

Talks About Our Winnetka Schools

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The science of education is in its infancy. Schools and courses of study as well as text books are based on philosophical theories and personal judgment rather than on accurate scientific data.

There has been some effort in the last fifteen years to apply the science of psychology to the methods of teaching. This has resulted in vast improvement in the class room, but has not usually been scientific in any strict sense.

Within very recent years the science of education itself has had birth. There are accurate scientific studies throwing light upon several of our school subjects. It is known, for example, exactly what words in the English language are used with the most frequency and are therefore most necessary in a child's vocabulary. The 3,000 words most commonly used in correspondence are known with scientific accuracy. There is evidence as to what types of fractions are most used in modern business life. A promising beginning has been made in discovering what civic and economic problems are most insistently confronting the American people.

Winnetka Schools Help

The schools of Winnetka have been adding their bit to the scientifically gathered data on which a new education can be based. Let me describe briefly a few of the investigations that have been carried on in the Winnetka Public schools or are now being carried on. Each investigation as it is completed is being published in professional journals having a nation wide circulation. In this way the research of the Winnetka teachers is benefiting not only the children of Winnetka, but those of many other schools.

One investigation consisted of discovering what spelling words should be taught in the various school grades and by what method they can be most efficiently handled. The 3,000 commonest words in the English language were compared with the 3,000 commonest words used in correspondence and the 3,000 commonest words used by children in their compositions. This was made possible by studies made by other investigators. We in Winnetka combined these studies in such a way as to find a common spelling list that would assure us that every child had an opportunity before leaving the eighth grade of studying all the words he was most likely to need in life. In order to find the relative difficulty of the words, they were dictated not only to children in the Winnetka schools, but to those in Wilmette and Evanston and a number of Chicago schools. By studying the number of errors made by the children in the different grades, we were able to determine which words were easiest and which were hardest and

to grade the words therefore with accuracy.

Study "Phonograms"

An investigation carried on by the first and second grade teachers brought to light for the first time those letter-groups known as "phonograms" which are most necessary to children learning how to read. It was found that *ee* occurred more frequently than any other combination, *ed* next then *ing*, then *er*, and so on. It therefore became possible to drill primary children in the letter combinations which were going to be most useful to them, rather than in those which somebody *thought* would be most useful. It is interesting that the Winnetka list based on an accurate count of all the letter combinations contained in ten primers and first readers and in seven second readers differs in a number of respects from any of the theoretical lists that have heretofore been available.

The Winnetka teachers have carried on several experiments to determine the best method of teaching some particular subject. There is now going on, for example, an investigation as to whether the old fashioned way of teaching subtraction by borrowing is more or less effective than the modern method of carrying to the next digit in the subtrahend. The old method of subtracting 28 from 56 went like this: "8 from 6—can't be taken; borrow one from the 5; 8 from 16 equal 8, 2 from 4 equals 2." The modern or additive method runs like this: "8 and what are 6?—can't be done; 8 and what are 16?—answer 8; carry 1, adding it to the 2 of 28. 3 and what are 5?—answer 2." Children can be taught by either method, but advocates of each method lay strong

claims to its superiority over the other. The Winnetka Schools have undertaken therefore to determine by a careful investigation which method is really superior. Half of the second grade children last year in all the schools learned the old way, half learned the new way. Great care was taken to see that each group of children had exactly the same ability to start with. The same teacher taught both groups. The work is continuing in third grade this year. It is too early yet to predict the results of the investigation, but by the end of this year we shall know and shall be able to tell the educational world at large which way is superior.

Determines What to Teach

The most ambitious undertaking of the Winnetka schools was a determination of what facts in history or geography were most necessary for intelligent reading. This investigation, which was supported by the Commonwealth Fund in New York, has already been described in the columns of the Talk. It showed that a number of persons, places or events which we had been teaching in school were of relatively small importance, while others that had no place in our

school curriculum ranked high in their value. Our whole history and geography course in Winnetka has been undergoing a thorough revision in the light of this study.

It is through just such investigations that the science of education can gradually develop until we know with definiteness and certainty what to teach and how to teach it.

Bids for New Highway Will Be Sought Soon

Authority to advertise for bids for the McCormick highway which will be built to the west of Evanston, following the course of the Drainage channel, was requested at a board meeting of the Sanitary District of Chicago, recently.

Bids will subsequently be taken in October, and if weather permits, work will go forward immediately.

The McCormick highway is designed to divert the through traffic of the north shore to Chicago to the west of the city, instead of on Ridge avenue and Sheridan road, as is now the necessity.

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