Preparing the Adolescent Mind for Living

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The subject of adolescent psychology is too broad to do more than touch briefly. It is my purpose merely to show how one high school teacher in the field of Social Science has tried to prepare the adolescent mind for living.

Before one can live one must eat. It is hard to enjoy life when we have to worry about finances, food, clothing and shelter, our jobs, our bank accounts, and our old age. One of our most important problems is to make this economic system of ours work so that not just a few at the top, but that the millions of "common folks" can enjoy economic liberty (to work) and independence.

But while our economic problems are important, there are other parts of living that are equally as important, chief of which is character development. One of the greatest tragedies of the depression is our loss of confidence in each other. We lose faith in our politicians when they enter on such disgraceful campaigns as are being waged today between our major political parties. We lose faith in our business institutions when our Senate uncovers the policies of some of our munitions makers, and our utilities. Do we not owe it to our high school students to bring to their attention such beautiful and courageous characters as Christ, Pasteur, Washington, Lincoln, Thomas Mott Osbourne, Jane Addams, and many others.

Another important part of living is the appreciation of beauty. As Dr. Shannon pointed out in speaking on "The House of the Educated Man," we would do well to pause each day to see something beautiful, to remember something beautiful, and to do something beautiful. If we are to aid our adolescents to live we must help them to appreciate those acts that are beautiful, that lift one onto a higher plane of mental and emotional experience.

In attempting to prepare the adolescent mind for living I have striven to bring about the realization of (1) certain problems, (2) ideals in the solution of those problems, (3) methods of approaching those ideals. If we look at a very few of those problems selecting one in each field, economic, social and political it is not difficult to find excellent examples.

In the field of economics we may take the paradox of want in the midst of plenty. In bringing about the realization of this problem the students in Social Science are encouraged and assisted in a wide read-

ing. We study this problem from a local, national and international standpoint. We try to appreciate, for example, that according to conservative estimates the nations of the world as a whole are capable of supporting the people of the world as a whole on a reasonably high plane of living. In the United States we attempt to comprehend the phenomenon of a national capacity to produce an actual quantity of goods and services to an estimated value of well over 100 billion dollars while in 1932 we produced about 39 billion dollars worth.

When that problem has been understood we attempt to establish ideals. It is quite possible that on many of these ideals there may be a difference of opinion. Consequently they are somewhat elastic rather than hard and fast. The attempt is made to draw these ideals from the students themselves rather than attempting to force them to accept those of their instructor. The ideals are established through reading of books, study of the goals reached by other countries, and class discussion.

For example, at the present time we are devoting considerable time to the study of the consumers' cooperative movement. The students are reading books and pamphlets on the Consumers' Cooperative Movement in Japan, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, England and America. In some the ideal has caught the imagination and these young people are now ready for the third step namely that of ways and means of approaching that ideal.

Those who believe that the cooperative movement will result in the better and more equitable distribution of goods and services are learning that that goal can not be reached by mere fanciful wishing. They are learning first that they must educate themselves on the movement so that they will understand it and be able to discuss it intelligently. The next goal is that of educating other people. Here again a few are getting a practical lesson in the field of education through the realization of the conservatism of their friends, parents, and neighbors. They are learning that it will take a great deal of time, of work and effort in order to bring about their goal—the establishment of a Consumers' Cooperative in Quincy. There are some who are actively trying to educate others to what they believe a desirable movement. How much they will accomplish time alone will tell.

Those who do not believe in the movement are given every opportunity to study and state their side of the case. The class conflict of opinion is often very interesting and at times exciting.

In the field of social problems we might take the family and the subject of marriage and divorce. In this field the problem of broken and divorced homes, having children of divorced parents is not difficult to realize. The ideal of a family in which husband, wife, and children are joined together in happy union and cooperation is easily appreciated. The difficulty lies in the method of approaching that ideal. In attempting to understand the solution of the problem the student is brought back to the economic function of the family. He is encouraged

to study ways of fulfilling that function through reading such books as those of Ralph Borsodi, "This Ugly Civilization" and "Flight From the City." The effort is made to help the prospective brides and grooms understand the financial obligations of married life and the necessity of a budget, how they can raise their plane of living even though their wages may not be as high as desired through the production of goods in the home.

The student comes to know that married life is more than three meals a day and the physical attraction of each for the other. He sees that he must give and take, sacrifice as well as receive, understand the other's problems and moods as he expects the other to understand his, and to make life beautiful and worth while.

In the political field civil service furnishes a good example. The problem of men totally unfit morally, intellectually and all too frequently inadequately trained. The goal, public employees honest and upright in character, interested in social welfare, intellectually qualified to do the job.

In order to approach that goal he sees the need for abandoning the spoils system, for abolishing greed in the attaining of jobs, for educating the public to the waste and inefficiency of our present method of appointing public servants, and educating the public to the desire for a better system.

I do not wish to indicate that I am one hundred per cent successful in my attempt to help my students develop the correct attitude toward life. There are many many times when the results are particularly discouraging. The true value of our efforts however can not be measured at this time or by the report cards. When these adolescents actually begin to work, to establish their own homes, to live in a world outside of school, when some of the ideals they have established in school remain the guiding goals of their lives, then and then only can we feel gratified that our efforts have not been entirely wasted.