

**AN EXPERIMENT IN  
EDUCATION: ALSO, THE  
IDEAS WHICH INSPIRED IT  
AND WERE INSPIRED BY IT**

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An experiment in education: also, the ideas which inspired it and were inspired by it by Mary R. Alling-Aber

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**MARY R. ALLING-ABER**

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# AN EXPERIMENT IN EDUCATION

ALSO

*THE IDEAS WHICH INSPIRED IT  
AND WERE INSPIRED BY IT*

BY

MARY R. ALLING-ABER



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TO  
PAULINE AGASSIZ SHAW

## PREFACE

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IN August of 1880, during a railway journey, I had some conversation with a stranger on educational topics. Some features of the conversation being reported, they reached one who was sufficiently interested in new things to wish to see any reasonable thing tried, and was able to provide opportunity for the trial.

As without the opportunity I could not have made the experiment, it is with no small degree of gratitude that I ask the reader to give to the maker of the opportunity—Mrs. Pauline Agassiz Shaw—due credit for whatever is helpful in the pages of this book.

Acknowledgment is due also to the teachers who aided in the work, since it was their patient, loyal efforts to give the plan a fair and complete trial—each in the parts assigned to her—that largely contributed to the final results. These teachers were Miss ANNA B. SHELDON, NINA MOORE, DORA V. WILLIAMS, CLARA F. PALMER, and RACHAEL C. CLARKE.

Whenever, in expressing opinions, I have transcended the limits of the experiment or inferences logically deducible from it, I have been made bold



to do so by the fact that a considerable body of opinion which, prior to the experiment, was theoretical only, was proved practicable or reasonable by the results of the experiment; and, although well aware that to prove one thing does by no means prove another or a different thing, the opinions not proved are so similar in kind and so allied by presumptive reasoning to those that were proved that their inclusion seems justified in a work of this kind.

Prior to the experiment I had ten years of teaching in high and normal schools. From one-half to one third of the time allotted to a subject had been spent in teaching the student how to use his mind, to use books, specimens, etc.; in other words, how to study. This waste was irritating and pitiable in view of the short time allowed to subjects, and I could not be reconciled to the notion that an adult mind must so generally lack power to work economically, trustworthily, and discriminatingly.

It was these conditions, superinduced on a tendency previously formed—during a course at the Oswego State Normal School—to watch the pupil's mind more than the subject being taught, which forced, at last, a conviction that mind *per se* was not to blame, and that bad mental habits and mental life devoid of habit were legitimate products of our processes of education. There naturally followed some devising of means to lessen the evils, and so grew up a desire to experiment with children.

At the opening of the experiment in 1881, so far

as I know, natural-science studies had not been made an integral part of any primary-school course, and literature and history in such grades were mostly unthought of. Some object-lessons had dealt with natural objects and phenomena, and some stories and poems had been drawn from literature and history; but the uses of these had not been of the sort recommended in this book; science, literature, and history had not been made the chief objects of study in primary nor in the grammar grades. Neither are they so now, but long strides in that direction have been taken in many places; so that all which my experiment was meant to demonstrate as feasible now bids fair to become the common usage in education.

If such usage were established and everywhere accepted as a matter of course, this book would have no excuse for being; but because it is not so, and educational thought is still feeling its way towards the same ends and usages for which my experiment was made, this book is offered with the hope that it may do something to increase the impetus of the present movement.

