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## FROEBEL AND THE MODERN KINDERGARTEN

ONE hundred years is a long time for an idea to live. In 1837 Frederick Froebel gave the world the idea of the kindergarten for the education of young children. It has spread in Europe and the United States until today in our country 30% of all five-year old children have the opportunity of such training.

Froebel loved children; he watched their spontaneous activities, and then built his theories around his observations. He wanted to help parents to live more intelligently and happily with their children in the home rather than to establish schools. As he looked out over the little homes of Blankenburg in Germany and noticed the growing gardens adjoining them he said, "I shall call my idea KINDERGARTEN"—the children's garden.

Gardens have been made for ages past. The principles remain the same—we sow; we cultivate; we reap—but the methods of carrying on each process have changed radically. This article will discuss Froebel's principles, not his methods, that we may see how his theories of one hundred years ago have influenced the kindergartens of today. We hear much about progressive teaching in 1937; we shall leave it to you to determine whether Froebel was a progressive teacher in 1837.

Froebel said, "*The kindergarten should be a place where children can grow, find out things, and be happy.*" In our kindergarten at the training school of the Harrisonburg State Teachers College, we first try to provide a suitable place for our children to live. We have a large, sunny room

(large as schoolrooms go) which is kept clean and sanitary by our faithful janitor by daily sweeping with dust-laying compound and by a thorough scrubbing of the floor every Saturday that the children may work and play on the floor or at the tables as suits their purpose best without soiling their clothes. Adjoining the room is a bathroom which enables children to be independent in their toilet habits and to wash their hands or clean up anything as the occasion demands.

We have tried to make the room colorful with a few large pictures and one beautifully colored frieze of farm life which is on the level with the child's eye so that he may enjoy it. From time to time we put up smaller seasonal pictures on our ample bulletin-board space where dark, unattractive blackboards used to be. Three years ago our little chairs were painted red, not by a painter, but by the children themselves. This adds much cheer to the room without hurting the children's eyes, as the tables were left the natural wood. We have cupboards where materials are easily accessible to the children and where they may put things away in an orderly way, for we believe the old adage, "Order is the first law of beauty." Froebel said, "Beauty is a part of life; little children need it."

That children may experiment and "find out things," we provide many stimulating playthings and materials. Few of them are expensive things; in fact, most of the construction material is waste material such as boxes that stores throw away, paper cuttings, cloth from home, and hosts of odds and ends. A student teacher after she had been in the kindergarten three days said, "I never saw a schoolroom with so many



things in it that didn't cost anything." We have trains that need tracks and stations, airplanes that need an airport, dolls that must have furniture and clothes made for them, besides the daily housekeeping needs of our playhouse corner. We have large blocks for building, providing for large muscle activities, and plastic clay that gives the child so much satisfaction in modeling and strengthens the muscles of his hands. Our tools for construction work offer all kinds of possibilities for making things from a simple airplane with two cross pieces to a bookcase for the child's playhouse at home. In our book corner imagination may have free range and information may be found as the child seeks to determine how airplanes are decorated, where to put the smoke stacks on a boat, what a sleeping car looks like. Then we have many living things from time to time—fish, snails, rabbits, chickens, earthworms, a canary, plants, and flowers. One day when some fourth grade pupils came in to wash their hands, as they do each noon, and noticed our canary for the first time, one boy ran over to the cage and said, "Look what they have now!" So the atmosphere of a garden promotes curiosity, growth, and happiness.

Froebel said, "*Children learn through self-activity.*" Today we would call it freedom, creativity, initiative. Only as we have experience first hand and do the thing ourselves does learning become permanent. So we try to have the children's days filled with *real* experience. To encourage observation and responsibility and to afford the joy of handling and caring for pets, our little bantam hen is perhaps the best example. First, she had to have a cage which the children made from a small grocery box turned on its side. Then they took the bottom of a larger box for the runway and enclosed all with chicken wire. Soon the hen showed indications of wanting to set on the nest provided, but it was decided

that three weeks was too long to keep her in our room and for us to wait for eggs to hatch. So we went to the hatchery and got some eggs that had been incubated and would hatch in a few days. We put them under the hen and she kept them warm for the remaining four days.

When the children came in they heard the peep-peep, and from that time on all the morning a group of eager watchers surrounded the cage. As they saw one little chick peep its head out from the mother's wing and watched the mother peck at the shell to help another one out, one child remarked, "What I'd like to know is how feathers got inside that egg," and another answered, "Because a hen layed the egg," and the teacher added, "That is one of the wonderful things about an egg." The children were experiencing one of the wonders of creation. Froebel said, "*Nature reveals God to little children.*" A similar impression was made after the children had prepared the soil for their own garden and had planted the seeds and watered them. On a Monday morning when we went out to see what had happened and found the seeds had pushed up through the caked ground, one boy exclaimed, "Why, those little radish seeds are stronger than the earth!"

To give the children other opportunities to learn for themselves we take many excursions—to the fire house, to church, to the post office, and to stores whenever we need supplies. Much appreciation was expressed for labor and property and for the beauty of spring flowers when we went to a neighboring garden and watched the gardener as he cleared the ground and transplanted some bluebottles. He let the children pick some and then gave them some of the bulbs to take home. As they left, they thanked him and said, "He likes children." Another said, "I guess he was glad we came, for we didn't tramp on his garden."

There are hosts of opportunities for self-



activity and expression in our work period as they work with wood, clay, cloth, paper, and oilcloth making things for themselves to use, for gifts, or for the group. Their stages of development are illustrated by three different children's remarks as they worked. Early in the year a teacher asked a child hammering boards together what he was making, and he said, "I don't know until I get done." Some months later a group were at the clay table when one brought the cookie cutters from the playhouse. At first they filled the cutter with clay only to find they could not get it out and preserve the shape. Soon a little girl pressed lightly with her cutter and tore off the edges and exclaimed, "Look, I've found the way!" Oh, the joy of finding the way herself.

Self-activity finds some of the most natural opportunities for expression in our music period. In rhythms they respond as an idea comes to them, or they find the joy of imitating another and realizing that they "can do it, too." When we couldn't find a song about our snails, a child suggested spontaneously, "Let's make one up." In literature they retell favorite stories and poems and make up their own; so, their power of language grows.

*"Play is the child's serious business. Children like to be with people; they need associations of their own age"*—we find in Froebel's writings. In our work period the children are happy playing together; they learn to share toys and tools, to be responsible in their care, and to give and receive suggestions. One mother wrote on a report card that she returned, "I work and can't come to visit the kindergarten, but I sure would like to see all those children playing together without quarreling." Another parent while visiting said, "How do you get the children to scatter out and not all want the same thing?" and the reply was, "Because we consider the interests of the individual children and provide materials to satisfy their needs."

As a garden sometimes needs cultivating and weeding, so in the kindergarten difficulties arise that call for direct training. We try to make the routine management such that it will be easy for the child to do the right thing, that is, the thing that will not interfere with the rights of others. In the winter we must spend considerable time showing the child how to take care of his heavy wraps—to put his cap in one sleeve, his mittens in another, to put his snow-suit pants over the wire, and then to slip his coat over the coat hanger and button one button so he can carry it all safely to hang it up or take it down. Using pulverized soap without waste is another illustration or necessary habit training—to wet his hands, take one push of soap, rub to make his hands soapy and clean, and then rinse with clean water. The preparation for lunch and rest periods has a definite routine, as does putting away materials. Such consistent routine gives the child a feeling of independence and security and calmness. But accidents will happen sometimes; after spilling a glass of water on the lunch table, the only thing to do is to wipe it up, and this the children soon do without reminding. One day a child spilled a can of paint and he said in the most natural way, "That happened when I wasn't thinking."

Our control, or cultivation, of good habits is based first on understanding why we do not make a noise in the hall, ("It might disturb someone"); why we put the long blocks in the box straight, ("We don't waste time taking the crooked ones out, and then they all go in.") Next, come hosts of chances to practice these habits in their everyday living together. But if a child disturbs others persistently, then "weeding" takes place and he is segregated from the group, that is, he is asked to sit over to one side where he can see how children share the blocks, take turns painting, or wait to wash their hands. Then he is always reinstated in the situation where he gave of-



fense that he may prove to himself that he can do the right thing.

Praising what children do well is usually sufficient stimulus to desirable behavior, as "Helping to roll out the rug helps us get ready for stories quicker," rather than giving the child any feeling of superiority by a personal remark, like "You were a good boy to help."

Again Froebel said, "*Children take to learning as naturally as to play.*" Their many questions show how eager they are for information: "What is the difference between dew and fog?" "How can a heavy airplane stay up in the air?" "Is a bouquet flowers or a vase?" They acquire new words naturally when understanding is the background. When we were discussing how eggs were kept warm the words *hatchery*, *incubator*, *electricity*, and *temperature* presented no difficulty as indicated by a little girl's question, "Did the hatchery man put a thermometer under the hen to find the temperature so as to know how much electricity to turn on?"

New skills are fascinating to children. Early in the year they saw just for the fun of the activity, and much later saw for a definite purpose of construction. They have readily learned the blanket stitch so as to make the oilcloth head for their hobby horses for the May Day. Pouring water without spilling and hanging up the doll's clothes are both fascinating skills to be learned. New experiences are a rich part of the child's learning. In the midst of the making of our train one boy went to visit his grandmother in South Carolina and when he returned he suggested that we needed a dining-car on our train, "Because I went in one with my Daddy and he told me a lot about them when we went back to our coach. And when I got home I found a picture in my book that I'll bring and show you." This incident reminds me of the refrain of the folk tale (though I change the words a bit, the idea is the

same): "I saw it with my eyes; I heard it with my ears; and part of it"—I found out for myself.

And what is the result of kindergarten training? The whole child as an individual grows and develops at his own rate, he gains confidence in himself, he adapts himself to his surroundings, and he learns to live happily with others.

Was Froebel a progressive teacher in 1837?

NELLIE L. WALKER

## THE HIGH SCHOOL AS A PEOPLE'S COLLEGE

### PART FIVE

#### *What Qualifications Are Needed in High School Teachers?*

IN four preceding articles of this series we have considered children of high school age, purposes of secondary education, the curriculum of the schools, and the place of subject matter. The main conclusions from these four articles form the basis of some intelligent demands for types of teachers needed. The conclusions are stated again here in a form so brief that they can serve as premises for the conclusions we may reach about teachers:

1. Children themselves are so important in education that they should be provided for in terms of their adolescent needs, aside from traditional demands as to subject matter, ease of administration, or teaching convenience.

2. The genuine needs of pupils in the present and near future constitute the only defensible aims of education which teachers carry on as the agents of society and interpreters for children.

3. Pupils should learn in the schools those skills, knowledges, and appreciations which constitute growth, which are within their abilities to learn, which they can by experience comprehend, and which can be