

By the Way.

While every educational paper and every book on Pedagogy is emphasizing the necessity of Nature Study in every grade, and many teachers are lamenting that their program allows no time for such work, it may be worth while to tell of an experiment which has worked successfully in an A B C class of little girls for a year. This was simply, by morning talks, to direct the attention of the children to such facts and sights immediately around them as would interest them, stimulate the imaginative faculty, and broaden their ideas. The teacher made no attempt at systematic science teaching; but she set aside a few minutes every morning to talk over with the children some subject, usually carrying one line of thought through a week, but often giving mornings—about two a week—to mere “stories” telling what the children had seen. Beginning by telling what she had seen, and bringing in sky and sun, and bird and tree, she soon led the children to notice and talk of these. Though in a crowded portion of the city, the Park was near enough to be familiar to the children.

The work bore fruit in many ways—in increased confidence in the teacher, since she shared in this way in their home joys; in command of language, one or two bad errors being almost completely eradicated. The children learned to see things around them, and to take delight in these things. Perhaps this faculty of enjoyment of the common, simple, natural occurrences is the best that the teacher can help to develop in such work as this. Very soon after the talks had begun, one child told this as her story: “I saw the sunshine, and I said, ‘Good morning, sunshine!’” Soon stars and moon, and even changes in the shape and color of the latter, were noted. When birds had been spoken of, every passing sparrow and house canary was chronicled in class. Of course, many incidents were related which had nothing to do with natural objects, but these too were welcomed.

Such topics as the turning of the leaves, the use of rain, the migration of the birds, the seed and its development, the building of nests and the story of the egg, the pussy willow, the coming of spring; the gifts of the cotton, the sheep, and the cow, and many others, were talked over; besides the care of the child’s own body and its home duties. Endless subjects may be found, and the child will be interested in all. In connection with most, selections may be taught, and the class will delight in these if they understand them. Even so difficult a piece as Edith Thomas’s “Talking in Their Sleep” may be made attractive to the little ones who have spent but a few months in school, if they are given a chance to talk it over.

Seeds were planted and watched, and then they learned "Kind hearts are the gardens." The actual knowledge gained was small; but the teacher felt rewarded for one week's talks, at least, when one child, who had at first been too dull to learn even to form or recognize the figures, and who had gradually been waking up to life around her, searched every possible picture card and story book to see if there were not a sheep pictured in it, and was as joyful as if she had a pet lamb given her when at last she did discover "a sheep."
