

leading idea or ideas. The reading-lessons, occupations, and object-lessons may all be usefully combined—*e.g.*, if the teacher wishes to impress on her class some knowledge of a domestic animal, she may usefully combine the object-lesson for general study of its structure; the reading-lesson for a knowledge of its habits and character; some occupation, such as pricking the outline, to impress an exact knowledge of its form; a song or simple story bearing on its association with human life; so that familiarity with animals, especially with domestic animals, and a kind treatment of them, may be fostered.

On the other hand you should caution teachers against the mere repetition of the same exercises and lessons; the progressive character of the whole scheme of instruction should be constantly kept in view; and each exercise should lead up to something beyond itself.

Pictures and flowers have been wisely introduced of late in greater abundance into infant-schools, and have added much to their cheerfulness and attractiveness. They should be frequently taken down into the class, and made the subject of conversation. It is not enough that the children should be taught to observe these things and to answer questions upon them. They should be encouraged in every way to give expression in their own words to what they know, what they want to know, and what they think.

It will be found that the elementary subjects when taught on right methods can be treated with greater variety; reading becomes a kindergarten lesson through pictures and word-building; writing becomes a variety of kindergarten drawing; elementary exercises in number are associated with many of the kindergarten occupations.

It is the experience of many good teachers that by the adoption of such methods it is found to be unnecessary before the sixth year is passed to employ books for reading, except occasionally for a change of occupation, or perform any exercise in writing except the elements of letters, or to do any formal arithmetic work on slates.

It may reasonably be hoped that the observance of these suggestions will materially improve the work of the younger children in infant-schools and classes, by relieving the teacher from that useless subdivision in the elementary subjects, which has been hitherto generally employed, and by rendering the instruction less formal, but more varied and attractive.

A list of varied occupations is appended to this circular.

I have, &c.,

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The following list of varied occupations may serve as a guide to teachers, especially in infant-schools or classes, which may be divided into sections for those lessons:—

(a.) What children between the ages of five and seven can do: Games with music. Games without music (guessing games, &c.; taking messages). Picture-lessons. Object-lessons. Story-lessons—*e.g.*, stories from history; Grimm's Household Tales. Recitations. Paper-folding. Mosaic with coloured paper; use of gum. Drawing; brush-drawing. Plaiting paper. Ruling simple geometrical forms. Measuring length; estimating length. Weighing; estimating weight. Setting a table (carrying a glass of water without spilling it; moving cups without breaking them). Modelling in clay. Basketwork. Cutting out patterns and shapes with scissors. Word-building. Number pictures, with cubes, beads, &c.

(b.) What children between three and five years of age can do: Games with music. Games without music (guessing games, &c.). Recitations, nursery rhymes, &c. Picture-lessons (learning to answer in complete sentences as to what they can see in a picture). Paper-folding. Mosaic with coloured tablets. Drawing. Matching colours (picking out the same shades of wool from a heap of remnants). Plaiting paper. Working patterns with needle and worsted. Threading beads in twos, threes, &c. Arranging shells in twos, threes, &c. Arranging "pictures of number" with cubes. Word-building.

2.—INSTRUCTION OF LOWER STANDARDS IN SCHOOLS FOR OLDER SCHOLARS.

(Circular 332.)

SIR,—

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A general opinion was expressed by the Chief Inspectors at their last conference that the condition of the lower part of many of the schools for older scholars is at present the weakest point of the instruction in public elementary schools.

In the best infant-schools children are taught by natural methods, and are trained to use their powers of observation and reasoning; in schools for older scholars they are too often taught by arbitrary and conventional methods, and there is little in the general course of instruction to lead them to observe or to reason. Object-lessons are in many cases discontinued, the reading-lessons are encumbered with the teaching of spelling even in the First Standard, and hand and eye occupations are very rarely found. Arithmetic also often becomes a mere abstract or mechanical exercise, and is not made to rest upon simple questions of common life within the knowledge and observation of the scholars, nor is it always sufficiently an exercise in reasoning.

When the general character of the lesson presents so little opportunity for the cultivation of intelligence, it cannot be expected that the habit of a spontaneous desire to question which ought to be fostered in young scholars will arise; and it is to be feared that, when examined, they often reproduce knowledge which has been conveyed by methods which are not truly educational.

It should be borne in mind that object-lessons cannot be dispensed with if habits of observation are to be duly fostered, and they should be treated as a means for mental exercise and not merely as opportunities for imparting miscellaneous information. Objects should always be present, and in sufficient numbers; and the chief aim should be to call into activity observation and the construction of clear mental pictures, so that the intelligence of the pupils may be exercised and developed. Geography, where it is a class-subject, should be treated in a similar way, and should be taught by visible illustrations and by actual modelling in sand and clay, for the production of miniature rivers, mountains, &c. Tales from history also, if graphically told and well illustrated by