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Child Study A Part of Homemaking Education

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I Want to Be Properly Trained

"A LITTLE child shall lead them," said the greatest Leader the world has ever known. Again we are framing around this thought a new policy, a new venture in education. This idea is not really a new thought, for Froebel and many others adopted it, and of late years Madame Montessori has demonstrated its value. Education has said many times that a child shall lead them, but medical men, psychologists, economists and ministers are now saying that the emphasis should be put on that word "little" because the first few years have been found to be such vitally important ones in an individual's life.

By showing the problems, the pitfalls, and successes of child life, little children are actually leading students in their studies in a number of colleges and universities in this and other countries. At Iowa State College it was deemed necessary to include care and training of children in the education of the prospective homemaker or teacher of homemaking, this education to include opportunity for practical application. Long ago home economics people learned that theory without practice was only half education, likewise it seems sure that the child to be known must be studied first hand.

We must acknowledge, however, that this new idea in the educational field was an adopted one. It took its inspiration from our English cousins, who, after the war, found themselves confronted with the fact that too many of their citizens were unfit for service. On tracing the trouble to its apparent source, they decided there must be supervision of the pre-school years as well as the school years. They not only found that the pre-school child must have a chance, but also decided that parents should know more about raising better children. The outcome of these investigations and decisions

was the organization of the nursery school as a part of their regular educational scheme. At present the English Nursery School gives the child from two to five years old a chance to develop normally, physically and mentally.

We may have taken our idea from England, but we are making our own applications according to our needs. In some places these schools serve as experimental laboratories where the physical and mental growth of pre-school years is measured. In other schools, educators are trying to give to the pre-school child that kind of teaching which the child needs at this particular period. In still other places, home economics people have realized that the nursery school is an ideal instrument through which child care can be taught.

As a part of homemaking training, it seems necessary to study both the abilities and growth of the child and at the same time to give to him that kind of educational material which he can take and needs to have. The underlying thought in this particular type of education is mainly preventative—that kind of material which will promise little undoing or doing over either in early or later years. This means taking into consideration first those factors which will insure to the individual a sane mind and a sound body. Therefore it seems that heredity makes its first contribution to a study of child care.

Perhaps logically following this line of thought is that kind of maternal care which brings the little newcomers to the world fit in mind and body. Science has long ago demonstrated facts which prove that the mother's health and healthy mindedness react definitely on the unborn child. Thus heredity and environment have a definite place in a child study or homemaking course. However, that is but the beginning. Nature gives us "eighty-two percent of our Iowa children with a chance to be vigorous men and women", so says a statistician, but "only seventeen percent of this number grow up without some handicap".

With a chance to study a group of children, such chances as our child laboratories provide, students have an opportunity to see childhood in its many phases and to build up in their own minds the necessary material which mothers or teachers of children should have. Students of today are discounting the old idea that at the proper times mothers are endowed with the necessary information which will make good citi-

zens of their offspring. Instead, they are deciding that science can tell them how to interpret much more effectively the time honored word, "motherhood".

She who is studying children must refer to psychology to help her to follow or to better understand why children react to situations as they do. With such a background and with an opportunity to see skillful guidance in behavior problems, students are doubly reinforced with material which will function in child teaching. Through the nursery school group, a splendid opportunity comes to the student to see the development which children can accomplish when given a chance. Through well chosen toys and games and opportunity for free and directed play, there comes stimulation of creative, dramatic and cooperative abilities. An appeal to nature and nurture can be demonstrated through animals and plants. Interpretation of rhythm can be called out of the child thru simple good music. Thru association with their own kind, little children learn to recognize the rights of others and to show what it means to be socially minded.

The relation of food habits and proper nutrition have many definite applications in a group of children. The student may also learn with great interest that even in a pre-school group, good food habits may become a part of a child's program because the child has learned at school it is the best thing to do. Careful physical examinations of the children give the student a clearer insight and interpretation of behavior problems and developmental studies.

"But are you teaching homemaking at the expense of the child's desires and interests?" asks one interested in children. The so-called nursery school or child laboratory has won the child's heart, as can be readily proven by watching the school in progress. Children come eagerly, leave reluctantly and show distress when kept at home. It is their school, their interests are paramount, a chance is given them to follow their desires.

Human relationships are no doubt one of the homemaker's biggest problems. Making a budget, selecting artistic and economical clothes, serving a delicious meal, are only means through which the individual can express itself. To so control situations and to so guide human beings that they may attain their greatest potentiality challenges the wisdom of the ages. That Leader long ago gave us the key when He directed us to study childhood.