

# The Curriculum as a Means of Personality Adjustment

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## INTRODUCTION

Emphasizing the need for integration of personality, we shall examine one important field of school experience: the curriculum. Since every experience of the child plays a part in influencing his attitudes and purposes, we cannot afford to ignore the curriculum as a means of personality adjustment. But this does not mean that we need to consider any one particular structure. It might be the experimental, the traditional, or any other type of curriculum. It might or might not be well integrated. We are concerned with the use of any curriculum in adjusting personality.

Nevertheless, the so-called integrated curriculum, in whatever form, aids in stimulating integrated activity. It stresses selection of activity. It prevents disconnected experiences—those unrelated to human relationships. It helps to remind us of the unity of all learning, and as teachers, to regard our children first as human beings, then as pupils.

## PART I. PRINCIPLES

Though educators have aimed at character development, community needs have limited their efforts to a curriculum based on the three R's. Under such circumstances, the community has demanded efficiency and cleverness rather than love and understanding. (However, there was a time when home and church really took care of the moral bases of character, hence the limited demands on our schools.)

In spite of this handicap, educators have not ignored pupil personality. Today both teachers and parents are aware of the importance of mental hygiene. Therefore the curriculum, now more than ever, is being carefully studied as a means or source of training. By the curriculum we mean not an ideal one geared specially to child development

but the type with which teachers actually work. But, can the regular school curriculum be used as an aid in character development? What is our curriculum? Today, it includes eight main subjects or areas: art, music, health education, science, social subjects, arithmetic, language arts, and pupil participation. Through their experiences in these areas, we hope our children will develop knowledge, health, disciplined thinking, moral and spiritual qualities so essential for American citizenship.

Since guidance in general means change of direction, we can say all our curriculum material contains guidance material, as:

1. Success in skills and drills may be a means of overcoming an inadequacy and of preventing emotional conditioning leading to rebellion, flight or block. Success may lead to renewed self-confidence; failure in school work to general discouragement.

2. Through integrated knowledge of social studies and literature, pupils can become aware of associational living and can intellectually understand others and also acquire knowledge of vocational possibilities.

3. Through instruction in the practice of fundamental hygienic rules, our pupils can avoid many mistakes due to ignorance. The teacher, through group and individual consultation, can detect needs and arrange for remedial work.

4. Through literature and composition, arts, dramatics, dancing and music, our pupils can develop more self-confidence, through discovering special aptitudes and abilities, and through overcoming disabilities. They can gain inspiration from the high ideals studied—particularly in the case of pupils of the first three school years, for these are more responsive to direct training.

### *Procedures*

But all these are general gains worked out in the classroom under special conditions. Somehow, the ability to work well with others, shown by a child in baseball, history, or dancing, does not seem to carry over into his home, play, or social life. How can this be done? How can we help a child to see the one-ness of his studies and training in school with his actions elsewhere? How can we help a child transfer his social and emotional training in school to everyday activities of everyday life?

### *Step I. Center Curriculum Around People*

Since an understanding of life, not knowledge\* alone is so important, the curriculum should be life-centered, not child-centered: We believe in organizing social subjects around people and their inter-relationships rather than around places, products, or events. Therefore, in studying Brazil, we should be more interested in the lives of the coffee or rubber collectors and their contribution to our welfare than in coffee or rubber products. In this way, we emphasize our share of contribution in this interdependent world. In studying the West, our children should understand that the failure of the corn crop in Nebraska may cause parents in New York City to lose their jobs.

When class lessons are lessons in living, in human contacts, in information on codes of behavior, in understanding, then the drills, the development of skills, and the learning of subject matter will not only become easy and efficient, but may be a means of guidance, as well.

However, curriculums, procedures and methods help only to develop social ideas, not social feelings—the willingness and ability to work and play with others, to give service for God and man. Unless feelings are stirred, ideas and knowledge are spark plugs harnessed to a dead battery.

We know it is wrong to lie, cheat or quarrel, but this social knowledge has never stopped any of us from doing so. Children will cooperate in committee work in school but will fail to do so at home or at play. The fires of social feeling have not been started by these ideas and practices.

### *Step II. Formulate a Class Theme (1)*

This is a "must" procedure in all group character training, whether "per se" or tied in with the curriculum, a class situation, etc. Pupils should have some specific standard (based on their needs) by which to measure their behavior and purposes. We can illustrate this from our work in group psychodramatics in a third year class.

There were two grades in the class to which we applied our ideas, an upper and a lower third year. The pupils in the lower half were brighter and were doing advanced work, while those in the upper half were retarded at least a year in reading and arithmetic. We selected

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\* Knowledge is not knowledge until it operates in life situations.

this class because the teacher complained of difficulties. Discussion with her revealed the following weaknesses:

Unless the teacher was at their side helping them, the retarded pupils were easily discouraged. Instead of working, they loafed, talked, giggled, sulked, fought, and made trouble in strenuous ways. They gained self-importance through the trouble they created.

Some of the advanced children needed constant assurance. They loved to run to their teacher and ask, "Am I all right so far?" They seemed afraid of losing approval and sought to regain it through correct work. They were developing the souls of hirelings. Many of them seemed to invent excuses to receive individual attention. Some day-dreamed. Some habitually forgot to bring homework, pencils, or books. Like their retarded comrades, some were frequently late or absent for trivial reasons.

Both groups felt helpless without teacher assistance. Therefore, Mrs. E. asked, "How can I get them to work and keep them working without constantly standing over them, watching or helping them?"

The problem is evident: The helpless must become self-reliant and the troublesome useful. Service and self-reliance vs. helplessness and disturbance must become our term theme. All guidance work for the term must be directed toward this end.

Children from seven to nine learn best from situations, but they do accept theory in the form of adult rules more readily than older ones do. (The open rebellion against adult society begins generally in puberty.) Therefore, we began with the term theme rather than with problems of the children in actual situations. This propaganda phase of our work is one of acute responsibility. Man's finest qualities of courage, service and self-sacrifice have been squandered through ignorance and misbeliefs. We suffer the consequences of our mistaken beliefs and purposes as surely as those born blind or crippled, blameless though the latter be.

Our first few lessons, therefore, were devoted to leading our pupils to accept some true goal or principle that could become a yardstick for understanding behavior and for measuring growth. We were aiming for an intelligent, not a slavish, acceptance of true values which were to become the spark plug of their lives. For in the use of these new measuring rods, children can become aware of their own mistakes and warped goals. From then on, they can always learn to square their acts in terms of the new and old ideals.

We proceeded to ask how many had baby brothers or sisters. The children repeated anecdotes about the babies at home. Then we related the story of a baby whose parents lived in our house, whose mother was busy all day long, bathing the baby, feeding it, changing its bib, its diapers. Discussion followed:

*Questioner:* "Poor mother—all day the baby gives its mother a lot of \_\_\_\_\_?"

*Answer* 1. "Work." 2. "Trouble."

"When bedtime comes, both mother and father are very tired. Father works in a factory. Yet in the middle of the night, the baby cries and wakes poor tired mother and daddy. (Here we imitated the baby's screams. Before children we don't hesitate to become actors.) She doesn't seem to care how tired they are. Why does a baby do this?"

*Answer* 1. "She's mean." 2. "No, she's hungry." 3. "She doesn't know any better." 4. "She can't help it."

"A baby is a lot of trouble and work, isn't she? Who makes more trouble in the house, baby or daddy?" (Laughter).

*Answer.* "Baby."

"Who helps more, baby or daddy?" (Laughter).

*Answer.* "Daddy."

"Who needs more help, baby or daddy?"

*Answer.* "Baby."

"Who makes more trouble, big people or children?"

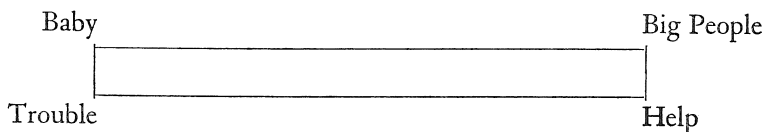
*Answer.* "Children make more trouble."

"Who help more, big people or children?"

*Answer.* "Big people help."

We wrote on the blackboard: "Babies make trouble—Big people help." After several children had read these sentences we asked, "Who makes more trouble at home, you or the baby? Who helps more at home, you or the baby? Of course you help more. You're more grown up."

"Now suppose we make a ruler to see how much trouble we make, or shall we call it a ruler to see how big we are?"



After explaining the ruler and having pupils read the words at each end, we asked, "At what end of the ruler would you put a little baby?" Point to the baby end. "At what end would you place your father? Your mother? Where would *you* be on this ruler?"

It was surprising to see how accurately these eight-year-olds measured babies, parents, and even themselves. In self-measurement, their honesty often sprang from fear of class comments. They knew they couldn't get away with boasting. Here again we asked as many pupils as possible to judge and to measure.

In this lesson we hoped to develop a new set of synonyms—"baby" with "helplessness and trouble," "big people" with "help." Whenever they think of adults, of growing up, they will also think of helpfulness. Perhaps they will, in the near future, begin to accept usefulness as the yardstick for measuring growth, especially if they become aware of their own undesirable goals.

### *Step III. Arrangement of Subject Matter*

It is profitable to arrange subject matter for grade around some social principle as interdependence, contribution, cooperation, or around the theme formulated for the month or term.

We can teach the *facts* of nature or science but we can also arrange them in such manner that our children will understand the unity of the world and the interdependence of all life on this earth, for example (2):

*Interdependence:* Nature in the orderliness and conservation of its planning follows through the dependence of one upon the other:

- (a) Bees help in the reproduction of plants.
- (b) Birds scatter the seeds, eat the fruit of the cherry, and then drop the seed.
- (c) Wind scatters the seeds.
- (d) Non-green plants live on the green plants.
- (e) Sun, rain, soil and air help the plant to grow.

*Application:* Man depends upon nature for many of the essentials of his living.

- (a) Food.
- (b) Clothing.
- (c) Shelter.

- (d) Medicine.
- (e) Aesthetic sense.

Man depends upon man for efficient living:

- (a) Aviator—Weatherman.
- (b) Urban—Rural.
- (c) Consumer—Electrical Plant.
- (d) Farmer, Miller, Baker—Consumer.

#### *Step IV. Application to Life*

Arrangement of material is not enough. We must apply the newly gained social ideas to the children's own lives, in as many fields as possible.

Two topics in fourth year science are aviation and weather. Naturally we mention the contribution of aviator and weatherman for our welfare and happiness, but in addition we emphasize their mutual relations by having the pupil see that the aviator is dependent upon the weather observer and vice versa. But this knowledge merely furnishes children with social ideas. Unless they feel it sufficiently to carry it over in their everyday life, such social consciousness will not change character. We must tie up knowledge of sharing and pooling with their own purposes and habits at home.

We might say, "The aviator feels safer because of the weatherman's help. The weatherman feels safer because he knows that in case of danger, as snow blocks the road to his lonely post, the aviator can drop supplies to him. So we cannot imagine a weatherman failing to send storm warnings because he was angry or too busy listening to a radio program or reading a book.

"Now, of course, no one ever does this. But still all of us make mistakes; we forget to do a job and let someone down. Every one of us has been angry at someone in the family. But did anyone ever refuse to help out just because he was angry? Because he was listening to the radio? Or reading a book?

"Now, who can tell us some other way in which we have not done our share at home? At school? What else could we have done?"

In such discussion we help our children to become aware of their mistakes and encourage them to choose better ways.\*

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\* We may point to some necessary precautions: (a) This application need not follow every lesson. (b) The teacher should avoid drawing conclusions for chil-

In like manner, we could show our interdependence, our necessity for sharing responsibility or contributing to the team, be it family, class or neighborhood. We must test our success by our practice in everyday life.

Sometimes a series of lessons in school subjects may be opened or closed with a general lesson on social feeling as, for instance, "Each must do his share."

We will present this in outline form:

1. *Teacher:* Do you like to go on picnics?
2. There are several ways of having a picnic:
  - (a) All go and take nothing to eat—all go hungry.
  - (b) All go and a few take something to eat—many go hungry.
  - (c) All go and each makes a contribution different from others.  
One or a group brings oranges enough for all, etc.—No one goes hungry.
3. Which would you consider the most successful type of picnic?
4. The third type, of course. The more each contributes to any group activity, the more each can enjoy it.
5. In this way we see the importance of being useful and not being a burden.
6. How does this apply to us here in the classroom?
  - (a) Keeping the room clean is one kind of contribution.
  - (b) Paying attention is another form.
  - (c) Working quietly during work periods is helpful.
7. Paying attention vs. getting attention. Each is responsible for himself.
8. Not to be responsible is to be a burden to someone.
9. If we do not want to observe such rules, we must permit others the same right of non-observance. (Carry to logical conclusion.) Others

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dren. Wexberg (3) illustrates this in the story of a four-year old girl who could cry at will. A new governess dressed her to take her out to play. When she burst into tears, the governess asked, "Do you know why babies cry?" The child looked surprised, for this adult reaction was different from any she had experienced in the past, and she answered, "No." Governess: "Because they can't talk." The little one understood the implication, but had the nurse said, "You're no baby. You don't have to cry," or "You can talk," the child would have resented this moralizing.



need not be considerate of or fair to us, if we are not fair to, and considerate of them. (4)

Everywhere we emphasize not only the principle but the practice.

We must be careful not to carry these self-examinations too far. We do not want our children to become introspective, self-centered or self-absorbed.

Any curriculum is an experience for our pupils, and every experience may be a means of guidance. We do not say this to belittle the tremendous importance of the curriculum but to emphasize the teacher's responsibility for the use she makes of both the subject matter and the child's experience.

So far, we have illustrated steps in our procedure for using the curriculum as an aid in personality adjustment, i.e., we have tried to show how to convert the social ideas of the curriculum into social feeling. Using a social situation in nature study, as an illustration of a social principle, we can apply it to our children's past acts as well as to possible future ones. Thus living becomes the test of adjustment.

## PART II. APPLICATION

Since all school subjects offer opportunity for emotional training, particularly through use of social situations, the question arises whether, in addition, each subject offers its own special opportunity. We can best answer this by indicating some possibilities in each subject, a procedure that makes for repetition.

### *Arithmetic*

The social situation wherein arithmetic functions is a fertile field for guidance. In teaching taxation, the purpose and advantages of taxes as a means of community and individual welfare could be stressed. Then "taxes" becomes another word for sharing and contributing. We might start with the sales tax which all children have experienced. Only after the social situation has been understood should examples or problems be solved.

In a later lesson, we might close this topic by noting how the greatest advantages are derived for each and all only as each makes his full contribution and as their contributions are pooled. This provides the individual with his most favorable situation and is most profitable to

him. Schools, hospitals, libraries, fire stations, etc., can be built and maintained at a very small cost to each individual. The cost is small because it is spread among so many people.

Then we could apply this effect of cooperation to the home life by commenting, "At home too, we profit most when each makes his full contribution. Father contributes money, love, and his care; mother her work, her love, her care. What 'taxes' can we children contribute to help make our homes happier and better?"

During one such discussion several pupils complained that there was more fun outside the home. One boy said, "Whenever I turn on the radio, my brother changes the station."

We asked, "What do you do to make him so angry at you?"

A. "Nothing."

Q. "When does he get most angry at you?"

A. "Oh, he gets mad if I tell him what to do."

Q. "Do you boss the friends you play with?"

A. "No. But my mother tells me to see that he helps with the dishes. Then he gets mad."

Q. "You're captain of your baseball team, aren't you?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "I wonder whether you speak to him as you do to the boys on the baseball team. How could you speak to him without making him so angry? Do you try making friends with him as you do with other boys? In your house is it more important to boss your brother or to help make it a happy place?"

The class discussed what could be done in case his brother refused to do his share.

Here as elsewhere we must help our children to see the part they play in every relationship.

We need not point out other social situations which may be developed in the study of arithmetic. The question may arise, "How can I use the fundamentals, fractions, decimals, etc., in personality guidance?" This may be found in the general values of skills and drills. In addition, the teacher should help the child carry over the concentration, the effort, and the skills to other related fields.

#### *Social Studies*

The opportunities for guidance through social subjects are unlimited. Teachers have always appreciated the value of historical and geographical relationships, the value of biography as an inspiration, but

have often failed to carry the point involved to the child's own specific acts at home and elsewhere, without moralizing from the life of Lincoln, Washington, Beethoven, or others.

We must make sure that our pupils have clear information, for exact knowledge and clear concepts are essential elements in the growth of good character. The world has suffered from the ignorance and fuzzy thinking of well meaning people.

An important concept for all of us to know and understand is that each is a part of this world and never apart from it. To help the child really feel and understand this, he must experience it himself. Hence, home and neighborhood experiences are not only a means of connecting the child with the world, but they afford the teachers excellent opportunities for training. For example, every week each of the ten classes in the fifth and sixth years reports neighborhood news items. These are discussed and sifted for their importance to the people of the neighborhood and then sent to the radio committee or class in charge of that program. The first pupil reporting the news item broadcasts it at the next assembly period. Items are varied. A neighborhood laundry closes down. That means that our children hereafter carry the family wash to another laundry at least six or seven blocks away. A grocery offers reduced prices on certain articles. An avoidable accident in school at dismissal time may lead to necessary, but slower ways, of dismissal.

Everything that happens in the neighborhood has some influence on our children. We should help them to see that we do not live alone. Hence we must always consider the influence of our actions on others.

We must help our children to transfer their training in school lessons and procedures to home and social life.

For example, in teaching Cortez and the Aztecs, it is insufficient to stir the indignation of the pupils against the cruelty and lust for power of both Aztecs and Cortez. We must turn this resentment against their own evasions of responsibility by reviewing some of their own acts: "We know no one is as cruel or selfish as the Aztecs, but each of us sometimes thinks only of himself, even though it may hurt others. How many of us have been unfair? How many had a fight with sister or brother? Did anyone just get out of doing the dishes or going to the store, and so made someone else do it? What else could you have done even if you were doing your homework or listening to the radio when you were asked to go on an errand?"

Thus we interpret and use their experiences, verbal and non-verbal,

pleasurable and non-pleasurable. It is true of all, children and adults, that only when we understand ourselves can we begin to understand others.

Besides questions and discussion for the purpose of interpretation and fixing responsibility, we should help our children practice their new insights under safe circumstances. Such practice becomes a bridge to future experience.

For instance, the curriculum should be used to give information on how to live. In a second year class the unit topic was "Those Who Help Us." The class discussed not alone the duties of the motorman but also the duties of the passengers in the cars, subways or busses. This teacher might have carried the lesson further had she permitted the pupils to practice their newly learned code by dramatizing common situations taking place in these vehicles, under varying conditions.

### *Music and Art*

The part music and art play in occupational therapy is well known. We know the advantage of using folk songs and art works as a means of understanding other peoples. We need not point out the value of art and music as a means of reconciling recalcitrant or discouraged pupils. Many a child has regained his self-respect in a classroom through his interest and skill in drawing, painting, weaving, carving, singing, or playing a musical instrument. With his added confidence he may begin again to make an effort with his arithmetic or other studies, provided the teacher is willing to place him on some special or remedial program until he is ready to be on his own.

Training children to become appreciative class and school audiences may be extended to showing respect and consideration at movies and on busses. We must recognize the opportunities offered us in the curriculum and then transfer school training to as many fields as possible.

### *Recreation*

The confidence and poise developed through skill in games, exercises and dances, the development of hobbies and interests for leisure time are invaluable aids in life. Today teachers recognize the part recreation plays in social studies, helping our children to understand other peoples through their games and dances, many of which we have adopted.

More important still is the practice recreation offers in correct living. For the cooperation and teamwork of baseball, basketball, and punchball make these games preferable to the solo efforts of track, handball, and swimming. Through casual or organized discussion, our children must come to see these teams as only a few of the many teams everyone of us belongs to, such as family, class, school community, etc. To do this, it is not sufficient to ask, "How did you help your family this morning?" We must help our children discover whether the "Me" or the "We" spirit dominates them, whether they play for the team or the galleries. It is the lack of consideration and self-confidence that prompts them to play with an eye on the crowds and not on the ball.

### *Health Education*

This holds true in health education. This area of the curriculum is a source of correct knowledge on health and growth, on activities and safety precautions involving a careful follow up program to improve health and appearance. Thus we bring together teachers, nurses, doctors, and parents.

### *Pupil Participation*

By pupil participation we mean performing services for the school and community. We all know that children can serve as individuals or as members of a group, in class and school housekeeping duties, in class and school libraries, lunchrooms, in taking care of blackboards, supplies, class and personal records, etc. Pupils with their teacher's help can plan each day's program. Looking back on our pupils' proud services during World War II, we see how they can assist in community matters.

The teacher should carefully survey 1) the number and kind of jobs available; 2) the pupils qualified for these tasks; and 3) the children needing certain duties for their own development. A child's term of service should depend upon his emotional endurance. Some are excellent monitors for a few days and then become careless, bored, neglectful or arrogant. Their attention span to some or all responsibilities may be limited as is another child's span in reading or arithmetic.

The teacher test of successful training in personality guidance is how much she can help the pupils to live and work together in classroom and in school. Of course, a disorganized teacher breeds a disor-

ganized class. Her own lack of organization reflects in her relationships with other teachers, in her arrangement of pupil activities, in her response to school and office requirements. If the teacher herself lacks confidence in herself, and love for others, she cannot expect to implant these qualities in her pupils. Each teacher should examine herself in these respects.

The best curriculum areas for personality direction are the recreational and the pupil participation activities. Our children are guided best through these. Through the recreational areas, the teacher can discover the rejected and the isolated, the aggressive and the discouraged. Herein lies the pupils' best opportunity for leisure, for wholesome living, for sublimation of patterns developed by negative group contacts, for discovery of false purposes. This is one field where each child practices helping each other, taking turns, offering services for the group, for living spiritually, since *doing* is the essence of learning.

Pupil participation, which involves living and working with others is, in a sense, the test of the teacher's success in guidance. Pupil organization of groups on human relationship criteria, teacher assignment of school and class jobs, based (*a*) on the pupil needs, interests and abilities, (*b*) on a recognition of the purposes of such jobs, and (*c*) on the gradation of these tasks (unconnected with academic work) are specific means of enabling a child to live his learning, for we learn best what we live and do.

#### SUMMARY

The curriculum can be used for character training. It can provide our pupils with information, with inspiration, with purposes, with social ideas, with opportunities for efficiency in skills, and for self-expression in cooperative living. But all this training does not guarantee right living.

The curriculum must be adjusted to the varying needs and abilities of children. Remedial arithmetic and reading programs, pupil sharing in the planning of curriculum experiences, are tried and useful practices, invaluable in preventing emotional blocks, essential in developing confidence. They are positive means of prevention and partial cure, workable in a school setting.

But our problem is:

- 1) how to transfer the feeling of adequacy in school situations to relationships with parents, siblings, neighbors, and others; and
- 2) how to transmute the social ideas our children acquire in school into social feelings.

We have indicated four steps that according to our experience are helpful in this necessary carryover to life outside the class. These steps are:

*Step I.* Center class lessons wherever possible, around people. This may help our pupils develop a picture of the world as one of inter-relationships.

*Step II.* Formulate a theme based on class needs. This may help the pupil become aware of some desirable purposes. By comparison and contrast he may become aware of his own behavior and goals, selfish or otherwise. Thus he can measure his own acts in the light of the new and the old goals.

For the teacher, the theme becomes a means of organizing the work in personality guidance.

*Step III.* Reinforce Steps I and II, by arranging curriculum material for the term around some principle, as interdependence, usefulness, etc.

*Step IV.* Transfer his new social ideas to everyday life, i.e., to his activities at home, school and playground by:

A. Comparing and contrasting 1) his purpose with more desirable ones; 2) his acts with more desirable ones.

B. Helping him to measure his acts in the light of his old goal (being smarter, being first) with other goals (as considering family welfare or service for the family, etc.).

C. Encouraging him to practice his newly gained ideas and responsibilities in as many fields as possible, for living his ideas is the final means for developing social feeling and desirable goals.

But just as knowledge, ability, and culture are no assurance of right living, so too even desirable goals and purposes are insufficient unless enlightened with knowledge, understanding of values, and fortified with a disciplined mind and a healthy body.

In our fervor for personality guidance, we cannot forget that knowledge, good health, a well-disciplined intellect and spiritual qualities

are vital to good character and a well adjusted personality. The curriculum provides materials and opportunities for guidance, especially group guidance. Thereby we may help our children to overcome some weaknesses and fortify some strengths. But for the truly unadjusted personality we cannot depend upon it alone.

In the final analysis, it is not the curriculum, but the teacher's use of it which may stimulate the pupils to apply their knowledge, skills, abilities, interests and understanding for the ultimate purpose of wholesome living.

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