

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

ACEReSearch

Primary School Studies

ACER Archives

1952

The purposes of teaching

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.acer.edu.au/pss>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), "The purposes of teaching" (1952).
<https://research.acer.edu.au/pss/6>

This Discussion Paper is brought to you by the ACER Archives at ACEReSearch. It has been accepted for inclusion in Primary School Studies by an authorized administrator of ACEReSearch. For more information, please contact repository@acer.edu.au.

Primary School Studies — No. 6

THE PURPOSES OF TEACHING



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL
RESEARCH

This is Number 6 in a series published by the ACER as a follow-up of a nation-wide Curriculum Survey. Some of our outstanding results of this Survey were published in 1951 in *English and Arithmetic for the Australian Child*. The present series of pamphlets is designed to lead to discussion of problems raised directly or indirectly by the Survey. They are written by a panel of writers drawn from all States. The authors are anonymous but include teachers, inspectors, lecturers in Teachers' Colleges, and members of University Departments of Education. Each author has been left free to express his own view-point, and the views expressed, and ideas expounded, are not necessarily those of the Council. The Discussion Brief enclosed with each pamphlet takes up other points of view and endeavours to centre discussion on some of the major issues touched on in the pamphlet.

The titles of the pamphlets are:

1. *The Approach to Reading*
2. *The Individual Child*
3. *Ends and Means in Arithmetic*
4. *The Appraisal of Results*
5. *Highways of Expression.*
6. *The Purposes of Teaching*
7. *Power Over Words*
8. *Children in Groups*
9. *Priorities in the Primary School*

*They ask me why I teach and I reply,
'Where could I find more splendid company?'*

THE PURPOSES OF TEACHING

Those of us who are teachers have had many a solemn lecture on the Aims of Education, and most of the rest of us have heard end-of-the-year addresses in which the Aims have played their ponderous part. Yet it should be the constant and relished task of all of us, even and especially the teacher harassed by an over large class, to reflect upon the purposes of teaching.

No other field of human endeavour is more important than teaching, given its broadest meaning. For the purpose of teaching is to help and indeed enable the offspring of human beings to become themselves human beings.

TO BECOME HUMAN WE MUST BE TAUGHT

Solitary wasps, so Henri Fabre and other master-observers report, go about quite the complicated business of their lives without benefit of teaching. By instinct, or 'racial memory', the wasp 'knows' how to go about its life's work. Chickens do not get much of demonstration, instruction, questioning, and revision on the matters of pecking their way out of the shell and bi-pedal ambulation.

But human babies are very ill equipped to face life independently, far less well equipped than are chickens, or the newly hatched solitary wasp. Taking it by and large, life has to be brought to the newborn child. He cannot go out to meet it. Left to himself he would die.

Suppose that by means of some electronic robot he were given every physical care, but denied all contacts with human beings. He would live, grow, see, hear, find his toes. He would crawl. Some pediatricians assert that he would swim with an eel-like motion—and, like the eel, with his head under water, so that he would not have long to improve his skill. Some say that he would walk. He would certainly use his hands to grasp, to pick up objects, to feed himself. Doubtless, too, he would gurgle and grunt and coo. He would feel fear in falling. He would cower from sudden loud noises. He would learn not to strike his head against harder objects.

You might reject some of these accomplishments, and add others. Whatever the selection, they would make quite a list. There is one thing they don't make, and that's a human being. The child may or may not be born with an instinctive tendency to speak; unless he is taught he will never speak, and still less read and write. The child may or may not have an inborn propensity for counting; unless he is taught he will never be able to count, still less to manipulate numbers.

Language and number are two of the distinctively human achievements. Without language, thought would be earth-bound, without poetry, philosophy and religion. Without number, there could be no science and no technology. Life could not but be sub-human. And we can acquire language and number only by being taught.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TAUGHT?

Teaching and learning go on from the moment of birth, and we especially who are adults teach whether we will or no; incidentally as well as directly. Children are born into a human world, a world pervaded by human seeing and hearing and speaking and thinking and doing. Just by living in it they are being taught. Without book and birch, and chalk and didactic talk, without benefit of lectures in pedagogy, mother teaches her little lambkin to talk by talking to him and within his hearing. She teaches him to count not so much by the repetition of 'one, two, three' (eeny, meeny, miny would at first be just as significant) but because she is a counting being, matching shoes to feet, buttons to button-holes and plates on the meal table to the number of those who will eat the meal. By living a human life in the presence of her child she is teaching him to be human. However important the work of the school (and it is indeed the chief agent for systematic instruction and training) much fundamental learning goes on before schooling commences, in the extra school periods and after schooling has ended.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

The higher animals have the same senses as men—and in some or other cases excel man by far in the acuity of their sense perceptions. But man can condense a host of particular sense experiences into a single generalization, a generalization which has its own reality. Let us consider an example. Some animals can differentiate between one thing and two things, and two things and three. There is no evidence that they can frame the abstract idea—two. To man, the two-ness of a couple of days and a brace of pheasants (to borrow from Bertrand Russell) is identical. Many animals are better judges, with their bodies, of distance and speed than are men. (Think of the precision and beautiful economy of movement of the cat.) Animals cannot frame the abstract ideas of length, time and ratio.

It is ideas of just this kind, abstract ideas, which make possible arithmetic and other branches of mathematics; physics and the other branches of physical science. Animals, like man, are interested in food and shelter and security. Only man can formulate economic and political theories and contrive 'systems'. Animals live in com-

merce with their environment, adapting themselves to it if they can, and sometimes, like the beaver, adapting it to themselves. They are incapable of those general ideas which we call geographical principles. They find their way about their domains rather better than civilized man could if deprived of roads and signposts; they cannot make or read a map.

Both animals and men 'feel'. Both can experience abject fear, savage rage, and pain. But only man can fear a Third World War or another Great Depression or the possibility of becoming a statistic in the next monthly return of road deaths. Both men and animals can experience pleasure and displeasure, but only man assigns merit to what pleases him; only for man, I believe, can beauty exist; only man is capable of cultivating 'taste', or developing aesthetic standards.

It is not simply the experience of pleasure, and the desire for more pleasure, but abstract ideas of harmony, variety and unity which underlie and make possible the highest forms of poetry and music and architecture and painting and sculpture. Without the capacity for abstract thought man could never have developed the instruments and techniques for the various arts.

Both animals and men 'will' (or at least want, and strive). Only man can set clearly before himself the goals he is going to pursue, or can frame those quite general ideas-to-be-sought called ideals. Only man can entertain such abstract ideas as justice and injustice, mercy and harshness, goodness and badness, and in the light of them consider, evaluate and choose from alternative courses of action.

Putting all this discussion shortly, and in the good old fashioned way, only man is capable of seeking truth and beauty and goodness. In so doing, and to the extent that he does so, he becomes human. Euclid and Beethoven, Newton and Michael Angelo, Einstein and Shakespeare, Pasteur and St. Francis of Assisi are diverse archetypes of human being-ness because of their power in their various fashions and degrees, to frame, entertain and live in the light of abstract ideas, especially of those ideas which are normative; ideas which bear with them the challenge of true or false, beautiful or ugly, right or wrong.

RELATING THE ABOVE TO A MORE CUSTOMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE PURPOSES OF TEACHING

The teacher has for some time been urged by psychologists and by those who profess educational theory to think less of instruction and training, and more about development; less about facts and the memory and the reason, and more about the whole child. The

teacher's purposes are nowadays commonly described as promoting and guiding the physical, social, aesthetic, intellectual, and moral-spiritual development of the child. Let us look at these in turn.

(1) *Physical Development.*

Nothing was said in the previous section about physical development. It is certainly far more than a physical process. The idea of health is itself abstract, and can be framed only by man. Animals cannot set up norms of health, and frame and make use of such concepts as infection, resistance, therapy and sanitation. It is the power to apprehend and accept abstract ideas of this kind which has released man from bondage to malevolent spirits and revengeful gods, has greatly reduced infantile mortality and greatly increased the expectation of life.

We must indeed accept as a general purpose of teaching the physical development of the child. Plainly, there is nothing in this aim that contradicts the assertion that the *distinctively* human attribute is the power to form, entertain and live in the light of abstract ideas, and especially of those ideas which have normative

force, which carry the weight of 'ought'.

(2) *Social Development.*

Nothing was said, either, of the development of sociability. Young children no more need, and are no more capable of forming, abstract ideas of tolerance, co-operation, unselfishness and so forth than of health. As they grow older, though, they need insight into the nature of society and of their interdependence with their fellows. The gregarious 'instinct' will not suffice. The child must be helped to a grasp of abstract ideas such as Wendell Wilkie's 'One World', and St. Paul's: 'for we are members one of another'.

The hard-headed, 'practical' man who derides these ideals as empty abstractions is a fool. He lives in a world made one by wireless, press, aeroplanes, ocean-going ships, influenza germs, trade. He lives, that is, in a world made physically one by man's technical ingenuity. Unless man can lay hold of the quite abstract idea of a world society, and live by it when fashioning his commercial and fiscal systems, the clever devices by which he has conquered the space of ocean and desert and mountain and plain will but multiply the areas of friction and make more deadly the ensuing conflicts.

(3) *Emotional-Aesthetic Development.*

Perhaps enough or nearly enough has been said about the relation between abstract ideas and aesthetic development, but I should like to add a comment on the proposal, rather popular some four years

ago, that teachers should deliberately set out to train the emotions of the children. The argument ran that teachers had been busily trying to inject knowledge and to discipline intellect but had failed to develop sensitiveness to beauty. We could, I think, accept the criticism without feeling committed to the remedy proposed. There is a hollowness about it.

To train the emotions is not merely to evoke them. Children, unless repressed, manifest emotion spontaneously and powerfully enough. Nor should the object of such training be taken to mean merely the suppressing of the manifestations of emotion. It should mean the development of taste. The person of fine sensibility is the person who responds emotionally towards what is comely and beautiful, and against what is unseemly and ugly.

The man of firm taste knows what he likes, yes; but he likes what is good. He knows that it is good, and why it is good. It is his mind and not his emotions that is trained.

(4) Intellectual Development.

Turning now to intellectual development: We need to keep in mind two aspects, the getting of knowledge and the getting of power. Knowledge is more than experience, and certainly more than what is called information. As Whitehead has said, 'The merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth.' Knowledge is acquired by creative or at least assimilative mental activity. (And is not the distinction only in degree?) New facts, to become knowledge, are not just added to what we already know, they are assimilated to it, and assimilation is achieved through insight. There is a stage beyond assimilation. It might be called condensation. It is reached when the recall of concrete experiences or particular facts is no longer needed; when, that is, the conceptual supersedes the perceptual, when knowledge is generalized and so becomes abstract.

This is the kind of knowledge mentioned earlier as knowledge of the laws of physics, for example, and the principles of geography. But there is a kind of knowledge at an even higher level, knowledge about knowledge and about knowing. And what could be more abstract than that?

It is distinctive of man that he knows what he knows, and can know how to know. He can make himself aware, that is, of the best ways to acquire knowledge and the best ways to use knowledge. This is what is involved in the second aspect of intellectual development, the getting of power.

One momentous objection to the emphasis here placed upon intellectual development—that character and not intellect is the highest

human attribute — will be considered in the next main section (moral-spiritual development). But there is another objection which needs to be stated and if possible fairly met. Steadily throughout the last half-century the criticism has gathered weight that school education has become too bookish, too intellectualistic.

In the United States, for example, the stress not only in primary but also in secondary education has swung away from 'learning' towards 'living'. Even at the later secondary and early tertiary stages the term 'academic' is fairly commonly regarded as condemnatory.

In England there has been much the same trend, though perhaps less markedly. At the secondary stage there has come in the last quarter of a century or so the development of 'non-academic' as well as 'academic' types of secondary schools. In the high or grammar school itself much thought has been given to the broadening of curricula, and there has been a good deal of tinkering with the examination system in the hope that boys and girls, and not just their intellects and memories, will be trained.

The trend at the primary stage has been forcefully expressed in the often quoted statement: 'The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored.'

The intention is admirable; the wording is, I feel, unfortunate. Much liveliness (and it was needed) has been brought to the primary school through changes in curricula and teaching methods made in the spirit of this well-known statement. But the contrast between the pairs, 'activity and experience' on the one hand, and 'knowledge and facts' on the other, is unsound. Not even the use of the rather unfavourably coloured words 'acquired' and 'stored' justifies so sharp a contrast.

Its looseness has done something to cause, or at least has done nothing to combat, the less desirable results of the changes in curricula and teaching method. As examples of these I would suggest a relaxation of effort with a consequent loss in thoroughness and mastery; the exaltation of interest with insufficient care for the quality and insignificance of the situation or topics which are the occasions for the interest. True, these changes have occurred in the larger life beyond the class-room, but unless we accept the view that the school merely reflects the values current in its society, and that the task of the school is fulfilled when it adapts the child to society-as-it-is-, then we should, in aim and practice, combat and not accept relaxation of effort and the loss of respect for quality.

We need to ask, with firm discernment: What kinds of activity? Experiences of what?

The new-born child is learning when he makes almost any sort of movement. Those movements made in the same way by a two-year-old would look grotesque, and would strongly suggest serious mental defect. As we grow older activity needs to be expressive at higher and higher levels if it is to be educative; expressive of ideas more clearly apprehended and purposes more explicitly formed.

Number games are good in an infant school not primarily because the children like them, and certainly not because the children are active, but (insofar as we are thinking of arithmetic and not of fun and games) because young children learn more and better about numbers through games than they can from verbal rigmarole and pencilled or chalked hieroglyphics; because rhythmic movement, and visible and active increment and decrement, made in the purposeful company of other children is arithmetically more meaningful. It is the meaning, not the 'activity', which matters or rather, activity matters to the degree that it is meaningful.

No arithmetic is concrete. When an apple means 'apple' to a child it does not mean one-in-general. The reality of arithmetical ideas lies in their abstractness and there is no educative merit in 'experience' unless it carries meaning beyond what is immediately present to the senses. The child may have a visual experience of a notation box, and tactual and kinaesthetic experiences of its bundles in all their 'concreteness', yet not have the slightest grasp of the decimal system. Experience which fails to teach is of no educational worth, and should certainly not be exalted above knowledge.

It should be helpful, then, to re-state the famous dictum: The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience; for these, if appropriate and of good quality, are, especially for children, the best means to the acquisition of knowledge, and make it likely that what has been learned will be retained. This cumbersome re-wording really does no more than justice to the intention of the original statement.

It is not that the acquisition of knowledge is somehow inferior to the undergoing of experience, but rather that so much of what passed for knowledge in the days of chalk and talk was poor stuff and has deservedly evoked hostile criticisms. Typical of them is Whitehead's biting remark on 'the merely well-informed man.' Mursell, too, flings a hearty stone at the sort of teaching which aims at little more than knowledge-cramming: 'We go through a set of complicated and costly motions called 'teaching' algebra, geometry, physics . . . English, Latin . . . the subjects are 'taught' but they are not learned.' W. J. Locke called elementary mathematics 'the most disastrous, the most soul-cramping branch of knowledge wherewith pedagogues (Locke was one for a short time) in their

insensate folly have crippled the minds and blasted the lives of thousands of their fellow-creatures . . . 'I fancy it was Shaw who spoke of the wretched task of the 19th-century teacher: 'to drive a flock that thirsts not to a pool disliked'. It was certainly Shaw who said: 'Pressing people to learn what they do not want to know is as unwholesome and disastrous as feeding them on sawdust.'

These swingeing criticisms, whether or not wholly just, are relevant not only to the first aspect of intellectual development, the getting of knowledge; they are, I hope to show, just as relevant to the second, the getting of power, by which is meant the quite general training of minds in the best way to acquire knowledge and the best ways to use knowledge.

It is commonly said that the traditional claims for the developmental power of certain subjects have been discredited; that arithmetic does not and cannot develop the power to reason; nor Latin, the power of concentration, analysis, and exact reason, nor the learning of poetry the power of memory.

For my own part I shall briefly recall your attention to what I called Whitehead's and Mursell's and Locke's and Shaw's swingeing criticisms. The point is this: Many research studies of the past forty or fifty years (and some were very thorough) concluded that the study of arithmetic or Latin did not develop general mental power—did not, for example, train *the* reason, develop *the* power of concentration.

One result has been a firmer insistence that subject matter should be chosen for its utility and its relevance to the child's universe of experience. The latter insistence is clear gain. The former? 'Utility' has often been a narrow and meagre goal. A second result has been the discrediting, by many of the possibility of general mental training, and therefore the abandonment of rigorous attempts to give this training.

This second consequence is unfortunate, and could well be disastrous. I believe it to be unfortunate because we have failed to distinguish between what has in fact been true, and what must necessarily be true.

There is more than a grain of truth in the criticisms quoted above (from Whitehead et al). Given an arid, over-systemized curriculum, taught by too mechanically logical 'steps' (which failed to do justice to Herbart's psychological insight) to over-large classes, with little other than hostile recognition of differences in ability, and in an atmosphere of strictness and sometimes harshness, how could we expect children to be given an effective general mental training? So

far we might accept the experimental evidence. We might for further and say that experimental evidence is hardly needed. One need but listen to vox populi in the week or so preceding the first Tuesday in November to wonder despondently whether the years of training in arithmetic and grammar and rational geography have developed mental powers sufficiently general to function in this nation-wide out-of-school situation. There is little comfort to be found for the advocate of the general training value of arithmetic in most discussions on the causes of inflation. Nor do most arguments about taxation, economic freedom and governmental controls offer models of clear reason and impartial judgment.

It was true and I feel is still largely true that the learning of arithmetic etc. did and is doing little towards the development of general intellectual power. It is not necessarily true that it cannot. How can we expect children to develop the power to reason if this power be not exercised at every stage? Arithmetic reduced to type-sums, with 'problems' drilled until they are worked by rule of thumb; grammatical exercises performed like well-practised conjuring tricks; 'casual' geography learned by dreary heart; history reduced to barebone notes ('causes, events, results,') for verbatim reproduction; this is the kind of teaching against which thoughtful teachers have themselves revolted.

But if the child is permitted and encouraged to think for himself, and not permitted (and *never* compelled) to move on to a later and more difficult process or topic until he has gained sufficient insight, then children in time form the habit of reasoning, at least in arithmetic and grammar and geography and history and so forth. What is more, they will know better than many children have known when they know and when they do not know. And this is an important and highly valuable 'more'.

As the children grow older, and in due time, they can be got to see that the ways in which the mind works when it is working well are fundamentally the same in arithmetic and grammar and history and geography. The last stage comes when boys and girls are enabled to grasp that the same kinds of mental 'techniques' and attitudes are needed if they are to deal effectively with religious, political, racial, 'ideological', economic, etc., problems.

It is the trained mind which achieves those generalizations called the 'laws' of mathematics and physics and chemistry; the principles of geography and psychology. It is the distinctive mark of the human mind that it can frame, entertain and live in the light of abstract, or quite general ideas.

Abraham Lincoln was a great man because he could reach to and live by abstract ideas; he was a man of principle. Albert Einstein

was a great scientist because he carried the laws of Kempler and Newton to higher levels of abstractness, and a great man because the ideas of freedom, justice, toleration are for him quite general in their scope-general for mankind in all its diversity.

The years of schooling stretch from early childhood to young adulthood. I believe that a great deal could be done (something is being done now) in these years to develop quite general powers to assemble facts, to analyse, systematize and generalize. Here is one of the most general purposes of teaching, and one of the most urgent.

(5) The Development of Character: Moral-Spiritual Development:

Oppressed by the gigantic complexity and apparent lawlessness of modern life, affronted and even disgusted by the contrast between the professions of religion and the practices of intra-national and national groups, a growing number of men and women no longer feel sure that there are abiding moral principles. Sartre's Existentialism is a self-consciously provocative expression of this trend. There are also the cruder versions of Pragmatism: Truth is 'what works', and since what works here and now in the present social and economic milieu may not work tomorrow or in ten years' time, then what is true now may not be true tomorrow.

A more practical and perverse form of pragmatism is to be found in any brand of totalitarian 'philosophy', whether of the Right or of the Left. Truth is what serves the purpose of the State (and in a totalitarian state, L'Etat—c'est moi!)

The beautiful in music or painting is that which has the approval of the Leader and accords with the ideology of the Party. Goodness consists in obedience to the will of the Leader, no matter how many moral somersaults obedience may entail.

Men and women who lend themselves to a totalitarian dictator, whether from hope of adventure or gain, or from fear or apathy have either lost or never firmly held their grasp of moral principles. Morality declines until it is no more than the expediences customary and acceptable at any given time, and moral development means no more than the moulding of character to the appropriate and currently expedient pattern.

It is terrifying, yet in a way heartening, to note how effective a part teaching can play in the 'moulding' of character, in the inculcation of inferior values and in the really potent training of boys and girls to live by them. Terrifying, when one observes the powerful mischief which can be wrought by the teaching of 'cooked' political geography, 'slanted' history, 'patriotic' literature and even

'guns and bombers' arithmetic; terrifying when one observed the devotion and almost worship, the loyalty and self-sacrifice freely and strongly flowing from the children to a leader who was unscrupulous, cowardly and wildly neurotic.

But we might feel heartened if we ask whether, if teachers can mould in these perverse ways, they cannot also influence the development of character in the highest ways. The answer we make to this question will depend a great deal upon our views of the special function of the schools. Is it transmissive or creative?

Influenced by the deterministic psychologies prevalent especially in the early decades of the century, many teachers would have answered, transmissive. The popular word in America, for example, was 'adjustment'. Boys and girls were being taught well if they were well adjusted to their material and social environment. 'Morality' would then have the limited meaning of its etymology—the customary. It is hardly a noble meaning.

True, there must be a good deal of conformity if boys and girls and men and women are to get along together in the smaller and larger groups. But moral-spiritual *development* as distinguished from training in conformity, requires insight prior to assent, and scepticism, and at times downright rebelliousness and rejection. The function of the schools is both transmissive and creative.

To return to the theme of this essay: We become human to the degree that we are able to form and *live in the light of* abstract ideas. The development of intellect will not of itself ensure virtue. Cleverness, like physical strength, may be used in the pursuit of wicked purposes. But goodness is impossible without choice, and choice is impossible without judgment, and judgment is impossible without knowledge. The highest virtue comes only with the best kind of wisdom, and the individual mind has attained wisdom when, through reflection and analysis and abstraction and judgment it has grasped moral principles, and not merely accepted conventional modes of behaviour. Through abstraction! I shall repeat, if I may, that I do not think this to be an assertion of the self-sufficiency of intellect. One cannot prove by logical reasoning the goodness of the Good, and there are more ultimate sources of knowledge of good and evil than the syllogism! But faith, too, is insufficient. It may be powerful and unshakable—and grievously misplaced.

Speaking broadly, there are today two main views on the reality or otherwise of man's spiritual freedom. First that he is what he has to be, and does what he must; that he is part and parcel of a wholly material universe governed by wholly mechanical laws. In a closed system of this kind there is no room for values; there is no meaning

to good or bad; moral responsibility and the possibility of spiritual development are illusions.

Second, that the universe is indeed an ordered universe and that man, in common with the atom and the amoeba is 'subject' to law; but that moral law is obligatory rather than prescriptive, and the obligation has to be perceived and acknowledged in freedom for conduct to be called good. The very essence of this second point of view is that man is able to grasp for himself the distinction between good and evil. It follows that moral-spiritual development is impossible without the development of the critical reason. One cannot live in the light of principles (and principles are always abstract) unless one has been trained in and has cultivated the ability to handle abstract ideas.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The chief assertions in this paper are first that *the* general purpose of teaching is to help and indeed enable the offspring of human beings to become themselves human beings, and second, that we become human to the degree that we frame, entertain and live in the light of abstract ideas; especially of those which have normative force.

I feel confident that the first of these assertions is sound although it might be objected that it is too general to be useful.

Perhaps the sharpest disagreement would be felt over the central part which abstract ideas are alleged to play in moral-spiritual development.

One other doubt is whether the assertions claimed to be general are not, after all, somewhat special in nature. Every now and then some prophet, such as Rousseau and more lately D. H. Lawrence, adjures us to shun reason and follow the promptings of nature. In an ideal (or is it idyllic?) society children would be perfect because their parents were; and society, because its members were, all by the light of Nature.

I cannot envisage the emergence of a world which would not need the pain of thought and the strain of disciplined effort, unless by some genetic freak the basic nature of man were changed. Insofar as we are to move further from callousness to kindness, from recourse to violence to acknowledgment of law, then it will be through the grasp of moral principles in all their grand abstractness.

A final point: I have throughout written as if the power to frame and live in the light of abstract ideas was open to all human beings. This point of view is taken deliberately, for I believe it to be sound

It is true that we differ greatly in power to frame abstract ideas, but the difference lies in degree, and not in discrete type.

The achievement of our degree of human excellence depends upon the development of our capacity, tiny though it may be, to form and make use of general ideas. And if we give reality to our professions of democracy (which is one facet of Christianity) then we shall be at as much pains with the boy of but one talent as with him who has four.

So I conclude that the general purpose of teaching is to help and enable each babe of human parents to become most richly human; that this is to be achieved by developing his power to form and live by abstract ideas; that only so can the individual life be enlarged and lived in freedom; that given this fundamental power, the rest will follow—peace instead of war, a common plenty instead of the patchwork of possessive wealth and constricting poverty, a world whose unity is enriched by manifold diversity instead of torn and rent by it. For abstract ideas are general ideas, and the higher the order of generality the nearer we approach to ideas whose validity is universal and eternal.

THE PURPOSES OF TEACHING

Primary School Studies No. 6

DISCUSSION BRIEF

1. Is there a difference between the 'Aims of Education' and the 'Purposes of Teaching'?

2. It is a constant complaint that schools are not, in general, adequately supported by the communities they serve. This suggests that those communities do not consider them the centres of the most important *human endeavour*. If you think this suggestion right, what reasons lie behind the situation?

3. Is there a difference between actively promoting physical development, and providing the necessary conditions for it? If so, upon which purpose should teachers concentrate?

4. Do you agree that in recent years there has been, in school work, 'a relaxation of effort with a consequent loss in thoroughness and mastery'? Is this due to a change in method, or a change in acceptable standards, or to the inclusion of new values in addition to those mentioned?

5. What values does your school stress that are not current in its society? With what effect?

In what fields of values—economic, political, spiritual—do you think the school can be 'ahead' of its times? Who establishes these 'higher' values for you, and how do you convince the children of their validity? What are the dangers in schools in our society attempting to be ahead in this way?

6. In what ways is the criterion of 'utility' in the selection of subject matter likely to be a 'narrow and meagre goal'?

7. How can you reconcile the need for the child to have gained sufficient insight into a process or topic before he moves to another, with the 'needs' of a fixed course to be taken by all children? Or is there no need for such a reconciliation?

8. What are the implications for class-room practice of the two views of the reality of spiritual freedom set out on pages 14 and 15?

9. What degree of 'abstractness' would you consider it reasonable to expect children to have of the idea of *community* at say ages eight, ten, fourteen and sixteen?

10. What, in your opinion, are the most important 'moral principles' made explicit in your own class? What amount of active practice do you give the children in deciding moral issues?