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The Place of The Child

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NURSERY schools are a comparatively new step in education and are still in the experimental stage. The benefits derived by both child and parents through this educational institution can scarcely be over-estimated.

In this day of "abbreviated" families and apartment houses, perhaps the greatest contribution of the nursery school is the opportunity it offers the child to associate with his peers. This adjustment to group life involves many factors in character building, leadership, self-reliance, self-control, cooperation, respect for rights of others, initiative, courtesy and ability to adjust to situations are developed. These are brought into play when young Jimmie realizes that Jack also has a turn at the swing or slide, that he can hang up his coat, that bullying gains him nothing, that "please" and "thank you" go a long way toward making life pleasant.

Standards of the group influence behavior even at this early age; hence eating, sleeping, cleaning up and other routine duties all become a thing to be done because "It's being done." Tantrums, pouting and other negative emotional reactions become infrequent, largely because it isn't popular with the group, and there are so many other interesting things to do.

Nursery schools also offer equipment for motor, postural and mental development such as the average home can neither provide space for nor afford. Here is a world constructed for the child, one he can adopt and conquer. Through this opportunity for lifting, balancing, reaching and running, which the spacious playground provides with its swings, slides, teeterers, sand pile, trees and large blocks, the child gains mastery over his own body.

Self-reliance, independence, self-confidence and ability to assume responsibility is further increased by the manipulation of dishes, silverware, clay, crayons, scissors, paper, taking off and putting on garments, washing his own hands and face and in making decisions regarding various small projects. Orderliness and adequacy to meet situations are particularly fostered in the nursery school, since the equipment is such that he can handle it, with little or no help from adults. The association with music, art and literature at this early age is of great value.

"Nursery school is the place for the child from the time he is 18 months old until he enters public school. Both he and his family are benefited by such an arrangement."

This is the theme of this first article on "The Place of the Child." Next month a mother who does not send her child to nursery school and one who does will tell you why they feel that the nursery school is not or is the place for their children. The series will be closed by Miss Anna E. Richardson, field worker of the committee for child development and parental education of the American Home Economics Association.

Nursery schools also provide physician, nurse, nutrition specialist and psychologist in addition to the nursery school teacher, who make a study of each individual child and assist in so adjusting the environment in the nursery school that the child may attain his maximum development. Since we are coming to look upon parenthood as a profession, and realize that in this, as well as other professions, training is necessary, and advice by experts desirable, that with the birth of the child parents do not suddenly acquire ability to care for it, we must also realize that the nursery school offers the expert advice of professionals to many for whom it is not desirable that they be especially trained for the care of the child.

In the nursery school there are persons, sympathetic, understanding and properly trained, who devote their entire time to furthering the little child's development, and helping him to increase his experiences.

This separation strengthens the relationship between mother and child, for it is practically impossible for the average mother who has household responsibilities to be ever alert to listen to Jackie's questions and help him meet his small problems adequately. Sheer lack of time and physical strength often causes mother to tell her child to "run away and play."

The nursery school as a step in education has probably come to stay. Although it has not yet been accepted by all educators, and criticisms are made which are just, the benefits undoubtedly outweigh any deterring effect upon the child. Nursery schools such as the Merrill-Palmer School at Detroit and the one at Iowa State College, at Ames, and others are doing much toward giving the pre-school child his opportunity.