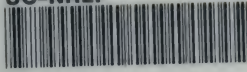


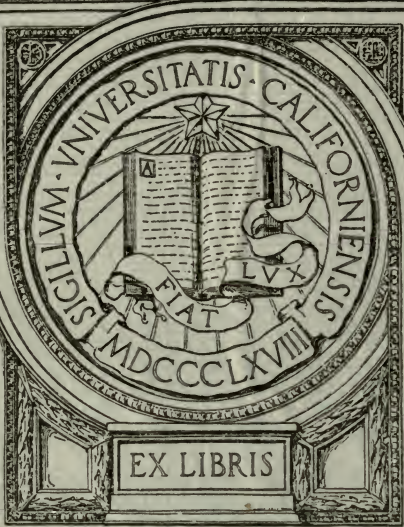
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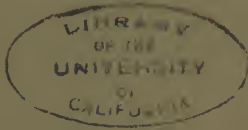


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A NOVEL EXPERIMENT





A NOVEL EXPERIMENT



Mary A. Laselle

The Newton Vocational School
Print Shop, Newtonville, Mass.



FOREWORD

EVERY boy and girl of high school age belongs in the high school regardless of the completion of the grammar school course. It is the function of the high school to welcome every such boy and girl and to adapt subject-matter, methods and organization to the needs of such boys and girls. The only conditions of admission to the high school and of retention therein to be imposed upon the young person of high school age are that such young person be educable and that he try according to his ability.

Such is a summary statement of the policy that has been carried out in the Newton school system during the last three years. In pursuance of this somewhat radical policy, within this period of three years more than two hundred boys and girls have been taken bodily, so to speak, from the Newton grammar schools and placed in the Newton Technical High. "High school age" varies somewhat with individuals. With rare exceptions fifteen is considered the maximum age up to which a pupil should be retained in grammar

school, and many pupils who have not completed grammar school work are transferred to high school several months before the fifteenth birthday is reached, in some instances at barely fourteen years of age. One result of this policy is that the distinctly over-age pupil is practically unknown in the higher grades of the Newton elementary schools.

What this policy is doing for the young people directly affected by it, it is the purpose of this little pamphlet to show. At my request, Miss Mary A. Laselle, who, from the beginning of this policy has been held responsible for the success of the "transferred" girls during their first year in high school and has given these girls all their instruction in academic subjects, has written the following description of the "transfer" work and of the subsequent success to date of the first class of girls to be admitted to the high school under this policy. As Miss Laselle shows (pp. 10-12) not only did nine-tenths of the fifty girls admitted remain throughout the year, but more than two-thirds of those who remained through continued their schooling the following year, twenty-seven of them in regular courses of the Technical High; and of the latter twenty-seven, nineteen are now half way through their second regular high school year. Not only have these girls continued their work, but they have been remarkably successful, decidedly more successful in avoiding "failures" than the average girl who is admitted in the usual way.

From the enumerations of the "reasons why the special course was successful" (p. 12), Miss Laselle

has modestly omitted one reason, undoubtedly the most important of all,—that is, the teacher who taught the girls their academic subjects, whose room was the girls' "home" room, who was responsible not for the maintenance of any fixed school standards but for the best possible education of every one of that particular group of girls for one year. Her guiding thought and aim was to give these girls something to learn that they could learn, something that would be of the greatest practical value to them, to encourage them to do what they could do, and thus to substitute in them for the habit of failure, to which they had long been accustomed, the habit of success.

What would have been the school career of this group of fifty girls who were transferred to high school in September, 1910, had they been compelled to complete grammar school work before admission to high school, can only be conjectured. Anyone familiar with the records of girls of this type would probably consider it a fair estimate that scarcely half would have returned to grammar school; that not more than half of those returning would have completed the course; that not more than half of those completing the course — perhaps a half-dozen — would ever have entered the high school; and that not more than two or three of these, more probably not any, would have gone beyond the first year.

The financial aspect of the policy pursued with these girls is interesting and important. Since September, 1910, when special work with these girls began, there

has been expended on their education probably between \$4000 and \$5000 more than would have been expended had they simply been left to the usual fate of such girls as estimated above. And to continue the education to the completion of some high school course of the goodly number of that group of nineteen now in their sophomore year who will probably remain to graduate, will cost at least \$2000 more. We might have economized and saved money by shutting our eyes to the needs of these girls; instead, we practiced a higher economy by saving and developing human talent, that will surely pay not only to these girls but to society large dividends for many years on the money invested.

The work with classes of girls that have been "transferred" to High School since September, 1910, promises to be just as successful as the work with that first class, chosen for presentation here simply because more of the results extending over a larger period are becoming apparent.

Work with "transfer" boys in the high school has proved no less successful than that with girls. This work and its results will be described in a pamphlet similar to this.

FRANK E. SPAULDING,

Superintendent of Newton Schools

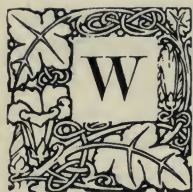
NEWTONVILLE, MASS.,

January 20, 1913.



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WHAT THE PROBLEM WAS



WHEN it was found some years ago that in the Newton schools, as in the schools of many other cities, there were in the eighth year of the grammar grades a rather large number of girls over fifteen years of age for whom there was little hope of promotion to the High School by the ordinary methods of school grading, a special class for these girls was organized in the Newton Technical High School. It was the Superintendent's belief that to the many and varied appeals to the mentality that would be made in the special courses in that school there would be an intellectual response that would cause these girls to become eventually efficient wage-earners instead of the unskilled workers that they gave promise of becoming if they left school in a somewhat discouraged condition at the end of the eighth grade.

The total number of these girls from all of the grammar schools was fifty, and their average age in September, 1910, was fifteen years and eight months. There were fourteen pupils over sixteen years of age.

CAUSES OF RETARDATION

Thirty-five out of fifty pupils had repeated a grade. The causes of retardation, as given upon the personal record cards which are sent on with the pupil from grade to grade, and which contain a valuable fund of information in regard to each one, were (1) sickness by which a grade was lost ; (2) entering school late — four did not enter until eight years of age ; (3) unfortunate home conditions making home study impossible ; (4) slow mental development.

ATTITUDE OF GIRLS TOWARDS SCHOOL WORK

The mental attitude of the most of the girls towards school work might be described by the words "apathetic," "stolid," "slow," "sluggish," and in a few cases, "befogged." We will quote here from some of the personal records, which are in many cases most interesting and sometimes pathetic human documents. Of one pupil the record is this: Grade V.—"This pupil is energetic, faithful, and has a good mind. She was out of school during the last months of the year because of sickness." Grade VI.—"This girl was not prepared for the work of the grade and was not promoted. She seems dull and listless, and shows little interest in her work. Poor in arithmetic. Little mental ability."

Grade VII.—“The pupil is a faithful worker but cannot understand her work in arithmetic. Sent to the eighth grade on trial.” Grade VIII.—“Transferred to special class in Technical High School.”

This seems a clear story of a normal, healthy mental growth up to the end of the Fifth grade when a few months of sickness so retarded the pupil that her work in the grammar school after that date was unsatisfactory. Possibly it would be well at this point to finish the record of this girl up to date by saying that after doing good work in the special class, she is now in the Clerical Department where she has not failed in any study thus far this year.

Another girl's record reads as follows: Grade VI.—“Little power of concentration, will not study excepting under compulsion; promoted to Grade VII on trial.” Grade VII.—“Pupil must repeat the grade, not interested in studies; good in drawing and hand work; attendance poor; no help from the home.” Grade VIII.—“Poor work. On account of age transferred to special class at High School.”

As might be expected from this record this pupil was aroused and reached through her work in design, sewing, and cooking. She is now a pupil in the Extra Technical Course, where she is doing second year work in household economics, and is said by her teacher to be one of the most expert needle women in the course. She now plans to become a teacher of sewing.

The two cards above quoted are typical of a great number of records in which sickness or lack of interest

in studies are given as the causes of failure to do satisfactory work in the grammar grades.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CONDITION OF GIRLS AS THEY ENTERED THE HIGH SCHOOL

The physical condition of the girls as they entered the High School was fairly satisfactory. Only three out of the fifty were found in a condition that would necessitate their being excused from gymnasium work. There was, however, a lack of robustness, of power of resistance, which made many of the girls fall easy victims to colds, headaches, and other minor ailments, and this condition, of course, meant many days of absence from school.

The mental attitude of the girls toward the new work seemed one of vague hope mingled with some definite fear.

ATTITUDE OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PUPILS TOWARDS SPECIAL CLASS

The special class was received with the greatest kindness by every one connected with the High School. The class was given all the privileges of the other pupils and in every way the girls were encouraged to feel themselves an integral part of the student body.

SPECIAL COURSE PLANNED FOR CLASS

In planning the special course for the girls many avenues of approach to their mentality was open for

them. They were given ten periods of academic work—commercial geography, hygiene, household accounts, and English; ten of household economics; four of design; and one of physical culture. The physical conditions under which they worked were of the very best. They were given a large, sunny “home” room, a cooking and a sewing laboratory that were supplied with every article of equipment that could possibly be required, and a large well-lighted room for work in design.

SEGREGATION AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN SUCCESS OF CLASS

The segregation of the class was an important element in the success of the undertaking. Many of the pupils were of the self-effacing, retiring type of pupil, who, in a mixed class, or in a class in which are rapid workers, is almost inevitably thrust into the background, where she persists in remaining despite the earnest endeavors of her teachers. With no large element of rapid or more accurate workers to make them timid, the girls developed a self confidence, and an ability to take a leading part in discussions in English and in other subjects that was very satisfactory, and that has enabled them this year to perform work required in the regular mixed classes of the High School in a creditable manner.

METHODS OF AROUSING GIRLS TO EFFORTS

From the very first the attempt was made to cause the girls to realize the splendid advantages given them

in their new environment, and the appeal was made to them that fair play and a sense of justice demanded strenuous effort on their part to show their appreciation.

Suggestions of success in vocations were used as a powerful incentive to effort, and the attempt was made to give each girl a hopeful outlook upon life. In the belief that nothing will clear a befogged mind or quicken sluggish mental processes so well as a strong desire to better one's condition, an effort was made to arouse the imagination of each pupil until she saw herself working successfully in some honorable vocation. Success in any part of the daily school work was commended in the effort to establish the "success habit."

STUDY OF VOCATIONS

A brief study of some of the more common vocations for girls was made, and some most interesting talks were given the class by the head nurse of the city hospital, a woman physician of Newton, the director of the Boston School of Salesmanship, the head librarian of the Newton Public Library, a member of the School Board, the Superintendent of Schools and other persons competent to speak upon special subjects.

These talks were all intended to stimulate thought along vocational lines. Some of the subjects were:

"What Qualities are Necessary to Success in Any Vocation?"

"What Should Determine One's Choice of a Vocation?"

- “Healthful and Unhealthful Vocations.”
- “A Mother’s Helper.”
- “The Kind of Girl Who would make a Good Nurse.”
- “Florence Nightingale: The Ideal Nurse.”
- “The Life of a Sales Girl.”
- “Work in a Well-Managed Manufacturing Establishment.”
- “What Positions are Open to a Skillful Needlewoman?”
- “Books that Every Girl Should Know.”
- “The Efficient Girl.”

MIND AROUSED TO ACTION BY STUDY OF VOCATIONS, THEN EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PRESSED HOME

In the study of vocations the aim was to place the vocation as a shining mark towards which to aim, but the fact was everywhere and at all times emphasized that to fill any vocation with credit one should possess a fund of mental resources in excess of those required in the actual work of earning a living and that one always needs a liberal supply of what is commonly called good sense and good judgment, in order to accomplish any worthy undertaking successfully.

The necessity of an educational equipment for work in any vocation was pressed home in many different ways; as was also the need of having a reserve supply of mental and moral force. If the talk was on nursing it was easy to see that the nurse must be well-trained, and it was also easy to imagine that she would be a dull companion for her patient if she knew nothing of

literature, biography, and history, or took no interest in important current events.

If the talk was of the work of a salesgirl, it was not hard to prove that the ability to enjoy a good book would enable a tired girl to spend her evenings happily, profitably, and economically.

As has been suggested the sluggish mental forces were first aroused by the study of possible vocations and as is always true, the mental and moral fibre of the pupils strained to its utmost under the stress of a compelling purpose.

VOCATIONAL TALKS MADE BASIS OF WORK IN ENGLISH

The girls wrote reports of each one of these talks upon vocations both as an exercise in English and also for the purpose of impressing upon their minds the facts given in regard to the vocations.

HOME CONDITIONS STUDIED

As far as possible the home conditions of the pupils were studied, and calls were made at a large number of homes during the year. In this manner much valuable information was obtained which could be used in advising the pupil as to her course in school and her preparation for later work.

APPEAL THROUGH LITERATURE

During the year each pupil memorized and recited ten choice poems. About fifty carefully selected books from the Public Library were kept in the schoolroom and fifty small volumes of English Classics were bought

by the class as a nucleus of a permanent schoolroom library. Every Friday a report was made upon the reading that the pupil had done through the week. After an hour spent in reading some delightful book the pupils realized something of the value of literature as a means of recreation, and in giving more color, action, and a broader human canvas to the reader. They were made in some degree to realize that literature is a "talisman and spell" that will entertain, comfort, broaden, and uplift the one who loves it.

WORK IN ARITHMETIC, HYGIENE, AND COMMERCIAL GEOGRAPHY

In arithmetic all work was eliminated, excepting practical problems in housekeeping, sewing, millinery, and expense accounts. The work in hygiene was made very practical and helped several girls to rid themselves of tendencies to spinal curvatures and of bad habits of living. The improvement in the physique of the girls at the close of the year was a matter of comment.

In commercial geography a talk illustrated by the reflectoscope summed up the lessons of each week, and the gift of a large number of minerals by the Smithsonian Institute and other specimens from several manufacturing plants made it possible to present the lessons in a concrete manner.

WORK IN COOKING, SEWING, AND DESIGN

In cooking each girl learned to make over seventy different articles of food, the most of which were

thoroughly tested in the school lunch room; besides this, each girl learned valuable lessons in neatness and care of equipment. In sewing, a complete set of underclothes was made, besides a cooking uniform, and some of the girls made dresses. In design, much valuable information was received in regard to harmony of line and color; hats, many articles for household use, and a few dresses were designed; the dresses were afterwards made in the sewing department.

WHERE ARE THE GIRLS NOW?

Of the fifty girls in the class at the beginning of the school year (September, 1910), forty-five remained until the end of the year. Of these forty-five, twenty-seven entered regular courses of the Technical High School in September, 1911, sixteen the Clerical, one the Fine Arts, and ten the Extra-Technical courses; two entered the Newton Classical High School, one a boarding school; two returned to the Special Transfer Class for a second year's work, which was so successful that both entered regular courses in September, 1912; four went to work in the Martin Manufacturing Company, where they had been employed afternoons during the school year (1910-1911); two went to work in factories; two became clerks in stores; one of the most promising was obliged to leave school to become a nursemaid; two remained at home and two removed from the city.

Of the five girls who left school during the year,

three of them became wage earners at once, as home conditions made this necessary.

In September, 1912, nineteen of these girls entered the regular second year class of the High School.

An effort is made to keep in touch with the girls who were obliged to leave school at the end of the Freshman Year and to make them feel that the school is interested in their success in whatever work they have taken up. In reply to letters sent out to these girls' information as to their employment and their reasons for leaving school have been frankly given. In nearly every case home conditions made it necessary for the girl to become self supporting at once.

THE STANDING OF THESE PUPILS IN THE REGULAR COURSES OF THE HIGH SCHOOL

A careful study has been made of the standing of all the girls who entered the regular high school courses in September, 1911. It has been found from the rating sheets that the number of those failing to do satisfactory work has been small. For the first twenty weeks of their work in the regular high school courses no pupil failed to secure a satisfactory general average and only two pupils failed in any subject for the entire twenty weeks.

In the endeavor to compare the work of these pupils in their Freshman year with the work of the other Freshman pupils, this question was asked of the three teachers of Freshman English;—"How does the work in English of the special-transfer girls compare with that of the other Freshmen?"

Teacher No. 1.—“Their work is as good as that of the other pupils, and, in special cases, it is better.”

Teacher No. 2.—“Their work is as good as any and in some cases better.”

Teacher No. 3.—“The average is as good as the average of the class.”

For the first ten weeks of their Sophomore year no girl of the group failed to secure a satisfactory average in her class. No one would be rated as a brilliant student, but no one could be classed as a failure, and the amount of individual achievement in the different courses was considerable.

REASONS WHY THE SPECIAL COURSE WAS SUCCESSFUL

1. The new environment aroused in the pupils the feeling that they must do their best to be worthy of a place in the High School.

2. The work was in a most stimulating atmosphere. There were large numbers and many activities. There was a many-sided development.

3. Every girl could do well some one of the many kinds of work in which she was engaged. This gave each pupil a sense of power that helped her in all her work.

4. In the academic studies attention was concentrated on a few vital points. The slow-working mind was not confused by non-essentials, nor was the pupil laboring under the discouragement of working with more rapid students.

5. The vocational outlook upon life caused a stream

of pleasurable emotion to flow through the consciousness. This aroused strong desire and determination.

6. As far as possible each girl was made to see the relation of every piece of work accomplished to some personal or social end.

7. The idea of preparation for the actual, successful work of life was constantly emphasized.

8. The course was adapted to meet the peculiar needs of the pupils.

A LOOK BACKWARD AND FORWARD

For too many years have thousands of boys and girls looked wistfully over the barriers within which the high schools have intrenched themselves, before these pupils have turned away to go stumblingly and haltingly out from the grammar schools to find some work in life. They have not realized that there was any injustice in the fact that none of the work of the high school was vocational or connected in any vital way with what must be their real work in life; but sometimes in talking of a wished for high school course, there was in their eyes a puzzled look that troubled their teachers, who knew that many pupils who had struggled through the grammar grades could ill-afford to spend four years in securing the academic culture, which was the only thing that the high school offered them.

At last, however, a better time is coming when the word "High" in High School will stand not alone for

certain work in the classics, sciences, and mathematics, but it will also stand for high achievement in many other lines of effort that lead to the strengthening of character, the brightening of intellect, the developing of skill in preparing for one's work in life.

In this better time, the "High" School will consider as its "highest" work for society the conservation of all of the boys and girls to whom it can be of service.

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