

## NOTES AND QUERIES ON THE WORK OF THE PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL.

EDITED BY THE DIRECTOR, P.U.S.

### I.

CONDITIONS FOR SCHOOLS USING P.U.S. PROGRAMMES.

AT the meeting of the Ambleside Council in July, 1928, it was decided to issue a copy of the following leaflet to all schools using the P.U.S. Programmes:—

“A. All schools following Parents' Union School programmes must be open to inspection by official visitors.

B. A school can only be placed on the Register of 'recognised P.N.E.U. schools' and on the list published occasionally in the *Parents' Review* if it fulfils the following conditions:—

1. (a) That the Principal and Staff are familiar with Miss Mason's books, and (b) that they are therefore able to carry out the programmes with some knowledge of the underlying principles.

2. That the school has worked in the P.U.S. for one year, and has sent in satisfactory examination papers at the end of each of two terms.

3. That in respect of its general conditions, character and atmosphere the school has satisfied the official visitors appointed by the Committee.

C. The name of any school on the Register may be removed unless such school continues to satisfy, in respect of these conditions, the official visitors who will revisit it from time to time.

D. Only such schools as are thus recognised may call themselves 'P.N.E.U. schools,' or use the P.U.S. colours.

Before a school enters the P.U.S., it is hoped that the Principal will arrange to meet one of the official visitors, preferably at the school itself; or, in the case of schools in distant

[p 446]

parts of the world, that the Principal will correspond very fully with the Director of the P.U.S., and will give such due assurances as are required.”

This leaflet, together with a letter asking for co-operation upon two further points, was issued in the autumn of 1928. The points in question were the possibility of (a) covering the programmes more fully, and (b) the elimination of marks, prizes, places, etc. Some eighty-six answers were received, for the most part full and detailed, all of them expressing sympathy with this movement at closer co-operation and containing many practical suggestions and considerations. The following is a résumé of the answers:—

### II.

CLOSER CO-OPERATION.

There is general agreement as to the need for closer co-operation among P.N.E.U. Schools; one Headmistress (not a H.O.E. student) expresses the opinion that, as the

programmes and examinations ensure identical work being done, “the present method could not be improved upon,” but letter after letter speaks with approval of the step now being taken, and quotes cases known to the writer where the name “P.N.E.U.” is used without the spirit of the Method. A H.O.E. student (a Headmistress of many years’ experience) writes: “I shall feel it a great help to be more closely linked with the source, for it is such an easy thing to slip away from the *letter* even while keeping the *spirit* of the Method.” Another H.O.E. student writes: “I heartily approve of the scheme, and am sure others will welcome it, as in time surely it will help to unite P.N.E.U. schools, as well as to keep up the standard of P.N.E.U. work in schools. . . . I have always felt and often had experience of the inadequacy of P.N.E.U. schools to meet the needs of parents coming from abroad whose children have had the advantages of a Home Schoolroom education, and who are disappointed in the work of many of the so-called P.N.E.U. schools,” while another says, “Personally I feel as though a great weight had been lifted from the shoulders of the progress of Miss Mason’s teaching.”

All the writers accept the conditions as laid down in Leaflet “U,” all are willing to be inspected, and the great majority  
[p 447]

would definitely welcome inspection, though one H.O.E. student fears there may be difficulties in carrying the ideal into practice. The following letter seems to express the general feeling among H.O.E. students: “I do not see how there could be two opinions on the wisdom of such a step, and feel sure that all who really care about the work will do all in their power to make the inspections what they are intended to be—a help! Almost certainly it will be the best run schools who will be the first to welcome the Inspector with her advice and comments; if there are quarters where inspection is resented, then that in itself is proof enough that closer scrutiny is required. . . . It is just what I hoped would happen, and must happen if our schools are to be recognised, wherever they spring up, as giving solid education founded on great principles.”

Headmistresses (not trained at Ambleside) welcome inspection for many reasons. Several write with much appreciation of helpful visits already received. One remarks, “It puts spirit into your work to see a visitor from time to time”; another says, “I consider that these visits inspire confidence in the parents and impress on them the fact that their children are not at an ordinary private school, as well as being of great assistance to me personally.” A Headmistress writes, “We should be glad of an official visit of inspection occasionally, as friendly criticism is most helpful. . . . Whoever visits should be willing to find fault and to show the weak places. We are all most keen and most willing to know about our failings, and we cannot improve unless we do.” A fourth writes, “I think that most Headmistresses will welcome inspection as a means whereby we may be sure that we have not strayed from the right path, and may be brought back if we have. For the path for Headmistresses is often beset with difficulties when the school staff cannot all be from Ambleside.” Another says, “I think it essential that any school calling itself a P.N.E.U. school should be really good and efficient, and open to inspection by an official visitor, otherwise neither the Director nor the parents can have any guarantee that the P.U.S. programmes are being properly worked and understood.”

As regards the need that teachers in P.N.E.U. schools should be familiar with Miss Mason’s principles, a H.O.E. student writes: “Quite possibly much will have been accomplished, if the teaching staff of schools following the programmes can be made really to read (not only to skim through) Miss

[p 448]

Mason's books. Judging from what I have seen and heard it is to a very large extent here that the weak spot lies; so many seem to find difficulty in realising that it is not enough conscientiously to follow the programmes, reading once and then narrating."

Some Headmistresses not trained themselves at Ambleside have, of course, H.O.E. students on their staff. Others write to assure us that they and their staff have studied Miss Mason's books and endeavour to carry out her ideals as closely as possible. One who has lately joined writes, "I have enjoyed Miss Mason's books myself, and have discussed them with my staff, who also have read some of them; as new members join I hand them such for their perusal." Another writes, "I personally have felt on reading Miss Mason's books that she entirely altered my view of teaching and that I have since been far better able to understand children." A third writes, "Those of us who knew Miss Mason, and whose mothers belonged to the Union before ourselves, do realise what a big and difficult matter it is to run a P.N.E.U. school. . . . and that no one can claim any relationship with Ambleside unless they read and study the methods as taught by Miss Mason in her books."

The extent to which the programmes are covered differs considerably. One H.O.E. student writes, "We always try to cover all the ground and take all the books set, but I do think it is a progressive thing, don't you? I seem to get through far more than I used to. This term we have finished everything and had time to spare." Other letters bear out this suggestion of progress as circumstances and the children's power of work permit. A H.O.E. student who has not long been established in a peculiarly difficult neighbourhood finds it "difficult to fit in the whole programme with the seniors," but is taking seventy-five per cent. of the programme and gradually increasing the work. Another writes, "We have always found it difficult to get in the whole of Form III. work . . . . but the children have not been through the P.U.S. and are mostly backward." Another who has had her children from the very beginning says, "In spite of the fact that my pupils are day children we have no difficulty in doing the whole programme in Forms I. and II. I have not yet had pupils in the higher Forms." The Headmistress of a boarding school sees no solution to the difficulty "unless the day be definitely lengthened," but takes seventy-five per

[p 449]

cent. of the programmes, as does another who manages the whole programme in Forms IA. and IIA.

Among non-students the amount of P.U.S. work varies. One or two assure us that they cover the whole programme; some are obliged to omit a few details, but endeavour to carry out the greater part of the work set. One Headmistress writes, "We find it quite possible to get the whole of the programme in up to IIb., but beyond that in a day school it begins to get difficult." Another problem is touched on by a Headmistress who writes, "My difficulty lies with parents who wish their children to enter the county schools and would like them to concentrate on the three R's. Fortunately they are in the minority." Again, another Headmistress is forced to sacrifice some of the programme to extra Grammar and Mathematics, in order to cope with the entrance examination to the County Secondary School to which her children pass on. A Headmistress of a boarding school gets in all the work by setting the "recreation" subjects—Reading, Century Books, Nature Diaries, History Calendars, and so forth—as homework for the upper Forms. (This is, of course, what Miss Mason intended).

With regard to marks and places, practices in different schools vary widely, though most agree that the stimulus of competition is unnecessary. To quote from one letter received, "Miss Mason's way of teaching succeeds in gaining the children's interest and enjoyment in their studies without any stimulus of marks or competition being needed." "I have worked without any marks (except examination marks) for seventeen years, and we do not award form prizes," writes the Headmaster of a Boys' Preparatory School, and Heads of other schools give similar assurances. One Headmistress allows her mistresses "to give a remark, 'Excellent,' for every lesson that is quite accurate and for any which shows special effort or advance," and some such system of remarks for good work and conduct is in use in several schools.

Letters from H.O.E. students state that marks and places are not used. One writes that she does not find that the parents ask for them, but others are having a struggle in this connexion. "It is tremendously difficult not to give way to pressure from outside, and give the children the assurance of marks and competition. Failure to give this does sometimes involve the loss of a pupil, but it's worth it," writes the Head (H.O.E.) of a day school, while another says she is "constantly

[p 450]

meeting the cry of 'there's not enough competition.'" One Headmistress, however, awards "honours marks" for good work, and writes, "We *do* have term places which are highly convenient in many ways to us, but we do not make much of them to the children."

---

At the meeting of the Ambleside Council in January, 1929, it was decided that this special report which had been presented upon the subject of closer co-operation between Miss Mason's Method and schools using the P.U.S. programmes should appear in the *Parents' Review*.

III.

EXAMINATIONS.

At the recent Southampton Conference, further details came up for consideration. The questions dealt chiefly with the conduct and method of the P.U.S. examinations, and it seems necessary to try to put before our members what Miss Mason had in mind in instituting the examination at the end of every term. It is not meant to take the place either of a public examination or of individual teaching, either in the home schoolroom or in schools. It is, on the other hand, meant to act as a guide, both for parents and teachers, not only as to the standard it is possible to attain but as to the standard that is attained by many hundreds of children at work in every possible kind of circumstances. As will be seen from the Examiners' notes which follow, we are able to estimate the standard which it is possible to attain by seeing many hundreds of papers, and the reports actually show whether or no a child is above or below or equal to the standard in any one subject in the examination. The general comment at the bottom of each report shows the Examiner's impression of the work as a whole, and he adds any special commendations or criticisms that are necessary.

Two points must be borne in mind. To get such work done satisfactorily (a), it must be done quickly, and (b), corrections are not necessary or desirable. Where definite books are set

and the questions are taken with great care from the passages studied, parents and teachers themselves can see what the answer should be without any correction from the examiner.

As far as we know, Miss Mason's method of examination is unique, in that the children's papers are always returned on request of the parents or teachers (and the majority ask for this).

[p 451]

Therefore the papers can be examined carefully with the report. It is generally possible to answer at once any question that arises as to whether or no a child has received his due, but if the reason is not clear the papers go back with the report to the Examiners, who never fail to give a second consideration to the matter.

We see quite a number of reports from non-P.N.E.U. schools, which are sent to us when children join the P.U.S. to give some idea of the standard reached, and I find that Miss Mason's method of putting a remark against each subject is being increasingly used in many schools. It is also a good and hopeful sign that some schools classify the children without a class order. One or two questions at the Southampton Conference, however, show that the method of the P.U.S. examination is still not understood by many of our members. We stand between the method of the correspondence class (of which there are scores in England, giving preparation for examinations, with test papers corrected week by week), and the competitive examination for certain places in schools or colleges for which schools have to prepare.

Again, the examinations of the P.U.S., held three times a year, are not only a test of the child's knowledge gained during the term, but a part of his moral and intellectual training. One teacher suggested (a), that in cases where two or three Forms were using the same book—Plutarch's *Lives*, for example—the child might be allowed to select his question from those set for the various Forms. Another teacher thought (b), that the Examiners might mark questions substituted for those set. This takes no account of the fact that the questions set (a), have in view the ages, and the work to be expected from children of different ages, and also that answers given, say, on "Alexander" by a child of ten, of twelve, or of fourteen, must be considered from a different standard; and, (b), are upon work that is part of a definite course.

In another way the P.U.S. examination is also unique. In an ordinary school examination or public examination every specialist marks his own papers, more or less by a set of standardised answers. In the P.U.S. examination each child's work is regarded as a whole by one highly qualified outside Examiner, who examines every subject. The ordinary school report gives a report upon a child's work from the point of view of every member of the Staff; the P.U.S. Examiners' report

[p 452]

enables the parent or teacher to gain an impression of the child's whole work, measured by the standard obtained from the whole work of hundreds of other children in the same subjects. I should add, perhaps, that it was not easy to secure as Examiners men willing to examine in every subject in the P.U.S., men themselves of high University qualifications, who are also engaged in lecturing, teaching and coaching, in Oxford and in London.

Another point Miss Mason made was that the parents themselves should get from the examinations a more intimate acquaintance with their own children's work. For this reason the parent or teacher examines the whole of the work once a year (the P.U.S. Examiners report upon only two out of the three examinations): this experience should enable the parents to

understand the Examiners' reports, to see, for example, that the marks indicate whether the child has or has not covered the ground in any one subject, or has only done, say, a third of the work. In the case of schools if the teacher's report which should accompany the Examiner's report is filled in according to the P.U.S. regulations,<sup>1</sup> it should give the parents the necessary indications for following the P.U.S. report.

We must beware of letting our examination become an end in itself to the children, parent, or teacher. It should be merely a test of the term's work, both as to the amount of ground covered and the standard reached, and it would lose both its present value and the spirit of Miss Mason's principles if it were placed in any way on a level with the ordinary public examination.

The questions asked at the Southampton Conference have been put before two of the Examiners, and they have been so good as to write in considerable detail upon the manner and method of work, as they took it up, in the first instance, from Miss Mason's own correspondence with them, and, later from some years' experience in the conduct of the examination. Their reports may help to show our members more clearly with what purpose and on what method the examinations are conducted. The Examiners have sent their views independently, and they show different sides and different points of view in connection [p 453]

with the same work. A criticism is so often the result of a want of understanding, and a fuller understanding of Miss Mason's method of examination would mean a much closer co-operation between all our members than exists at present.

#### EXAMINER I.

##### PRINCIPLES OF EXAMINATION AND THE P.N.E.U.

Although it seems often forgotten, the conditions governing any examination are ultimately the object it is aiming at. This may be one of three:—selection for a prize, scholarship, or post; certificate of a standard reached; test of a school or system.

The common defects in examination setting and correcting are also threefold: over-rigidity—irrelevancy to the object—and the personal factor of the examiner. The rigidity is greater in proportion to the scale of the examination, that is the number taking it. It is mitigated in the case of university degrees by the *viva-voce* and the often very flexible manner of marking; but the other large scale examinations must necessarily keep to well defined grooves. This ensures at least that by keeping to the safe middle ground common to all, practically all new advances and the precious uniqueness of personality in both teacher and taught shall be heavily penalised. It is indeed only tolerable to be so rigid where the object is extremely precise—like “go” and “not-go” in engineering tests, for example, and perhaps the examination for a bank clerk.

Irrelevancy to the object is as common as it is deplorable. The arch offence lies in the so common assumption that to measure the contents of a boy's basket of wares, his unthinking memory of undigested facts, is to have tested him in some real way. It is a good test of a certain limited kind of memory but of how little else of any value at all. Unfortunately this kind is far the easiest both to set and to correct and of course to cram for. There is a faint mitigation of such relevancy where the object is really little more than to satisfy parents and employers that something has been passed, some obstacle race run. Refreshingly opposite to these are the

psychological tests, highly relevant to a specific purpose but of course very narrow in their field.

Finally the personal factor: examiners fail through misconceiving or forgetting the object set before them, or through over pressure in spite of their most conscientious efforts. And [p 454]

this very conscientiousness sometimes leads to meticulous attempts at nice evaluation out of scale with the young mind being tested.

The greatest of all these causes of failure and the most widespread is that examinations are too commonly regarded as tests of past achievement rather than of probable future aptitudes; the great success at school is so often the university failure, and *vice versa*, that school leaving examinations are a poor guide to university aptitude. This has been worked at explicitly in American universities.

P.N.E.U.:—

To what extent does the Mason System meet the above conditions and defects?

OBJECTS:—

(a) To focus a term's work; (b) To guide and encourage isolated teachers—as in fact most teachers are, even though enmeshed in the most rigorous examination nets that official control can devise; (c) To guide also those who plan the work.

(a) The P.N.E.U. does in fact do this, but Miss Mason's emphatic intention that the day's and week's work should never have in view an impending examination is easily fulfilled. The work which shows best in examination is unquestionably that which at the time when the "lesson" was taken was most marked by the interest of assimilation. An account of an event or person or scientific phenomenon understood and told back or narrated intelligently does remain permanent without any of the traditional "revision for the examinations" found necessary in nearly all school work.

This supreme character of the Mason principles has two aspects:—

(i.) ATMOSPHERE. The atmosphere at a typical "lesson" is not that of a lesson as usually conceived—i.e., at its commonest based on inhibitions (from distaste, through dislike, up to actual fear), at its so-called best principally an irrelevant pursuit of the prize of marks or commendation and competitive superiority over one's fellows. These desperate defects of fear and hostility to one's neighbour are essentially absent from the Mason System, so remote indeed that even the opposites, eagerness for the lesson as such (for any reason other than its actual subject-matter), team work and so on are almost equally deplored. The great point is that the subject itself on its own

[p 455]

merits, presented by its most able exponents as far as possible, is the thing. Personalities, the goodness or badness of this child or that, fear or affection for the teacher, thoughts of individual praise or reproach—all these are to be quietly forgotten and the subject only is to fill the whole horizon.

These ideals are in the minds of many others of course, whether courageous isolated individuals or whole schools, but the P.N.E.U. leaders have worked them out in long successful practice.

(ii.) NARRATION. Psychologists have formulated the principle that to "do something

yourself about it” is the only method of real assimilation of new experience—if it is only giving up your seat in a tram car, as William James said, to register permanently your exultation over a fine concert as you come away. But before such formulas were grasped, Miss Mason worked out and established that for a child to tell back in his own way, but with the help of the vocabulary and descriptive power of good writers, what has just entered his mind, is the sure way of fixing it there indeed for ever, not merely for a terminal examination.

On the bye-products, the power of attention, self-forgetful concentration, intelligence and vocabulary, one cannot dwell here; but they are not hard to imagine.

Objects (b) and (c) refer particularly to the P.N.E.U. examination which follows the term’s programme:—

(b) A *standard* is quite definitely here being sought. But it rests upon no abstract conception of what a child at a certain age ought to know but on the actual relation to one another of a given set of children taking the papers at a given season. The examiner aims at an open mind which weighs one child in relation to the others not for any competitive purpose at all but as an indication of the degree to which the course intended in the Mason principles is followed.

This obviously joins at once on to (c), for child, teacher, examiner, and the setter of programmes and papers all are held in a growing organic situation whose object is definitely the assimilation of the heritage of thought and experience which belongs to the child of our civilisation. Growing and organic I say, because it is essential that each of the four elements should be constantly learning from the others.

Reduced to its simplest elements this is achieved by *approximate* marks set against each subject, but especially by

[p 456]

the comment at the foot of a child’s report. The examiner is not expected, nor would he claim, to give such precision to the marks as would justify the awarding of a prize to one child rather than another. But—and here is almost a supreme quality—this very flexibility and absence of “fear” in the examiner himself leads to what must be a far truer estimate of the living little person he is judging than the more rigid way could ever afford.

It may be objected by some uneasy teacher that when an examiner sits down to a thousand sets of papers, his judgment of relative values may be growing sound after the first hundred or two indeed, but what of the early ones? Actually that difficulty is apparent in an examiner in his first year or two (though mitigated much by an experienced “trainer”), but after that the memory of previous examinations and the constant stream of late-comers from abroad or home keep his standard continuous though never absolute. Yet it remains true that judgment does actually grow more assured as the first hundred wears on, and possibly to review that hundred at a later stage might modify some markings. But against this has to be set the point that in any such revision something of the fresh sweep, the subconscious *feeling* for values, is lost. The experienced examiner himself has his mind set at ease both on this score and other similar ones by the fact that to take any set at random and re-mark it without looking at the first report sheet does in actual experience result in a very close correspondence of values between the two markings. There is a rhythm in the swift unhurried survey that gives a living precision which nice calculation cannot achieve. For example, it is the experience of all examiners that they nervously tend to keep well below the maximum lest other papers come

along better than the best so far. Miss Mason has taught us not to press for such intense competition: one hundred per cent. means the paper is good and the work done as it should be, not necessarily the best or a perfect one. Similarly comments never take the form of “this is the best . . . (or the worst . . .).” So high is the general success of the teaching by narration that the great majority of marks lie in the upper part of the century. This may make the new examiner or parent uneasy until he realises that the lowest register, the 10’s, 15’s, 20’s, are also being used, though so rarely.

(c) Finally, there is the guidance to those who choose the  
[p 457]

books and set the programmes and examination questions which results from the report sheets and conference with the examiners. This is not so peculiar to the P.N.E.U. examination as some other qualities, but it is probably more vitally important here than [sic] elsewhere. If the whole is to be a living growth out of the roots planted by Miss Mason we—all concerned in tending the growth—must be prepared and eager for the constant mutual readjustments which growing means. Perhaps those at the heart of the system may be permitted some depth of enthusiasm, for they do constantly realise and delight in this living flexibility.

#### EXAMINER II.

I gather that two suggestions have been made with regard to the examination:—

1. That it should (a) be more like a correspondence class and (b) return the papers corrected.

(b). This correction might be either for the benefit (i) of the pupil,—this, I consider, would be a superfluity, as the teacher can do all that is requisite for the pupil’s edification in this respect,—or (ii) of the teacher. The purpose of the correction would be, in this case, I conceive, to give the teacher a clearer idea of the standard to be aimed at; e.g., a pupil obtains sixty-five marks for English History; the paper is corrected by the Examiner in such a way as to indicate what kind of answers would be required to obtain the maximum marks.

(a) That the Examination should be more like a correspondence class. I fail to see how this applies. A correspondence class held only twice a year is hardly deserving of the name.

2. That the P.U.S. examination should conform more nearly to the usual public examination.

(a) Taking an extreme view of the meaning of this proposal, it may be presumed that the proposers have in mind such an examination as the School Certificate and the London Matriculation, i.e., examinations which have a utilitarian value. I can conceive that it is a great temptation to some people to urge that “if we have examinations, why not make them serve a further purpose beyond the acquisition of knowledge?” serve, in other words, as currency to secure some tangible advantage. The adoption of such a proposition would, to my mind, subvert the whole P.N.E.U. system. The two principles are mutually

[p 458]

destructive. It is an attempt to conventionalise a system whose characteristic is that it is a break away from convention.

(b) If the proposal means nothing more than that the P.N.E.U. examination should be regarded as a test which would satisfy the parent or teacher that a reasonable standard had been reached, I should say that this is already accomplished by the present examination.

We have received the kind permission of the writers to publish the following important letters:—

IV.

LARGE CLASSES AND THE P.U.S. EXAMINATION.

i.

*December, 1928.*

TO THE DIRECTOR,—We should be glad to be excused the Christmas examinations this year, as we find the strain of marking all the papers is very heavy upon the Staff at the end of term.—Yours, etc., X. Y. Z.

ii.

Thank you for your letter, I must leave the question of the examinations to you as we do not like to think that too great a burden is being put upon a school. But is it not possible for the examination to be taken without giving the teachers the labour of marking? It seems to me there is no object in marking all the papers; if you send us one set just as a test that is all that is necessary. The children will have had the pleasure of doing the examination which they always seem to enjoy.

We always regret it when Elementary Schools send in a long list of marks for papers done by other children and I wish it were possible to establish a method of examination which would obviate the necessity for correcting and for estimating the value of each answer. Could you not trust your staff, if some record must be kept, to make a general classification of the papers using words such as good, very good, poor, etc., only, without any reference to marks at all? We do not want the papers worked in connection with the P.N.E.U. to bring back the retrograde days of *marks as marks*, therefore, I should be most grateful if you could give the matter some consideration and see how far it would be feasible, and acceptable to the

[p 459]

Authorities, to let a whole class take the papers and send only the required sets to us for examination. Would it not be considered enough for you to show an Inspector the daily written and corrected work of the children and not the examination papers?

This is just for your consideration in the hope of your working out something which will make it possible for schools like yours to send us in test papers without putting on the teachers the burden of the correction and the marking of so many papers. You cannot, of course, choose one child beforehand to take the examination, but perhaps it would be possible from the work of the term for most teachers to gauge which child's set of work would be an average test for the class.

\_\_\_\_\_

iii.

*January 6th, 1929.*

DEAR \_\_\_\_\_,—I almost decided to give no opinion, for I should not presume to suggest to other people the way in which the examinations might be conducted. But for the work's

sake—or rather for the sake of the ideal which we *all* try to set before ourselves, even though some of us fail at times—I will tell you what is in my heart about the matter.

As far as the Authorities go, I feel sure that elaborate marking of the papers would not be demanded. Careful correction of daily work *is* required; and that, I think, would suffice.

For myself, I am no advocate for marking with *marks*. I grieve to see a child look at her exercise with the intent to see the number of marks. As a general rule the system of marks is absent from the régime of our school; though sometimes adopted by a teacher as a temporary means to attain a certain standard. Well and good if—when the marks are omitted—there is developed the desire to do a piece of work well for the work's sake.

One of my theories is this, and I often say this to the children: “If you are going to do that piece of work well for the sake of the marks you will get, it *may* be *good*, but it will *not* be the *best* you can do. The best work you do is that which you do for the love of it. It is like life—a Savings Bank. You will get out what you put in. Put in only a desire to get good marks, and perhaps too a desire to oust someone else, and

[p 460]

you will only get the very transitory pleasure of a good mark. Do the work because you love it, because you *want* to do it, and you will know joy even in the doing, and when the task is finished *you* will be a little better for having done it well. You will have given, too, of your best, and the class and the school will be that much the richer.”

Once, at least, each year, I carefully examine the written exercises of each girl in the school, and *never* do I give a numerical judgment. My plan has always been to draw attention to the *worst* failing—for a child can only put right *one thing at a time*—and also to commend the child for effort and for success if such be hers, but for effort chiefly. They *know* how I feel about this. They have not all the same ability. I am satisfied when the child *does her best*, poor though it sometimes may be.

When the children work the examination questions, we have been in the habit of assessing marks for each subject, but I think that this plan originated because marks were assessed by the examiners when the papers came to Ambleside; and also because I understand we are asked—if we wish—to assess *marks* for singing, drill, etc.

I feel *very strongly* with you in this matter. If you gave me some papers—essays, perhaps, written by children—and asked me to place them in order of merit, I should assess no marks; I should make no correction on the paper, but I should read through the efforts and judge them as good, better or best according to their grasp of the subject and their power of expression.

Although some of my teachers feel they can do most good by laboriously going through the examination work, I have laid down this general rule: Take *one* answer (Tales, or one of the Composition answers with the older girls) as your basis of judgment of the child's power or development of power in Composition. Read the other answers *without* making any detailed correction of composition errors, etc.

Often—at a Staff Meeting—if the subject of marking arises, I express the opinion that if the work is too much of a labour it must be because we attack the work in *not* the best way: I contend that the whole spirit of the scheme is alien to a harassed state of mind. You know the modern expression “being fed up.” I grieve to hear it. I guard against ever using it or any other that approaches it in meaning, but when

[p 461]

anyone at school seems to be heading in this direction I try to find some way to relieve the pressure; and I often have to say, "Don't you think you are worrying too much about this or that, and losing sight of the bigger issues?"

Nevertheless, with large numbers such as we have in the Elementary Schools, the ordinary daily correction takes a good deal of time if done effectively; and the teacher has to be prepared to give time out of school for this and for the preparation of work, but if one's heart is in the work it is no drudgery. I agree with Mr. Household's theory that the best teachers are those who have a sense of mission.

We are going to adopt your suggestion at the Easter Examinations, and mark the papers Good, Fair, Poor, etc. For promotions—if a merit list is considered necessary—one exercise in composition would answer the purpose. I have it in my mind that I may ask one teacher at Easter to mark all the History papers in the school (I do not mean assess marks—I should have used the words "read through" instead of "mark"), another the Natural History, and so on—anyway in the Upper School.

To sum up, my idea of an examination (shall I say my ideal?) is that it shall give the child an opportunity of shewing how much she knows; and that to the teacher it shall be a guide as to whether the tuition is suitable and efficient.

An Inspector who at one time visited our school always found the older girls particularly responsive. He brought another Inspector one day; and she found them most difficult, and the reverse of responsive. Naturally the first Inspector was disappointed, told the girls so after the other visitor had departed, and asked me if I could explain it. "Yes, I think I can," said I, after a moment's thought. "When you enter a room, your whole manner suggests, 'Now, I want you to show me how much you know'; but when the other Inspector entered the room, her whole being shouted out, 'Now, I'm going to find out what you do *not* know.'"

Our girls love the examinations. It would delight your heart sometimes to be present when a question is read to them. I often think of my schooldays, and especially how a visit to a museum, etc., etc., was spoiled for me—for most of us, I think, if we thought or were told that we would have to write an account afterwards. Our children—after a visit such as we were fortunate enough to have just before Christmas from a

[p 462]

Bristol gentleman who gave a talk on Schubert in connection with the Centenary—bombarded me with the request: "Can we write about it?" "Would you like to?" I asked; not because I needed any assurance, but because of the sheer joy which their enthusiastic "Yes" would give me.

I *love* to see children so thoroughly enjoying their work.—Yours, etc.,  
X. Y. Z.

iv.

March 24th, 1929.

DEAR \_\_\_\_\_,—You will be interested to know that we are adopting your suggestion and classing children's examination work A, B or C, and we find it a great relief.—Yours, etc.,  
X. Y. Z.

V.

THE P.U.S. AND INFANT SCHOOLS.

The following letter is in answer to a question as to how far it was possible to work towards the work of Form Ib in Public Elementary Infants' Schools:—

*January 22nd, 1929.*

DEAR \_\_\_\_\_,—The average age of the seventy-five children who have worked part of Form Ib. of the P.N.E.U. programme is six years eleven months at the end of the present month. All the children in the school are being trained on P.N.E.U. lines,—that is each child is considered individually. He is encouraged to study the plants and creatures of his environment, and to discourse in his own way on his observations for the benefit of his fellow pupils.

He listens to the stories, fables, readings, etc., and is encouraged to retell them. He loves to listen to the teacher reading the poems, and endeavours to quote lines or even interesting words if he cannot remember a whole phrase.

He recites many poems. He draws, models, and constructs in connection with all lessons in which he is interested—the child's unfettered natural expression only is expected.

He playfully is allowed to pick the daisies—as many as he can, of the educational feast which is spread for him, as it were. He picks them himself. We do not thrust ready picked bunches into his hands.

[p 463]

He is taught to speak properly. He loves to be shown how to produce words perfectly.

He learns daily about the construction of words, in which at this stage he is interested. He wants to write them, and does, and incidentally he is learning to read.

Reading apparatus is prepared for him, he plays with it, then he soon requires reading cards, and so to books.

The two groups at the top of the school, as I have stated, read very well. Many of them also are beginning to do literary expression.

They have read the books suggested by the P.N.E.U. programme. They have read others. The children know what they are reading; for they are asked to retell their readings.

The top groups study from the P.N.E.U. programme—the fairy stories, fables, stories of other lands, and are intelligently interested in weather conditions, etc., and the world they see.

They are encouraged to describe places they have visited. This term *Our Island Story* is being read to them. Birds and animals, as suggested in the programme, have been observed, and many good descriptions are given by the children.

Regarding Religious Instruction, we follow the scheme sent out by the County Education Committee.

Here I may state, the children already have a good knowledge of the Life of Christ, and are intelligently interested as one easily learns from the children's questions and answers.

I understand from the managers of this school that the two top groups (seventy-five children) are to be retained in this department from April 1st next, and worked as Standard I. In this event the children will study Form Ib. programme in its entirety. They ought to do well, for they are well prepared. At any rate I have faith in the programme, and shall if all goes well, experiment fully with the scheme from April the 1st next. I do trust I have given you an insight into the conditions of education and training here.—Yours, etc., A. B.

P.S.—My teachers and I have just had a little sale of our work, etc., and have made £20, which is to be spent on a few requisites for this school.

---

<sup>1</sup> Members are asked to state on the Parents' or Teachers' Report Form (*a*), how the pupil has worked during the term; (*b*), if there has been any handicap on account of illness during the term; (*c*), the reason for the omission of subjects in the examination.