Praise or Censure

Two teachers in Michigan University recently made a most interesting experiment. A class of fifty students was divided haphazard into groups of twenty-five. The same exercise in composition was given to each group. To the first group the teacher said, "A hasty examination shows that you seem to have done very badly. Twelve year old children could have done better. You had better write it again." To the second group the teacher said, "A hasty examination shows that you have done remarkably well. I am going to ask you to take the test again." The result was that the first group did no better, in fact they averaged a little lower. The second group improved seventy per cent.

Read this, you scolding, fault-finding pedagogues. Your scolding is not only discourteous and unladylike, but it does not pay. No! That is not at all what should be said to you. It will only make you more pronounced in your fault-finding. Listen again and take this other advice. Ye have spoken kindly to your children, giving them every encouragement and all due praise. Continue in that good way, for verily ye shall win the triple reward—the thanks of your little ones, their progress in all their work, and the approval of your own conscience. And if you value them at all, you will have a voice that charms, a brow without wrinkles, a face that never grows old.

School Failures

There sit before me forty-eight young people writing on a supplemental examination in arithmetic. Why did they fail on the mid-summer examination? Some will say they were lazy, some will say they have little mathematical ability, some will blame the papers set at mid-summer, some will find fault with the teaching. Perhaps there is something in each of the reasons given, and perhaps there is something in the complaint that the text-book is faulty. It is with this last point I wish to deal just now. I am not going to compare the text with others built on the same plan, since all others appear to be built on somewhat the same plan. Probably the text used in our schools is quite as good as the best. The point at issue is whether the plan is not altogether wrong.

Dr. Dewey has the idea that if a student comes face to face with a real life problem, it will suggest to his mind all the questions that are worth solving. For instance, if a lad becomes interested in the erection of a building, there will be numerous questions touching the manufacture of brick, lumber, nails, paint, plaster, etc. There will also be problems connected with the expenditure of money—paying for materials, paying wages and the like. Now problems arising in this way are real, and every one of them has a meaning. On the other hand problems from a text-book seem artificial. They come unsolicited. There is no setting for them and, therefore, no reason for attempting to solve them. Frequently they are misunderstood. Indeed, in most cases, when a solution is not found by a student it is owing to one of two causes—inability to understand the problem or lack of motive.

What seems to be required for school is a series of problems or undertakings or projects, that will call forth life interest, and which will serve as the ground or basis for composition, arithmetic, geography manual work and other activities. The lesson should give way to the occupation or rather the occupation should lead to the lesson. As it is, lessons are too detached and meaningless. Questions are thrown at the student by impersonal beings—the authors of the texts. They do not rise up of their own accord, out of experience. It is a fair venture to wager that not fifty per cent. of Grade IX pupils understand anything about stocks and shares, even after they have worked their way through the problems of the text-book. It was so in my own case. I knew perfectly the mathematics of the thing, but the thing itself—a stock