



SOME ASPECTS OF WORK EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING

JOSE C. SADDUL

Superintendent On Detail, Bureau of Public Schools

INTRODUCTION

During the eighteenth century, a certain intellectual named J. J. Rousseau, proposed a revolutionary theory that human nature is inherently good, but that individuals deteriorate when they get in contact with the artificial environment into which they are born. He advocated a type of education wherein the individual should be removed from the urban society and transferred to a rural environment where his instincts and capacities may unfold and develop through natural habits of activity. These views of Rousseau on education influenced very profoundly the thinking of Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Froebel, three prominent educators of the nineteenth century. These three men made further investigations of Rousseau's doctrine. The psychological developments that followed gave rise to the so-called "activity movement", which recognizes the part played by sensory, manual, or work experiences in the educative process.

Thus, *work experience* is not a new idea, although its role in the promotion of effective learning has often been ignored by teachers. There is a likelihood that teachers do not simply ignore the principle; some are totally ignorant of its psychological role in teaching. The result is that the child becomes confused and disin-

terested with school work and, schooling is made theoretical and meaningless rather than practical and significant to the life of the child.

John Dewey¹ bemoaned the relative disappearance of work experience from the home, industry, and business, where less and less opportunity is available for employment of children and youth. To compensate for this loss he called attention to the increasing need for society to provide more work experience in school and elsewhere. This warning was given almost half-century ago. The succeeding years seemed to have made the situation worse; a mania for white-collar jobs is still the vogue. In view of enough evidence to show that work experience does not only have psychological aspects but also social significance in the child's learning, the warning is certainly worthy of our attention today.

It is the purpose of the writer (1) to present a discussion of some of the aspects of work experience in the learning process; and (2) to examine the purposes for which work experience is provided in the school curriculum.

WORK EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING

Work experience has been defined as "a means and method in the program of the school by

¹ Harl R. Douglas and Hubert H. Mills, *Ronald Press Company, 1948*, p. 369.

Teaching in High School (New York: The

which the learner actually produces useful goods or renders useful services through participation in socially desirable work activities in the community under real conditions."² Conceived in this definition are many possibilities: that work experience is likely to be educative; that it is first-hand experience; that it involves work or service; that it is concerned with socially desirable activity; that it is exploratory; that it is real. It is the first possibility, more than the others, that should interest the teacher.

Influence of work experience. Obviously, from a pedagogical point of view, the most interesting question is how work experience influences the learning process. The leaders of the experience movement are strong in their condemnation of the old practices of the traditional school wherein the mind is at work, it should not be disturbed or distracted by physical activity of any kind.

Even the early Greek and Roman educators recognized the effect of activity on physical development. This attitude is still persisting today, that an individual to be properly educated must have a "strong mind in a strong body." Besides producing physical development, activity serves in some way to stimulate mental development. Froebel³ insisted that children will develop most favorably when they participate actively and pleasurably in activities motivated by their own interests, curiosity, and desires. It is also conceded that such an activity, be it work under the guidance of a teacher wherein useful goods or services

are produced, is important in helping the learner acquire ideals that should later help him solve problems on social and moral issues. Hobbes and Locke⁴ introduced the view "that physical activity can determine, in part at least, the nature of that which the individual should think and believe." They also concluded "that man can have no knowledge except that which has come to him through his physical senses, or is based on such sensory experiences." This implies that the learner must reach out into the world to gain knowledge. The more active participation he takes in the course of learning, the more knowledge he will acquire. This is a cue for schools to provide more participatory experiences, *work experiences* if you please, in order to establish better learning-teaching situations. It is noteworthy that psychologists of today attach much importance to theory that the pupil learns only as he actively participates in the educative process. It is this view that gave rise to the definition that learning is *doing*, and teaching is *guiding* of pupil experiences.

The principle of practice. The thought in the foregoing paragraph may be summed up in this too familiar statement: "one learns by doing." There is great danger that teachers may misunderstand the implication of the statement. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why Thorndike practically renounced the law of exercise in some of his writings. He simply wanted to safeguard against misuse of the principle.

The principle of practice which

² Clifford E. Erickson, *A Basic Text for Inc.*, 1947), p. 856.

³ I. N. Thut and J. Raymond Gerberich, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc.,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

Guidance Workers (New York: Prentice-Hall

Foundations of Method for Secondary Schools 1949), p. 273.

is probably the most abused principle of learning is stated as follows: "What is learned is what is practised; continued practice or use is usually necessary for retention of the learning."⁵ It does seem that practice plays an important role in learning. However, practice which is a mere repetition of the act is not desirable because it does not produce learning. Practice does not always improve the quality of performance. In fact, when the error is practised, repetition tends to prevent the correction of the error. It is necessary that the teacher keeps the learner practise the better way, on the assumption that the learner learns what he does.

Hammonds,⁶ in expressing the necessity of practice of the right sort in the teaching of vocational agriculture said, "Not until agricultural teachers come to believe in the necessity for practice by the learners can they make their teaching vital . . . Participation in farming is an essential in learning to farm." Then he elaborated on his discussion with the following: "One learns by practice what he practises. This is not a silly statement; it is an important truth. To practise an error is to learn the error. To use a poor practice in farming is to tend to learn the poor practice . . . Improvement in a function may be expected only when one performs the function better. The wrong practice tends to get the wrong learning. Spiritless, aimless activity is not effective in securing desirable learning. Motivated practice of the correct procedure, on the other hand, with the student desiring to improve his per-

formance, may be expected to bring improvement." These statements of Hammonds imply that practice needs to be supervised by a teacher in order to produce the most desirable learnings. Undoubtedly, it is this implication that gave birth to the supervised farming programs in vocational agriculture.

The implication of work experience in learning. Work experience as embodied in the curriculum provides the necessary opportunities for practice. Inasmuch as learning implies a change in behavior, this change is made possible while performing an activity, or in the course of practice. The learner's attitudes, appreciations, values, interests, and motives, are partly and largely dependent upon experience or activity. It follows, therefore, that the school should provide a wide variety of situations in which the learners are given a greater degree of participation. Such participatory experiences are valuable because "they give reality to learning, motivate pupils to learn, and result in more effective maturation."

CONCLUSIONS

The following significant points may easily be isolated from the foregoing discussions:

1. Work experience, activity, or practice influences the learning process. It stimulates both physical and mental development.
2. Experience or practice that does not improve the quality
(Continued on page 17)

⁵ Carnie Hammonds, *Teaching Agriculture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), p. 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.