When first the marriage knot was ty'd
Between my wife and me,
My age was to that of my bride,
As three times three to three.
But now when ten, and half ten years
We man and wife have been,
Her age to mine exactly bears,
As eight is to sixteen;
Now tell, I pray, from what I've said,
What were our ages when we wed?

Even the answer is in verse form:

Ans. (They age, when marry'd must have been just forty-five; they wife's fifteen.)

Much of the material in the old geographies was untrue and based upon the fanciful tales of travelers. Natural curiosities and miscellaneous bits of information were stressed. Examples may be given as follows:

Grey squirrels sometimes migrate in considerable numbers. If in their course they meet with a river, each of them takes a shingle, piece of bark, or the like, and carries it to the water; thus equipped they embark, and erect their tails to the gentle breeze, which soon wafts them over in safety; but a sudden flaw of wind sometimes produces a destructive shipwreck.

In California, there falls in the morning a great quantity of dew, which, settling on the rose-leaves becomes hard like manna, having all the sweetness of refined sugar, without its whiteness.

The foregoing might be adjudged propaganda from the Pacific Coast except for the date of publication, 1784.

A geography published in 1795 in the form of questions and answers gives information of interest to modern golfers.

Q. What are the diversions of the Scots?

A. They are all of the vigorous, athletic kind; such as dancing, *goff* and *curling*. The goff is a species of ballplaying performed with a bat and a ball, the extremity of the bat being loaded with lead, and the party which strikes the ball with fewest strokes into a hole prepared for the purpose wins the game.

Here is a geographical riddle:

Three men went on a journey, in which, though their heads traveled 12 yards farther than their feet, all returned alive, with their heads on.

The answer is that they walked around the world, the space traveled by the head exceeding that traversed by the feet.

The writers of histories of a century ago placed major stress on biblical events and other miscellaneous items in the absence of any well-organized body of historical fact. The titles of two of these early books were Noah Webster's volume of 1832, *History of the United States,* to which was prefixed a brief account of our English ancestors from the dispersion at Babel to their migration to America, and Butler's *History, Sacred and Profane, from the Creation of the World, to the year 1818, of the Christian Era.* A quotation from one of these old histories

illustrating the miscellaneous character of its content is as follows:

> The negroes of the Congo affirm that the world was made by the hands of angels, excepting their own country, which the Supreme Being constructed himself; that he took great pains with the inhabitants, and made them very black and beautiful; and when he had finished the first man, he was well pleased with him, and smoothed him over the face; and hence his nose, and the noses of all his descendants became flat.

School Administration, Buildings, and Equipment

The organization, administration, and supervision of the old schools are in marked contrast to that of the new schools. In one of the New England schools in 1645, during the warmer part of the year, school was in session between 7 a. m. and 5 p. m.

The clergy were actively concerned with school supervision. Their visits to the school were frequent, where they examined the children in terms of their knowledge of the catechism, Bible, and sometimes the sermon of the preceding Sunday.

Of course there is a decided contrast between the buildings of the old and the new school. For a hundred years in colonial records there is frequent mention of keeping schools in the meeting house or church.

> The first schoolhouses in the Middle colonies were of logs almost exclusively. Such school buildings were common in many sections for at least fifty years after the Revolution, and among the mountains they have lingered in use until quite recently. The earlier ones had a rough puncheon floor, if they had any floor at all. Often there was only the bare earth which the children's feet soon rendered very dusty. On occasion the youngsters would purposely stir up this dust in clouds to annoy the teacher and amuse their fellows. Sticks were inserted between the logs around the sides of the room at a convenient height, and boards were nailed on them to serve as desks. Roofs were of bark, and at one end of the building was a chimney of short logs laid up cob-house fashion and daubed with clay. Many of the school-houses, even to the borders of the nineteenth century, had no glass in their windows. The paper that served instead was greased with lard to make it transparent and less easily affected by wet.[5]

In some instances many district meetings were required to determine the location of one of these small buildings. Usually a spot, valueless for any other purpose, was chosen and the school erected near the road so as to occupy a minimum of space.

The equipment of the old schools was especially meager. There was the horn book, a slab of wood on which was fastened a sheet of paper covered by a transparent sheet of horn; a revolving alphabet, which exhibited one letter at a time through an opening in a disc; and the ink stand, sand box, ink powder, and quill pens. The master spent much of his time in making quill pens. Paper was rough and dark and because of its cost many pupils ciphered on birch bark.

> The colonial schools had no blackboards and no maps, but once in a while a schoolroom in the more flourishing communities would possess a globe. Slates did not come into general use until about 1820, and lead pencils not for a good many years after that. In filling the pages of their manuscript "sum-books" and "copy-books," the children were in the habit of using pen and ink exclusively.[6]

An interesting recipe for making ink, which probably could not be used safely and legally today is as follows:

> In hard frosty weather, ink will be apt to freeze; which if it once doth, it will be good for nothing; it takes away all its Blackness and Beauty. To prevent which put a few drops of brandy into it, and it will not freeze. And to hinder its moulding put a little salt therein.

The foregoing rather lengthy description of the old schools is intended to bring them into sharp contrast with the modern school, which is available for visiting and observation on the part of those interested in educational procedure. Many other interesting characterizations of the old school may be found in Clifton Johnson's *Old Time Schools and School Books,* from which many of the foregoing examples have been taken. The comparison made is intended in no way to minimize the influence of the old school and certain readers and textbooks in the development of sterling moral qualities. However, the fact remains that fully two-

[5] Clifton Johnson, *op. cit.,* pp. 36-37.

[6] *Ibid.,* pp. 37-38

thirds of the time in schools of a century and a quarter ago was wasted. It is estimated that the child of a well-taught fourth grade of today is better educated in the real sense of the word than the pupil of 1800 who had been exposed to eight or more abbreviated school sessions or winters.

Problems of the New School

Have the new schools any pressing problems to solve? It may be repeated that the six essential characteristics of a program of progressive education are: (1) individuality, (2) freedom, (3) self-directed learning, (4) use of manual and mental activities for expression, (5) group-consciousness or social adaptation, and (6) parent education. Of course the problem which looms largest is to strike an appropriate balance between individuality and freedom on the one hand and social adaptation or conformity to the admittedly desirable institutions of society on the other hand.

It is also true that the need for experimental measurement and scientific evaluation in the new schools is imperative. Apparently the progressive-education movement is in what may be considered its second stage of development. First, there was vigorous opposition to change, which has swung to uncritical acceptance of the so-called new methods in many quarters. The foregoing statements in no way detract from the fine spirit and bright promise of the new education.

It is not desirable to accept new methods simply because they are recent in origin. Fads come and go in the evolution of public education. Charters suggest that widespread national interest in educational ideas has a span of three or four years.[7] The project method was at the height of its popularity as a subject of discussion from 1917 to 1920; curriculum construction was the most popular subject from 1924 to 1927; and at present, character education and progressive education seem to be holding the center of the educational stage. Individual instruction (of a poor quality, to be sure) more than a century ago was followed by the popular monitorial system, which gave way to the improved Pestalozzian methods, and in turn many of the practices of Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Froebel have been discarded. Individual instruction is again in favor. In the classrooms of the monitorial schools of a century ago there were as many as 500 or even 1,000 children. Now Hudelson at Minnesota and others have concluded after extensive experimentation that a greater or less advantage—at least, no disadvantage—accrues to students in large sections in college and high school.

The classroom teacher necessarily plays an important part in the testing out of new methods. No student of educational research or public-school worker should hesitate to conduct needed studies in the evaluation of teaching and learning procedures for fear that a major discovery will not result. It is by the accumulation of small advantages that master methods in education are discovered. It has been stated that one of the greatest wastes in education results when administrators and teachers who have had good training in the college and graduate school fail to continue their investigations and studies after entering teaching work in the field.

It is recognized also that different kinds of workers are needed in education. Not all teachers and administrators are expected to do research. In addition to scientists and students of measurement, there is need for educational innovators, administrators, and interpreters.

A word concerning the type of research most needed in education is in order. The pure scientist in laboratory or field may be concerned only with two factors—search for truth and absolute honesty in reporting truth. The teacher in service must add to

(Continued on page 85)

[7] W. W. Charters, "Fads," *Educational Research Bulletin*, VII (October 31, 1928), 326-27.

Helen M. Lee, of Norfolk, collected dues from the following H. T. C. alumnæ teaching in her school and sent the money to the alumnæ office: Gladys Goodson, Bessie Taylor, Edna Phelps and Mrs. A. T. Warwick.

Alice Denby, Norfolk, sent in her dues to the Alumnæ Association.

Rebecca Jennings and Carrie Dickerson, South Boston, plan to organize the H. T. C. Alumnæ of Halifax County.

Juanita Beery, now Mrs. E. L. Houck of Blackstone, Virginia recently wrote the alumnæ office and sent check for dues.

Margaret Ford, Norfolk, collected dues from the alumnæ in her school and sent check to alumnæ office. Mabel Rawls and Elizabeth Terrie teach in the same school.

Mary B. Hinton, a four-year graduate, sent dues to the alumnæ office Jan. 29. Miss Hinton is teaching in Roanoke.

Doris T. Shotwell of Emporia; Mrs. Virginia Mecartney Barrow of Alberta; Mrs. Margaret Lewis Wise of Harrisonburg and Edith Glick of Mt. Crawford recently sent in their dues to the alumnæ office.

Mrs. Harry Garber, alumnæ secretary, has planned meetings of the alumnæ in the following cities: Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Hampton and Newport News. President S. P. Duke will be present at these meetings to address the alumnæ. The presidents of the above alumnæ chapters are: Gladys Lee, Richmond; Helen Bowman, Petersburg; Isabel DuVal, Norfolk; Mattie Worster, Portsmouth; Charlotte Wilson, Hampton; Emily Wiley, Newport News.

Ruby Walton, Burkville, has been appointed to organize the H. T. C. alumnæ in Nottoway County.

Most crime would disappear if there were high schools adequate to meet the needs of the United States of today and tomorrow. One good teacher is worth a platoon of policemen.—THOMAS H. BRIGGS.

"We expect an airplane generation to be pushed around in moral oxcarts."

—GOODWIN WATSON.

Youth, which is forgiven everything, forgives itself nothing; age, which forgives itself everything, is forgiven nothing.

—BERNARD SHAW.

Boy scouting means something very real to a boy. The loyalties of youth are the strongest loyalties that we have, and if we can develop them in this particular way we should do so.—*Ray Lyman Wilbur.*

The standards which teachers are required to maintain are continually rising. Their work takes on a new dignity. It is rising above a calling, above a profession, into the realms of an art. . . . . It is not too much to say that the need of civilization is the need of teachers. The contribution which they make to human welfare is beyond estimation.—*Calvin Coolidge.*

NEW SCHOOLS FOR OLD

(Continued from page 63)

these a third control—interpretation of truth to the learner—and the last of these is not the least.

Teaching viewed from this angle well may be considered one of the most attractive callings. As Buckingham quite appropriately has pointed out, the educational worker deals with living children, who are constantly changing and always in some interesting stage of development.[8] He does not experiment with sticks, stones, fossils, or bugs as do scientists in certain other fields. If teaching of children is to include study of them, then it well may be thought of as one of life's great adventures.

CARTER V. GOOD.

---

[8]B. R. Buckingham, "The Public-School Teacher as a Research Worker," *Journal of Educational Research,* XI (April, 1925), 235-43.