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HOW THE MAGAZINES CAN HELP THE SCHOOL TEACHER

BY ANNA TOMWELL

If you have a son, or a daughter, a sister or a brother at school, show this article to their teachers, for this plea, most direct and particular, that we should use magazines and periodicals in the schools will interest them. In both public and high schools, but more especially in the high schools, where the age of the students permits their extended use, magazine reading should find a place in the daily work. Magazines and periodicals give the life of the time in literature, in information, in biography. Right now, their use by teachers and pupils both in and out of school is negligible, although we hear of instances where the teachers are realizing their value. We believe that an extended use of magazines and periodicals in the schools would increase the efficiency of the schools beyond calculation.

SCHOOLS get behind the times; schools always have gotten behind the times, as the history of education tells, and have had to be brought up again—a hard matter, as the lives of famous educators show. In Canada are schools that we consider—and rightly—to be good schools; but they are not as good as they could be. When the curriculum is laid down, teachers trained, and time tables arranged, there is the framework of the modern school; the life-blood has still to be added, and vitality inspired. How often is the school really alive? To what extent is the school directly related to the life of its city, to the life of the nation, or to the life of the pupils? You may go into one mathematics class after another to find students yawning over difficulties in arithmetic, bored over problems in geometry, trigonometry and algebra, because they do not realize the real importance of these subjects, because the problems have no reality beyond the demands of an examination. The geography classes may be enlivened by visits to the moving picture theatre if there is one in town that shows the right kind of pictures, but in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred the geography classes are only recitations out of a text-book, dull beyond the power of fancy to imagine. History text-books

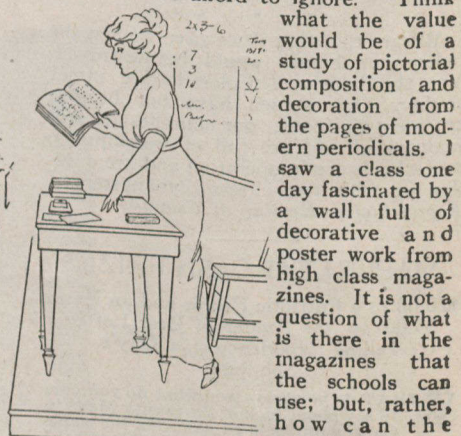
glide over the last fifty years as if the last fifty years were ice too thin to bear them, the result being that the relation of history to present politics is not realized; the result of this is that the boys and girls, when, becoming ever so little older, they are men and women have no vital realization of the life of the nation, and the national life suffers. "Literature"—at the word some boy groans, having recollections of weary hours over an author who seems to him old-fashioned, some girl sighs over longer hours spent memorizing lines she did not appreciate. "What"—they ask, and are not answered—"what is the use of this old stuff?" Even in the science classes over the latest subjects on the curriculum, the same deadly dull, unreal, impracticable spirit of inactivity steals. The schools get out of touch with life.

At present neither teachers nor students use magazines and periodicals purposely and purposively in the study of the subject in hand. Because everyone reads magazines to a certain extent, the teachers at least know something of what is being done and written in the different departments of human life. But they don't apply their knowledge to their teaching. They stick to the text-book. Of course, to a large extent they feel impelled to do this; even so, a determined effort on their part for freedom and spontaneity in teaching must in the nature of things succeed. The schools could have more life.

What may teachers and students expect to find in magazines and periodicals that will have bearing on the process of education, that will give them inspiration, information and help? First and foremost they get the record of our present day life, throbbing vitality, reality surging with interest. They will not find the present-day reality in a text-book of European manners at the close of the Napoleonic wars, necessary as this subject is, rightly considered. We do not need to sacrifice knowledge of the history of former times to keep in touch with current events, but most certainly the former should give a place to the latter. It is more necessary to know the how and why of garden cities and town planning and of urban transportation than it is to know the method of conducting tax-gathering in the Roman Empire. Modern social conditions are treated and treated well in modern magazines; they are not mentioned in school text-books. It is from our knowledge of present conditions that we obtain inspiration for our modern life. It is from living men and women that we get the ideas that count in making life what it may be. Present history and present biography are in the magazines.

Besides this general knowledge of facts and of persons, various scores of periodicals are devoted to the very subjects that form some part of the education of the schools. From these both teacher and pupils can get inspiration and also the

latest information as to what is being done in their department. It means a great deal to boys and girls to realize that literature is not an invention of Professor Dry-as-Dust, but a living reality; that new discoveries are being made in geography; that art is a thing of the present, and science of the future. Read *The Bookman's* critique on Dickens, on Scott; let the class see that living men care a good deal about these writers that the boys and girls consider old-fashioned, and the boys and girls will fall in line and catch the enthusiasm; Dickens and Scott have suddenly got life. Or read a little travel story from one of the standard magazines describing Scott's home as it now is, and see the interest in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" (a text-book poem) go up one hundred per cent. Let the girl who despises mathematical calculations read of Mme. Curie's work in radium in a magazine and she will realize the importance of mathematics and go at her work in a different spirit. Interest in Canadian history will be vivified by discovering that log-cabins are still of sufficient interest to everyone that a modern magazine gives several pages of pictures of them. In science and in art, the magazines are full of information which the live teacher and school cannot afford to ignore. Think



what the value would be of a study of pictorial composition and decoration from the pages of modern periodicals. I saw a class one day fascinated by a wall full of decorative and poster work from high class magazines. It is not a question of what is there in the magazines that the schools can use; but, rather, how can the schools get on

without using magazines and periodicals?

Then comes the question: Knowing that the magazines and periodicals contain information that is needed in the class-room, that they have a value in giving purpose and meaning to school work, how can they best be used, and how will their general acknowledged value work out in detail? They must be used by both teachers and students both in and out of the class-room. The advantage of their use to teachers being evident, it is not necessary to deal with this phase of the matter. There remains the unworked field of their use in the class-room.

When I say that magazines and periodicals will give inspiration to the work of the school-room, I do not mean that their use to this end should become part of the routine; if this happens, reference to magazines, reading from them, the use of them would become as mechanical as some of the class-work criticized in this article. But there is no doubt that an occasional reading from a modern article dealing with a man or woman who is doing something in the world, or from an account of a new discovery in science or travel, would really vitalize the lives and work of both teachers and pupils, and bring a fresh realization of the direct relation of the school work to life. Instead of being a more or less efficient preparation for life, the school life would be realized to be part of life itself.

For arousing and maintaining interest and lessening the strain of direct discipline, the use of magazines would seem pertinent. Imagine the effect on dull, worried and tired students, if the teacher in history walked into the class-room, and without a reference to text-book or lesson, began to read a modern article on the subject of the lesson. Gone the dullness, the tiredness, and the lack of interest; and by the time the reading was finished, the class would be ready and keen for the historical discussion. For one thing, such evident interest on the part of the teacher in his work arouses a response in the class, although they may not be conscious of the reason.

To have the pupils look up and get the articles ready to read, too, is ideal; and with students of High School age this method of bringing modern information to the school-room can be used to advantage. The debating societies already use periodicals in preparing debates, and their use for this is spreading to the debates which are now a part of the school-work

(Concluded on page 25)