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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Bearley, Molly, Editor

The Teaching Of Young Children

New York: Schocken Books, 1970, Pp. vii +192.

. . . when we teach we need to be aware of the fact that the patterns of reaction that each child displays to persons, things and situations are the result of his own continuous cumulative growth and development, and that his individual history of personal experience is recorded and categorized in active mental patterns that are ready for further experience.

Inasmuch as the public school is a planned environment, and teaching in it is deliberate, planned intervention in children's continuous cumulative growth and development, the authors of this volume, *The Teaching Of Young Children*, believe that the appropriateness of such intervention is the key to effective education. Education which leads to worthwhile goals of clarification and understanding is teaching that supports, extends, and continues purposes from within. Teachers cannot give children experience itself; they can only provide children with conditions for experience, offering ways of structuring thoughts and ordering values. Teachers must take up their pupils' learning development where they find it—"to join the main stream"—"to get a glimpse of the children's own learning powers." This is understood in the light of the work done by Piaget, and is vastly different from programmed learning, or extrinsically motivated behavior, as it is generally conceived.

To this end, then, paying attention to the learner, his thought processes, and the levels of thinking and conceptual skills he brings to the learning experience, the considerations of this book are addressed. In the chapters of the book, throughout the major areas of science, art, literature, movement, mathematics, music, and into the realm of morality and values, the authors are demonstrating and discussing the rationale for ensuring continuity of children's learning from the massive volumes of experience they have had in their early years before entering school.

In science, the teacher's goal is to perpetuate and enrich the child's enquiring nature; all individuals need to have a rational view of the world if they are to make sense of it. In art, the teacher needs to provide conditions in which aesthetic development can flourish; it is essential to understand how art is related to intellectual and emotional development, and to realize its function in extending human experience.

In literature, teachers must recognize that stories can evoke deeply satisfying intellectual and emotional responses from children; such responses can give rise to accommodatory behavior, and may bring order and clarification to the complexity of life's experiences.

Relationship is the key in the establishment of concepts and learning patterns generally. Armed with the knowledge that children have a natural appetite for movement, teachers can use relatedness in movement to lead to the development of sound, personal relationships within the increasingly complex context of the school. "Because . . . every movement of man is expressive of himself, his aims, struggles and achievements, it reflects the inner activity of the person."

The ability of a child to deal effectively with numerical relationships is dependent upon the development of mental structures within him, not upon the building up of rote knowledge. The facility for perceptual learning by young children can easily lead to rote learning and be misinterpreted as conceptual learning. It is important for the teacher to differentiate between them. In the realm of mathematical thinking, then, "the contribution of a teacher is to provide the materials and language which are appropriate to the level of thinking reached by a child, but which also provoke the quest for further clarification and extension."

As in other areas, a sense of commitment to music grows with the child's experience of involvement in it. When children are guided in the gradual development of their individual and personal worlds of music "they will find the key to the wider world of music as established in our culture pattern."

The child's sense of morality and values is based upon gradual differentiation between "self" and "others." The very young child is intellectually unable to put himself at another's point of view. Conflict of purposes among group members results in a break-down of cooperation; the necessary accommodations to another's point of view is not possible. Because children are dependent upon adults in building up a store of possible actions, teachers must help them to understand justifications for rules, and to offer "choices" of behavior. In order for choice-making to be autonomous, children must be able to explore alternative ways of behaving. These authors suggest that teachers can foster moral progress by giving responsibility to promote self-respect; by being interested in trivial problems that loom large to children; and by refraining from arbitrary decisions which override a child's developing ability to think for himself.

Not for the ditto-dependent, gadget-gearred, mechanically mani-

pulative teacher is the philosophy of this book. But, for teachers looking for thinking and growth patterns “which they themselves can fill in with their own thought and experience,” this book offers much to help them in presenting ideas for close, courageous scrutiny, in maintaining continuous dialogue in the classroom, in holding fast to humanness, and in perfecting their professional knowledge and skill to teach when children are *willing* and *able*.