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AN EXPERIMENT;
PP. 3-41**

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by

MARY S. MAROT

This report is the result of three
years' research as Recorder of the
Bureau of Educational Experiments

BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENTS

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SCHOOL RECORDS—AN EXPERIMENT

PURPOSE AND HISTORY

In March, 1918, the Bureau of Educational Experiments began an experiment in school records. The undertaking arose from a practical need felt by all experimental schools,—the need to know what subject matter, equipment, and methods bring promising results. Another desire, held in common with most school experiments, was to accumulate material which should in time contribute towards a better knowledge of children's growth in school. To these ends the Bureau felt it necessary to work directly on the technique of school recording.

At the outset of the experiment the old forms of school reports in common use were discarded as inadequate to convey real information concerning school procedure. The question of form and method of keeping new records was left open, the only requirement being that each record should supply educational data in a sufficiently organized form to be readily used by the Bureau and by the school or teacher co-operating in the experiment.

The active participants in the experiment were the City and Country School (formerly the Play School), the Nursery School, several experimental classes in public elementary schools, and a Recorder. The City and Country School children were from three to nine years old, in groups of eight to fifteen children. The Nursery School children were between one and a half and three years old, in a group of eight children. The public school children were of the First, Fifth, and Sixth Grades. The illustrations in this report are nearly all from notes of these schools, and most of the children were under ten years of age.

For the last two years, to June, 1921, the experiment was confined to the City and Country School and the Nursery School. In both of these schools the recording was attempted by the teachers and by myself. In the public school classes I undertook the classroom recording alone.

The teachers of the City and Country School had been working upon notes of their work for several years before the Bureau began its experiment. They had kept notes of individual children and of the teachers' methods, but they were not well satisfied with their material. They had followed the plan of making daily notes. Most of the teachers in the school followed this plan until the last year of our experiment.

But it was a burdensome method for the teacher, and it was not practical for general use because it set before the reader too unorganized or too detailed a picture.

As recorder I made many notes in these schools and classes, but they also were unsatisfactory, though for another reason. My notes of specific subject matter, for example, always missed significant connecting links which only the teacher could supply. When I tried to record the interesting first reactions of a group of children to some new experience, I had to go to the teacher to find out what other experiences had led up to this one. Moreover, I did not always know which remarks of the children were important enough to record. My usefulness was temporary and experimental. I helped to do part of the work of recording while we were all learning how, and I sifted out and generalized into conclusions the many differences of opinion and the many ways of taking notes.

For a limited time we tried continuous literal note-taking every day, to record certain subject matter. A stenographer had to be specially trained for this type of recording. It was expensive and the notes contained much irrelevant matter. Even an expert stenographer loses much of the significance of the byplay because nobody but the teacher understands its implications. Not even the teacher can catch everything that goes on in a class of children, but she can catch more than anyone else even while she is teaching. The verbatim notes did not prove to be of special help to the teachers and we discarded them except where we desired to quote the children exactly, and we decided that these quoted remarks must be chosen by the teacher in order to assure their significance.

These experiences in recording and the conclusions we drew from them threw the responsibility for making records squarely upon the teachers. The teachers and directors of the City and Country School and the Nursery School accepted this responsibility with my help until June 1921. They were ready then to assume all of the work themselves. The plan finally adopted by the teachers, after much experimenting, was that of taking rough notes daily or less often as expedient, and of making an organized summary of these rough notes at the end of a week. The summary was to be the record. Later sections of this report will give illustrations of the teachers' notes.

The organization of the teachers' summaries was, in each school, the organization which was finally adopted by the school as its guide for procedure as well as for its system of recording. We had experimented with several outlines for organizing the teachers' notes, but no outline proved satisfactory in practice until each school had organized its pro-

cedure, and had made this organization a basis for reporting the children's responses.

The teachers in these two schools recorded primarily for their own use and for their school. When their material developed into organized form a demand for the records began to come from other experimental schools. The City and Country School and the Nursery School then decided to mimeograph or to print from time to time records which were more or less satisfactory. Some of these records are now ready.* They are not sent out as finished products, but are tentative both in form and as statements of educational procedure. They are experimental records of experimental procedures. They are limited to those school activities which the teachers themselves are responsible for; they do not include the physician's and psychologist's records. This report also is limited to a discussion of teachers' records.

At the beginning of the experiment I formulated several tentative principles of recording which had grown out of past experience in making school records. The teachers of the City and Country School, and later the Nursery School, cooperated in trying out these principles of recording and in adding to them as working hypotheses. This cooperation was necessary to the success of the experiment. One teacher in particular made the experiment as a whole possible by her untiring willingness to test out hypotheses, and to experiment with various methods of recording. Our experience showed that it must be the class teacher who makes the record of her own class, although other people may make contributions to it. This decision caused us to drop the public school classes as contributors to our study of recording. We could not ask public school teachers to record in our way in addition to making the records required of them by the public school system.

A discussion of recording finds its logical place in a discussion of teaching. Recording is only one of the necessary factors in an efficient teaching procedure. A treatment of recording by itself is presenting the cart without the horse which makes it function. But this experiment was only concerned with recording. We are thus obliged to confine our present discussion to recording, with references to educational procedures only in their application to recording.

* See "A Nursery School Experiment," by Harriet M. Johnson, Bulletin XI, Bureau of Educational Experiments, 1922, and "Record of Group VI," by Leila V. Stott, Bulletin of The City and Country School, 1922. Record of several other groups can be obtained in mimeograph from The City and Country School, and a second bulletin, "Record of Group V," is in preparation.

STANDARDS OF OBSERVATION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our experiment required a definition of terms in order that we, the Bureau and the teachers, should understand each other. When we talked about growth, curriculum, environment and experience, what did we mean? We defined these terms and they became our standards for observing children in school. We tried out several principles as guides to our recording and we adopted those which assisted us in gathering the material we desired.

STANDARDS OF OBSERVATION

The teachers in our experiment made records as an aid to their teaching and as a report of the children's progress in school. They were not responsible for the work of the doctor and the psychologist, nor for the parents at home; and, although they cooperated with all of these people, their own records were records of what came under their own observation. When they talked about growth, for example, they did not mean weight and height, they meant progress in school.

Growth (for teaching purposes) we defined as a child's progress in ability to use his environment. This progress can be indicated only by a continued recording of a child's reactions to an environment. Progress is not continuous in the sense of a constant rate, but it does take place, and how it takes place is what we must observe. For example, a teacher's note in October stated that B.'s attention was held only for a moment by any kind of work. She gave an illustration. In November she reported some progress, "B. steadies now a little better; she is making a more direct connection with the class work; her interest is always awake, but she guesses rather than thinks." Specific reactions to different types of work were given, and it was shown how B. compared with the other children and how she reacted socially. In the following months these points were all followed up until any reader could see how, and in what respects, B. was progressing in her use of the school environment.

Environment (for teaching purposes) consists of those parts of a child's surroundings which may provide experience for him. Environment for us includes the material setup, the children, the teacher, the school, the city streets, and the interrelationships of all of these. A child's environment is not static, it is relative and changing. His environment stimulates him, he responds, and an experience gets started. We must observe these experiences and what part of the environment produces them.

Experience (for teaching purposes) is a child's use of his environment, his participation in it. A school is responsible for supplying to its children opportunities for first hand contacts and for making their own discoveries. The children's progress in ability to get this kind of experience is the measure of their school growth, and the measure of the success of the school environment. The teacher must observe the environment to see that it offers opportunities for this kind of experience.

Curriculum for us is the school's plan in so far as it is successful in providing children with a succession of experiences. Curriculum in this sense therefore is concerned only with those parts of the school surroundings which the children make definite use of. Subject matter, materials, the city streets, what the other children and the teacher bring to the group, are the raw material of the curriculum: when they are utilized by the school and actually give experiences to the children, they become curriculum.

The curriculum is not found in the books the children read, nor in what the teacher tells them, until the children begin to get experience from this presented environment. The course in science is not curriculum until the children begin to get from it, or through it, a stimulus to scientific inquiry; until they begin to ask spontaneous questions, not directly suggested by the teacher but by their own desire to learn. "What is this button?", "What is that jar for?" may or may not be a beginning of scientific inquiry. "This button is not in the same place as that one, what does it do?" "There's a wire from that jar. Does it go to a bell? I don't see any bell. Where does it go then? What is it for?" Records of such questions as these indicate that children are making use of the school environment, that they are ready for more experience, are using past experience to draw their own inferences in a new situation and to ask for new explanations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We decided, then, that records would provide reliable data for school purposes only if we made our observations of children's responses with our school definitions of growth, environment, experience, and curriculum clearly in mind. We decided furthermore that our records must contain certain information and must be gathered according to a certain method. This method was supplied by the guiding principles which we adopted.

Records must provide information for making changes in school procedure. Our school records were planned to help the schools to know