

The Independent Progressive School

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St. Mary's Town and Country

Co-educational day and boarding school from 4 to 18

ELISABETH PAUL

THE Town and Country School originally started in 1937, with the taking over of a small school known as St. Mary's in co-operation with Mrs. Ena Curry of Dartington Hall, to supply the need in Hampstead for a co-educational day school with a realistic approach to the new education.

During the war a school community was built up at Yarkhill Court near Hereford. The day school reopened in September 1945 at 38 Eton Avenue and the country boarding school at Stanford Park, near Rugby. The two schools were run in close conjunction through a system of interchange between town and country.

Since 1951 this scheme has been modified and we now have Hedgerley Wood, a woodland property of 16 acres in the Chilterns, with a small swimming-pool and open-air theatre and all facilities for games and projects. Hedgerley Wood is used as a weekend house for a small group of boarders and day children and also for a French/English summer school for children. The Junior School regularly spends a week or more there during the summer term with its form teachers. During this time we follow a normal school timetable whilst finding ample scope for creativeness in Art and Drama, for learning by doing, and for teaching through living experience in field work, thus coordinating subjects in the curriculum. This is, of course, the general aim of the school.

Our object is to give the child a general education of a formative character combined with a sound intellectual training and specialized knowledge in preparation for his future career. To avoid one-sided intellectualism, the child is encouraged to use his common sense, to think for himself, and to act on his own judgment; thus his knowledge will be related to life.

True harmony and inner security, which are our ultimate aims in education, can, however, be achieved only by helping the child to find adequate expression for the creative and spiritual forces within him.

We emphasize subjects which are intimately connected with life, for we believe that the skills the child develops are of value to his all-round development as well as preparing him for the examinations we take (11-plus and G.C.E.). We specialize in all English subjects and Modern Languages, French and German, combined with Mathematics, Biology and Science. Science is started in the Junior School to satisfy the younger children's vital interest at that age, and we introduce it with a special programme supported by visual aids. Latin is studied both for its cultural value and because it leads to a fuller understanding of Modern Languages. Creative work has always been a vital part of the school: Drama, Music, Painting, Clay Modelling, and especially Free Writing and Art which was for many years in the hands of art teachers trained by Cizek himself.

We consider physical development as equally important, and we give the children ample scope for physical education, games, sports and swimming, and for riding at Hedgerley Wood. To learn the right use of the body through posture training is a complementary task to physical exercise and we attempt this through the Alexander technique; classes in this technique are conducted at the school. They contribute not only to correct posture but also increase the child's powers of concentration, and further in many ways his physical, intellectual and emotional development.

We believe in co-education because of and not in spite of the rapidly increasing precociousness in the sex relationships of the younger generation. Co-education provides a realistic basis for sex education, if clear-cut advice founded on mutual confidence and trust is offered to the adolescent troubled by early maturity and moral insecurity. Coeducation should, however, reach a deeper level. Boys and girls should grow up together in an atmosphere which leads them to realize that they are not developing exclusively in terms of being either men or women. 'The mature and fully developed adult is not a man or a woman, but both' (Goethe). Male or female qualities may be predominant in such an adult, but never exclusively. The female intuitive, irrational, imaginative and creative approach to life can be developed in harmony with the male contribution of logical and factual thinking in boys and girls alike. They will then discover and become conscious of their complementary potentials in life. They will learn to value, respect and accept each other with a more mature relationship, and their communications will become richer, more complete and real. The prevailing urge towards sex play as a 'leisure-time activity' and early sex experience without personal involvement will then lose its character of urgency. The adult in charge-parent or

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teacher will be freed from an anxiety which only too often manifests itself in blind criticism or in the form of diminished responsibility, both equally negative and harmful to the growing generation. An adolescent who is bent on developing the male and female components of his maturing life in harmony will be immune to modern sex conventions and aberrations which are so often the tragedy of the best in our time.

Realizing how dangerous both rigid discipline and chaotic freedom are, and that true discipline is not static, but is spontaneously evolving new patterns of behaviour, we try to develop a discipline which is not imposed through a prescribed code or set of rules, tabulating the dos or don'ts of the school. The set of rules actually existing in the school was drawn up by the staff and the children, both the Senior and Junior Houses contributing to it. In the School Council each class is represented by a boy and a girl from the age of nine onwards. Any self-government of this kind is a truly voluntary form of discipline. The child is not abandoned to himself, but has a share in the responsibilities of the school. A sense of initiative and of collective solidarity is thus developed, beginning with a regard for others and culminating in control. Voluntary discipline of this kind is often a product of the group process which reveals the immense treasure of goodwill, feeling for justice and sense of proportion natural in a child; of this group process more later.

We feel that religion should not be taught in lessons as 'Religious Instruction'. Spiritual values should permeate the whole life of the school and should consciously and unconsciously be present in all the relationships shared by those who work and live together in the daily routine. 'The conscious is only part of the spiritual and it is therefore never capable of spiritual completeness; for that, the indefinite expansion of the unconscious is needed.'¹ The readings during morning Assembly are chosen from the texts of the great religions, as well as from the various philosophical traditions, also from stories and legends. Their interpretation during the short talks which follow are meant to give expression to the truth that all religions are one and that, in spite of their various manifestations, their values are meaningful if not binding. The children follow these talks and readings with an ever increasing seriousness, and we believe that the atmosphere thus created is reflected in their own creative work.

Free writing has been for more than 12 years in the hands of an able specialist who takes the classes in this subject throughout the school from the age of eight onwards. Free writing started in 1940 when the children of the school were evacuated to Yarkhill Court. They felt

¹ C. G. Jung, *The Unconscious Self* (Mentor Books).

secure in the natural surroundings of this Herefordshire hop farm, but were at the same time tormented by anxiety. Most of their fathers were fighting; their mothers were braving the battle of London. The children were encouraged to write war poems, because it was hoped that this would help their to deal with their fears which were coming out in aggressive war games. Thus a poetry group sprang up, composed of boys and girls between the ages of eight and 16, who read and wrote poetry together. The more varied the group, the greater was the inspiration, because the strength and intensity of the interpersonal relationships among the group members increased with the dynamic tension of their diverse and contrasting quality and power. As soon as the varying levels of achievement began to interact in this group, the atmosphere was charged with creative impulses, the classroom was changed into an artist's work-shop, learning was creative and teaching an art. This was our first experience of the group process and since that time it has been the school's endeavour to keep it alive. It may well be that the poems and stories written by the children today still draw some inspiration from this original source. In 1956 an anthology of poems and stories written in the years 1940-56 was printed; a number of them have been included by Boris Ford in his book *Young Writers, Young Readers*.¹

From the wealth of material collected during the last 20 years we are led to conclude that imaginative writing is a natural gift of childhood, and has a function in child development similar to play; it seems to be a drive coming from within, affording the child the pleasure of manipulation, experimental investigation and discovery of the means of expression; this affects the efficiency of his learning and becomes an important factor in the mastery of skills and knowledge. We have therefore systematically incorporated this activity into the teaching methods of the junior School and use it for all English subjects. We find that all children write stories as soon as they are ready to handle the tools, and so we teach them to read and to write at an early age. This spontaneous activity gives them joy, freedom and contentment as much as play, which 'at this time'-to quote Froebel-'is not trivial, but highly serious and of deep significance'. The children begin to write stories between the ages of six and seven and can produce delightful work, some of it astonishingly mature in essence and form. We have experienced that with the right use of the group method children 'are capable of a quality of expression that is to be judged and accepted by the highest standards of literature.'²

¹ Hutchinson 1960.

² Herbert Read, *Children as Writers* (Faber).

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By the time the children have reached the last form of the junior School they are able to express with precision, colour and a natural rhythm their own feelings and thoughts, their experience and their knowledge. This is a great asset when they have to cope with the 11-plus examination; the attainment in English is invariably high in this age group. But what is more important is that this method gives the children a relaxed readiness to perform the skills and produce the knowledge they have assimilated in the course of a natural intellectual development and not through competitive work, drill and coaching. In this way they are able to take the examination in their stride and are immune to undue pressure from without and to emotional strain caused by parental anxiety. This happy condition, however, does not last. The natural rhythm alternating between effortless assimilation and relaxed performance gradually fades away. With the specialization needed for academic work a new differentiation sets in: logical thinking has to be developed systematically and becomes an essential factor in the learning process of the Senior School.

In the young child of primary school age artistic, scientific and religious potentials still slumber tranquilly together, and the disposition towards artistic or towards intellectual pursuits is still maintained in an undifferentiated co-existence. But at the Senior level the war of faculties begins to cause a split; logical and imaginative thinking tend to be mutually exclusive. They can only be reconciled when a new creation arises between them which, though different from both, has the power to absorb their energies and to restate both of them while yet being neither. This cannot be contrived; it can happen only in a living situation. To combine art and academic subjects on the Senior School time-table in mere juxtaposition does not solve the problem. We have known children who, at the onset of puberty, when their natural powers of expression had left them, were no longer able to formulate with clarity, colour and precision what they had learned and experienced. They began to develop a feeling of inferiority, and their work deteriorated. To create a living link between the two modes of thinking is imperative, and this is a more important function of the teacher than his actual teaching: 'some subtle qualities of the classroom climate and the teacher's personality contribute as much or more to the intelligence of primary and secondary pupils as the particular topics taught or the techniques of teaching.'¹ 'More than externals ... the subtleties of inter-personal relationships have a part to play ... the complexity of the teaching situation and the supreme significance of

¹ Professor Vernon, *Educational Research I*, I. P. 8.

the quality and skill of the human being in charge of the situation.'¹ This is a most significant transformation of the teacher's role and function. From the intellectually trained expert who applies the method of habit training, develops logical thinking and the capacity for problem solving, who stimulates his pupils by his skill in presenting his subject and inspires them through the extent of his learning, the teacher has become 'the human being in charge of a human situation'. Such a teacher gives himself to his work with a disinterested, undisturbed detachment. The results depend in part on not caring what comes out of it. The real importance is the 'interpersonal relationship', the growth and transformation in all concerned, teacher and pupil alike. The pupil's contribution is correspondingly changed: he transmits from the wealth of his unconscious knowledge and this the teacher accepts and respects. The teacher transmits whilst he is teaching and the pupil while he is learning.

When Cizek discovered by mere chance in 1895 that any child who is allowed to use paint and brush freely can paint, and does not need instruction, he formed the axiom, 'The child does not paint what he sees, but what he knows.' The child gives visible form to the messages he receives from the store of untaught knowledge. Cizek tells us about a little boy who insisted upon painting his goat red. Before the war we had in our school a little Jamaican boy who, on a hot summer day, appeared in the art room dressed in his blazer: he proceeded to paint a red sky with angry clouds. His teacher took his blazer off and handed him a new sheet of paper. The scenery changed to peaceful green trees under a serene blue sky. Again, a few years ago a little six-year-old girl wrote in her diary in beautiful clear handwriting, without any spelling mistakes, 'I am learning to play the piano very fast, and soon I shall be able to play two pieces very well.' On the opposite page she portrayed herself at the piano: a tiny figure on a high stool under an enormous keyboard five times her size. Her feet and arms outstretched, she tries in vain to reach the keyboard, a little dwarfed figure overwhelmed by the gigantic task of learning two pieces very fast and very well. She could not stand the strain any longer and was asking for help. Her S O S was heard, and when her parents were shown the picture they gave up their ambition to make their daughter jump a class. Without this 'psychogram' no one would have known that this highly intelligent child who could speak two languages (French and English), who could read, write, spell, dance and act beautifully at the age of six, suffered from overstrain, a feeling of inferiority and an acute anxiety. How did she know?

¹ C. M. Fleming, *Educational Research I*, 11. p. 46.

How did she know what her family, teachers and friends ignored? And who had taught her how to express it? Where did Cizek's little boy learn that 'capricious' derives from 'capra' (a goat and that he portrayed in the red goat his own wilful, jumpy mood of aggression?

Apart from their significance for child art and therapy, these flashes of insight from the child's store of unconscious knowledge have no direct bearing on the established methods of teaching, but they contribute a great deal towards group life and should be the basis of the group method of teaching.

The group works on two levels, the conscious and the unconscious. Boys and girls of slightly different ages, physical and mental ability, and varying standards of achievement, are taught together as a group by a teacher, who is a group leader either by experience or instinct. He knows how to control the dynamic tensions in the group whenever they arise from the polarity of its members. He will know how to direct this dynamism into positive channels. This he achieves by valuing all group members without differentiation; 'those who give, and those who give by taking away' are accepted alike. Inner authority of this nature creates an atmosphere of harmony, peace and order, in which the desire to learn, is freed, and discipline is an inherent part and function of the working together. This gives the children a sense of achievement which is a reward in itself. The group therefore needs no stimulus from without nor does it need external incentives such as competition: it creates and lives by its own values, which are transmitted by a two-way communication-from teacher to pupil and from pupil to teacher.

The question we had to face was how to apply this technique and how to harness group dynamism for academic work. Group teaching is easily adapted to junior work, but it is more difficult to incorporate into the Senior School, where the group teacher's work is constantly interrupted by the demands of specialists. We found ourselves, therefore, in the position of having to change the group technique in the Senior School. It was here that our interest in the audio-visual method gave us help. Instead of grouping children at varying levels of achievement, we have organized large groups by combining classes of varying ages in such subjects as English and Modern Languages. Any subject which can be presented as a whole and at the same time taught at progressive levels in regular classes lends itself to this method of group teaching. In our particular case between 60 and 70 children assemble for a period called 'French without Reading' in a room equipped with a small stage, a TV set, a tape-recorder, a film projector and films. This large group of children, directed by two or three bilingual

French teachers, meets for a long period of time. In these circumstances, when the various levels of achievement begin to interact, an atmosphere is created in which the flow of speech becomes continuous and the language is experienced in all its complexities as a whole. Junior dramatizations of fairy-tales learned in class from records and acted for the older pupils encourage good delivery. The ear of the more senior pupils is now trained to realize that the intonation of the younger children is more accurate than their own and that they are, of course, less inhibited. So the older children can benefit from the lingual dexterity of the younger ones. The plays are then tape-recorded and played back as oral practice for the juniors, which they enjoy very much.

There is some evidence from neurology and psychology that the optimum age for beginning a second language is between the ages of four and eight; at this stage the brain seems to have a great elasticity and capacity for learning speech, because the child's approach to his own language is not yet differentiated. We therefore start our first French course with a group of about 40 children between the ages of four and seven in daily short periods. This group is relaxed and happy and most children participate actively; all are fully at home in this language experience.

The older children like to act sketches and short plays, or to dramatize scenes from the various French TV programmes on our small stage. Film strips are chosen for their mythological value. Poems of the great masters are used for choral work and form a link with the creativeness inherent in the use of the group process. We have found that, when such work is being done, the entire group of 60 to 70 children of all ages becomes absorbed in one linguistic experience. Only in such a natural way can a real penetration into the culture of the language be achieved. As soon as the process is forced, these values escape and evaporate. True culture is an inescapable part of the language, inseparable from its very life, and will reveal itself only in really living situations.

Of course the use of mechanical aids by no means eliminates the teacher; it rather increases the demands on him. He needs not only all the qualities of a group teacher but has also to be more alert than the language teacher who is merely following a textbook page by page. He acts and improvises, stimulates and compels in situations which place the children in the same position as they would be in a foreign country, with the same feeling of floating, the same stresses and the same need for concentration. But the children are unaware of this concentration and do not feel the effort. These group lessons are fun

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for them, the approach being persuasive and always positive, moving from simple to complex stages and patiently advancing in minimal steps which even the less gifted child can follow. During one of the first lessons a teacher heard a girl of nine, a slow developer, say to herself, 'This is better than work!' When challenged, 'Is thus not work?' her reply was, 'Yes, y-yes, but it is French!' Again a young boy expressed unconscious assimilation in this way: 'I understand it all,' he said at the end of a lesson, 'but I do not know the French.' Little did he realize that this 'not knowing' meant that he had unconsciously absorbed and assimilated the material and that in this way his inhibitions and his unconscious resistance to the language had evaporated.

By finding the living link between logical and imaginative thinking, by removing the opposition between the machine-like processes of the brain and the compelling experience of a subject as a whole, many other opposites in education, which now seem to be incompatible in the intellectual order, will reveal themselves as complementary in the spiritual and creative order.

When the dynamics of intergroup relations come into play such pairs of opposites as 'individualization' versus 'socialization', 'child centeredness' versus 'adult-centeredness', 'compulsion' versus 'free discipline' and many others become reconciled.

The creative energy released by group dynamism allows teacher and learner to master their task in a new and different way. A new elasticity of functioning is set free in the teacher and a happy spontaneity in the child. In both the highest skill is shown by 'letting it happen'. Liberated from personal factors and fixations, when authoritative pressure, competitive strain and self-seeking are abandoned, the teacher's skill and the learner's ability come into full play, whilst all group members are creatively united with the task in hand. The old working patterns are no longer the sole guide when the teacher stops cultivating the narrower forms of intelligence and aims at education rather than immediate results.

The fact is that a new consciousness is here emerging. Not unlike religion and the arts, group teaching of children penetrates the mind and shakes it still. It opens a new access to the vast dimensions of the unconscious, an access which is sustaining, health-giving and transforming for teacher and learner alike. Such a continuous widening of consciousness uncovers regions of the mind, unknown until then to the individual, opens for him self-knowledge and self-discovery and finally culminates in a maturing process which continues throughout life.

Education today is challenged to review its structure in the perspective of a fast-moving world and to inspire the younger generation

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to break through the boredom and frustration which are the cause of their revolt. Only by pursuing the common day-to-day task-the matter in hand-faithfully, and by co-ordinating it with the overwhelming problems of tomorrow, will education meet the demands of our time and prepare the younger generation for a future which is opening before them with exciting potentialities, but which also presents a vision of horror more threatening than any generation before has ever had to face.