EDUCATIONAL COMMENT

CHILDREN AND MOVIES

The time seems to be near when the schools will exert an influence on standards of motion picture production. This desirable end promises to be the outcome of an experiment started two years ago by the National Council of Teachers of English to determine whether the motion picture tastes of high school pupils could be improved through the medium of the English class, according to Holland D. Roberts, chairman of the Council's Public Relations Committee.

The experiment was so successful that at the annual convention of the National Council in Detroit last December, the thousand teachers present voted the adoption of the report of William Lewin, Weequahic High School, Newark, chairman of the Photoplay Appreciation Committee, recommending that photoplay instruction be introduced in the schools and that courses of methods in teaching photoplay appreciation be given in schools of education.

The response of educators to these proposals would seem to indicate that motion picture appreciation will eventually be taught in secondary schools from coast to coast. Already curriculum commissions in New York, Virginia, Maryland, and California have recommended the inclusion of such courses in junior and senior high schools.

Motion picture producers and theatre managers, anticipating the higher standards that will be demanded by young people trained in discriminating criticism of photo-plays, are now beginning to cooperate with teachers in the making and selection of films.

Sixty-eight English classes in cities scattered throughout the country took part in the National Council's experiment. Boys and girls attended selected pictures in a group and then in their class-rooms discussed frankly the plays they had seen. Frequently they were more critical than adult theatre-goers. They quickly adapted principles of story structure and fundamental values taught them in studies of the classics to their judgments of current photo-plays.

One of the significant findings of the Council's study was that pupils in the experimental groups soon formed the habit of seeking the teacher's advice before seeing a picture. Ordinarily this is the last thing a pupil would think of doing.

Other findings were:

Photoplay appreciation can be taught to boys and girls of normal intelligence in grades nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. Pupils under guidance show 85 per cent superiority in reporting examples of films that have influenced their behavior, the chief influence being in the direction of higher ideals.

Class instruction excels in developing appreciation of honesty, bravery, devotion, and self-sacrifice among the ideals portrayed by screen characters.

Pupils enjoy photoplay discussion so much that it is eager and rapid.

As their first step in formulating some sort of criteria for judging photoplays, the Council committee prepared study guides for three important films, "Emperor Jones," "Little Women," and "Alice in Wonderland." These were distributed to high
schools throughout the country, and pupils were invited to submit critical essays on the pictures. The response to these method suggestions was so great that the National Council is planning the regular issuance of photoplay instruction material.

The entire project fits in with the research program of the National Council’s Curriculum Commission which is working on a modernized English curriculum to extend from elementary school to university, but it has a broader base. As Mr. Lewin said in presenting his report, “If our millions of high school students can be taught intelligently critical standards for judging photoplays, the level of taste among the rising generation of motion-picture-goers will be raised, and the whole standard of motion picture production will be improved.”

ULTIMATE CONTROL OF MOVIES WILL COME THROUGH THE SCHOOL

Thoughtful parents view the influence of current movies upon their children with apprehension and alarm. This fear is well founded, for the Payne Fund studies have shown that even young children remember more than they miss in the pictures. High-school boys and girls have their attitudes toward important values changed to a measurable degree by a single exposure to some pictures, and this influence is both cumulative and permanent. Manners, clothes, and play are modified by the characters who move upon the silver screen. The movies are a very powerful influence for good or bad. They are potent in raising the standards of a nation or in debasing them.

The apprehension of parents is born of the belief that the commercial movies are made by adults for adults without regard for effect upon the social customs of a nation or for the influence upon the immature who, on the average, see a movie once a week. On such visits the children are exposed to pictures of sex, crime, and love in about equal numbers three out of the four weeks in a month. And this is an unbalanced diet for the children. A social instrument has been developed by human genius which needs to be controlled in the public interest.

One method of control has been devised and placed in practical operation in many states. Censorship has been established by law, but that device is a rough screen capable of eliminating only the grossest infractions of mores, and incapable of influencing picture-making until after the product is ready for the market. Useful to a degree, it cannot completely solve the problem.

Other methods of control are advocated, however, and of these one is peculiarly powerful over the long range. If the public exhibited discrimination such that it would ignore poor pictures and patronize good pictures the producers would be quick to respond to the best of their ability. Up to date the public has not shown great discrimination and for a cogent reason: It knows little about how pictures are made and what makes pictures good or poor.

At this point the schools can render a signal service through appreciation courses. They have for the last twenty years demonstrated their ability to raise appreciably the artistic discrimination of a nation. They have aided materially in the development of a more intelligent appreciation of literature and music. They are, therefore, favorably situated to add to their repertoire the photoplay—probably the most powerful of all the arts and certainly the most spectacularly interesting to children. Through an understanding of the nature of the photoplay children will learn discrimination, and the children of today are the adults of tomorrow.

This obligation has been sensed by many schools. Teachers of English in whose field motion-picture appreciation naturally lies, are beginning to insert ten lesson-units in
their English courses to the great benefit and interest of senior high-school students. The National Council of Teachers of English is actively supporting the idea. Organizations such as the International Council on Religious Education, the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C. A., the Jewish Welfare Board, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, in their own educational groups for adolescents are all addressing themselves to the problem. It would appear that the appreciation of motion pictures is on the way promptly to be included in high-school curriculums. And if agencies such as these deliberately underwrite the project, it is only a matter of a decade or so until the public will intelligently discriminate between good and poor pictures, which discrimination will have a direct effect upon the box-office receipts of exhibitors—than which there is no more powerful influence known to producers. Such a public will also evolve techniques of control that seem to be beyond the ability of the present generation of adults to whom commercial pictures are a mystery, and seem to be a menace.

W. W. Charters,
In Educational Research Bulletin.

THE READING TABLE


Out of the mass of confusing educational theories now current this practical treatment of teacher and pupil growth and development seems particularly clear. The integrative aspects of teaching and learning are kept in mind.

Only through integration of theory and practice can one develop in independence and power in teaching. This book makes this integration seem within range of accomplishment of most teachers by dividing teaching into two major phases. The first phase is that of administrative procedures which have to do with pupil growth in independence and power to get things done by giving him opportunity to develop such attitudes and skills as insight, self-direction, self-appraisal, self-improvement, cooperation, leadership, initiative, and self-control. The second phase is that of teaching techniques which have to do with the ways and means by which a teacher stimulates, guides, and encourages pupils in his efforts to control subject matter and acquire desirable learning techniques. These teaching techniques are clearly made synonymous with learning techniques.

This book makes integration of personality the aim of learning. Pupil growth or learning is divided into three main lines: 1. Development of independence and power in getting things done; 2. Acquisition of learning techniques; 3. Gaining mastery of subject matter. Child study is made the most important basis of teaching. Many guides and suggestions are given the teacher to aid her in meeting individual differences. The appendix includes helpful lesson plans for diagnostic work in the classroom and also illustrating the use of the principles of problem solving, appreciation, and drill type lessons for various grades.

This book should be helpful as a text in educational psychology, in a course preparatory to student teaching, or as a text for student teachers. The problems and suggested tests at the close of each chapter should stimulate interest and thinking on the part of the students.

Virginia Buchanan


This is something new in a history textbook. It presents, not merely the activities of men through the ages, but the growth and development of civilization through ancient and medieval history. The subtitle, "The Rise of Classical Culture and the Development of Medieval Civilization," reveals