

# Learning the Three R's by Doing as You Please

## New Method of Educating Children Provides First of All for Self-Determination, and Makes Playmates of the Old Schoolroom Bogeys

By JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON

IMAGINE yourself going to school and being asked what you would like to do. The old way was to tell the pupil what he must do, and especially what he must not do. But it is the natural way to learn by doing, even if one does try something at first rather beyond his powers.

"Why," replied a youngster in one of the pre-primary grades at the Horace Mann School, "I think I would like to build a Woolworth Building."

"Would you like to begin today?" asked the teacher.

"Right away, if I can do it before lunch."

The boy was directed to a large pile of wooden beams, each four feet in length and about three inches square. They had interlocking devices to hold them together. As the schoolroom was only fifteen feet high, the tower which was soon being reared was not a full-scale skyscraper to the adult mind. It was the real thing, though, to the youthful architect. He soon found that he needed help, and he was joined by four or five other lads of that impossible school. Foot by foot the fabric was

reared, and once in a while the teacher strolled up to see how the construction was progressing. The first story was as high as the builders, and so, after a good deal of talk, they left a hole in its roof, which was the floor of the second story that was to be, so they could crawl up through the aperture and lay the courses for the rising walls.

The third floor meant a dizzy height for the age of 5 or 6, and it required a firm will to work in those upper airs. At last came the peak of a tower where slanting beams were raised high aloft. Down among the tables stood a boy who had been a timid spectator. He was struggling with a great purpose. At last he screwed his courage to the sticking point and crawled into the awesome structure and wriggled to the very top floor. There he sat down with a sigh of triumph and relief. He had done it. His fear of high places had been trampled under foot.

In the erection of that pile there had been also the building of character. First there had been instilled in the mind of the pioneer a spirit of initiative. He had thought that he would like to do something on his own account. Finding that his own strength was not equal to the task, he had sent forth his call for aid, and those who joined him thus learned the value of co-operation. The youngster who followed in their wake, like some young Hercules, had strangled the serpent of timidity.

The foundation stone of the new education and of the good citizenship which this youngest generation is expected to reach by the new method are just such qualities as these, which are considered of far more account than anything which can be learned from books or

worked out by rule of thumb. The youngsters who built the skyscraper had first of all learned the properties of things; they had mastered the social ideals of co-operation, and had developed personal self-reliance. They had made plans and had executed them.

But what of the "Three R's"? You may say that the boys and girls of Do-As-You-Please-Hall are really not learn-

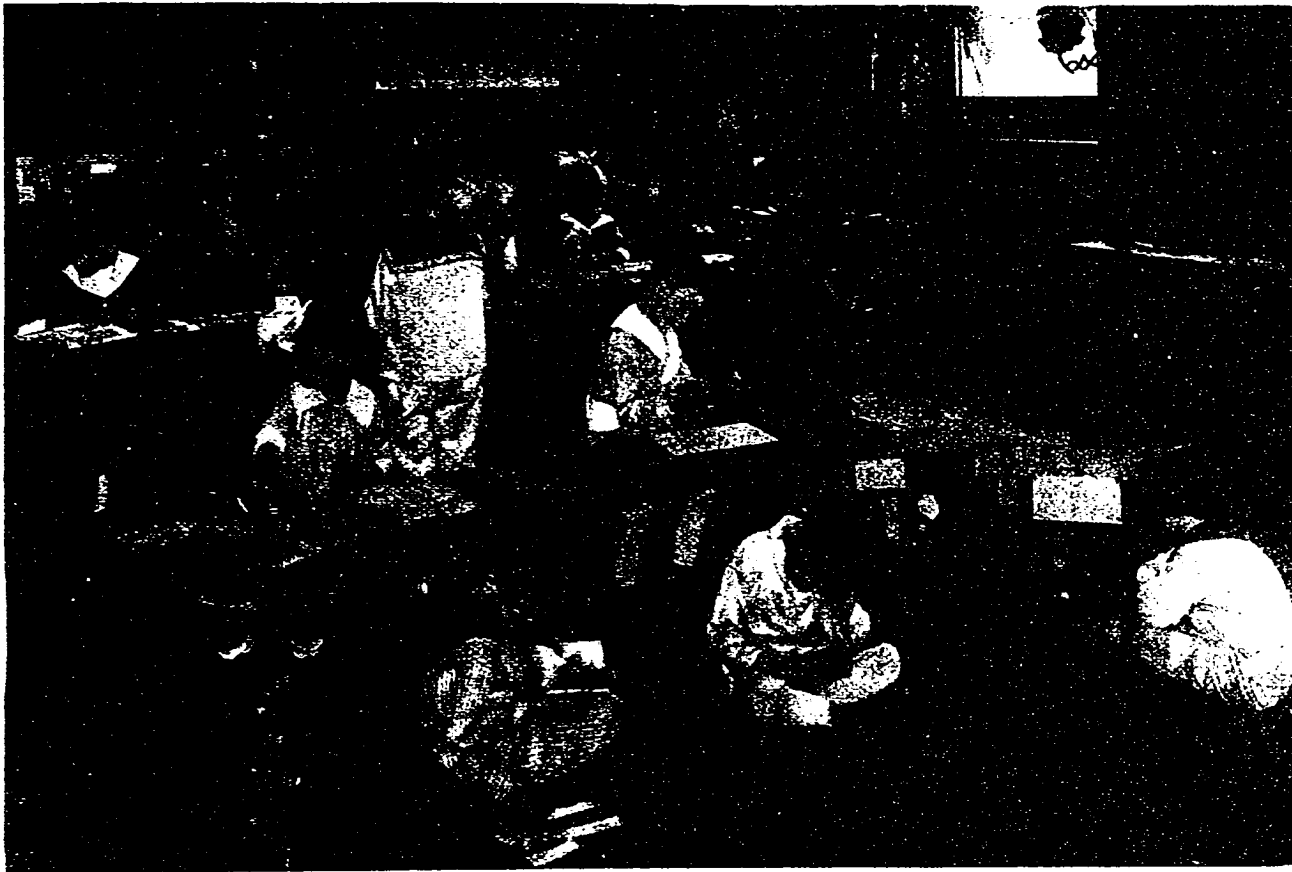
wall. They absorbed arithmetic without knowing it. It was necessary to have the name of the building put upon its front. But these youngsters, much as they wished to have the inscription, were weak in orthography and chirography. Over in one corner was a tray filled with A B C's, little and big, carved on printing blocks. The entire crew, with a little help from the teacher, assembled the name in a line of type. The first at-

The more formal things required in an education can be added. There is no laborious drilling in the alphabet; nothing is said about the multiplication table; and there is no endless repetition of words and phrases which the child mind cannot grasp. When the youngster makes houses, airplanes, submarines, or tea, he is acquiring skill in the use of tools and paste and dishes.

These children get their own meals.

The teacher does not tell them about it, but along about noontime they begin to feel hungry, and some one says, "Let's get lunch." The ones who like domestic duties the most attend to that. They spread the tables and bring out the dishes and see that the chairs are placed. Initiative, co-operation, and a desire for service all have their places in this play, and the school arts come in when the bill of fare is printed and there is a counting of knives and forks and spoons.

For the last two years there has been much discussion in educational circles about the discontinuance of the word kindergarten. The old name still appears in the catalogue of Teachers College,



Children Teaching Themselves Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic by Playing Games of Their Own Choice, at the Horace Mann School, Teachers College.



Ninety Per Cent. of All Children Under Six in the District Have Received a Complete Physical Examination.

ing anything. Fourth in importance in the scale of the new education come the "school arts," such as reading, writing, arithmetic. Let us go back to the skyscraper and perhaps we may find them somewhere in the cornerstone.

The architect and his helpers, in order to get the stories the same height, were obliged to count the timbers of the

tempt lacked an "o" in the first syllable, but the final tablet pasted to the building just above the imposing entrance was correctly spelled.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic had come to those youngsters in the heat of achievement. Now that the building was done, why not make some more labels? There were so many things about the room that had interesting names, such as chalk, pencils, brushes, paints. These were more convenient to use if each kind were kept in a box by itself. It would be best, in that case, to have a label on each box. Therefore, more scrambling among the type, more reading and spelling, and the labels were duly made.

Although, at first blush, one might think that this school is a haphazard institution, the teacher is at every point directing and overseeing the tasks which the pupils have chosen for themselves. The child on reaching the classes in the morning is permitted to help itself to whatever material it wishes. It may model in clay or nail a box or make a wagon or paste up a scrapbook. Whatever it does has in it the urge of a personal interest. Some of us may remember periods in our lives when we took up the flying of kites, or the hunting for Indian arrowheads in the fields, and in the kindling enthusiasm of that time we grasped the principles of aeronautics, archaeology, and of geology, sciences with mouthfilling names of which we did not even hear until later years.

If the boys and girls who go to this school of the new order are guided aright in their building of houses and of the making of automobiles and fire engines out of wooden beams and wheels, the theory is that they will develop correct and accurate habits of thought.

of which the Horace Mann School is a division. The new movement in juvenile education is radically different from the Froebel idea of the kindergarten. It harks back to the original conception of the brilliant French-Swiss thinker Rousseau.

When Froebel served with Pestalozzi, when that distinguished educator was working out the ideas of Rousseau's "Emile," he grasped comparatively little of the spirit of the work. His kindergarten, as he called it, meant literally a garden in which children were raised like plants. He invented his ponderous system of gifts and of applied play. The children were taught to act and to think in unison. In the average kindergarten the pupils are assembled about the table at the same time and each child is set to work cutting or pasting or modeling in the same way that every one else is doing. The system at Horace Mann, as put into practice by Miss Patty Hill, who is in charge of these pre-primary grades gives scope to the talents of every pupil. Instruction in some of the pre-primary grades begins with the age of 4 years.

No one would think on entering the schoolroom where this kind of instruction is given that he was in a schoolroom. He sees a group of children, each one of whom is earnestly doing what he likes. It takes some time to realize that these youngsters who are playing games of their own choice are teaching themselves reading, writing, and arithmetic through occupations for which they have a natural aptitude.

In this way, modern education removes the old obstacles which blocked the path of self-determination, and gives to every child a full opportunity to develop its individuality.