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NATURE AND THE NEW EDUCATION PART II

By R. S. Sherman

But enough of maxims, isolated dogmas and empirical generalizations. I shall now present to you my definite views on the form or system of education which should be adopted in order to furnish the state with desirable citizens, and produce men who are brave and strong, yet gentle, temperate, philosophical and efficient.

I would start within our present system by eliminating formal examinations and for grading purposes use the standard educational tests, or better ones if such can be devised. These tests determine, or are supposed to determine the intellectual age of the child. In other words their sole object would be to obtain a basis for grouping the children into classes.

The primary work would be conducted along modern lines as at present practised by the best teachers. Dramatization of nursery stories, song and play, conducted out of doors where possible or practicable. In the teaching of words, the child must be given a sense impression of the object, notion, or idea named or conveyed by the word. Pictures will not do. Verbal descriptions will not do. The actual object must be subjected to the child's senses. I went into a receiving class not long ago where the teacher had drawn a very good picture of a sheep on the board. I asked the pupils what it represented. Some thought it was a cow, others a pig; a few remembered that it was called a sheep; but none had actually seen a sheep. Do not let us deceive ourselves; we are not improving the minds of these children by loading their memories with words that have no actual vital meaning to them. No: the object must be perceived by the child through one or more of its senses before the word representing that object is taught. Instead of teaching words relative to spring in winter, or vice versa, I would let each season bring its own harvest of ideas, sense impressions and the words to convey or represent them. To do this you must take the children outdoors and show them and let them observe for themselves the bluebird, the swallow, the chickadee and the robin, the crocus, the daffodil, the daisy, and the buttercup; the bursting buds, the grassy glades dotted with dandelions; the glory of the sunlight and the gloom of the cloud.

In spite of the ridicule heaped upon Josh Billings and his disciples, I would make the spelling of words truly phonetic. The very alphabet would require revision. Every sound in our language should have a special character to represent it, and the same letter should not be made to represent more than one sound. Think of the vast saving of time and energy, not to mention the benefits of added clearness, accuracy and

efficiency, which this system would bring about. I fail to see any more reason for retaining our present system of orthography than there was for perpetuating the quaint English of Chaucer's time.

It would follow naturally that at an early age the children would be taught shorthand and ultimately I have no doubt short hand would replace longhand altogether. The time will no doubt come when all our books and papers will be published in shorthand. Prejudice and false sentiment are largely responsible for burdening humanity with our present cumbersome illogical system. In this direction we have made no advancement in a thousand years.

As regards Arithmetic, so dear to the hearts of parents and teachers, so dreaded by pupils of all ages, I would insist on the number sense of little children being developed by sense teaching only, and they should deal only with numbers well within their power to grasp. It is, or ought to be, a truism that all knowledge comes first through the senses. Yet for generations arithmetic seems to have been made an exception to the rule. This is wrong. Some earnest teachers not only realize that it is wrong, but are doing their best to correct it. Mr. Elmer W. Reid, one of the advanced thinkers on the staff of our city schools, has published an excellent pamphlet on Arithmetic, advocating more sense teaching in this subject, and giving practical hints on handling number work in the various grades.

The primary work in Arithmetic, is far more efficient and up to date than that in the higher grades. We find that as the pupil advances, sense teaching diminishes. Quoting from Mr. Reid's pamphlet: "It is usually here (in the Junior Grade) that the small wayfarer first tires of the journey that leads to the temple of Athena. Instead of the busy work of the former grade, the blocks and splints for counting, he is placed on new rations, bare figures. He steps from the shore of concrete objects into the sea of abstract numbers. These pupils should also be made to see that Arithmetic operations function in everyday life. A column of bare figures to add is foreign to the daily experience of the child, and becomes a school task, uninteresting and without reason."

When the pupils come to deal with measures, they should be shown each unit of measure, the inch, the square inch, and the cubic inch, and so on with the foot and the yard. They be shown each unit of measure, the inch, the square inch, and the cubic inch, and so on with the foot and the yard they should have a first hand knowledge of the rod, the square rod and the acre. They should actually lay these out on the ground.