

Training Youth for the Textile Industry of Today

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It is a far cry from this day of mass production to the time when the commodities of life were fashioned in the homes of craftsmen and bartered for in the public market places. During this great change in the lives of people, some things have been lost that cannot be supplied by the great industries which now cater to their needs. Space does not permit discussion of the many phases to which this applies, therefore this article is limited to the textile industry.

Long before the Industrial Revolution, when youth was bound to the master craftsman, to learn at his side the technique of producing textiles, the processes thus learned were but a small part of his education. In him also was developed the desire to create, the pride in craft, and a conscious effort to produce such masterpieces of workmanship as would be to his credit and his craft. Briefly, these are a few of the things with which the modern textile industry has to, and is, concerning itself.

Owing to the specialization which has come naturally with improved methods and the development of the machinery in use today, the worker seldom gets from his small job the satisfaction of work well done and an appreciation of his usefulness to society as a whole.

It is, however, common knowledge that efforts are being made and have been for some years by our leaders, to develop standards and ideals similar to those which existed in the earlier days.

This is not, however, a process which can be worked out easily with adults. It seems possible, however, to borrow a page from history and by starting with youth at an early

age, build up a background of knowledge in which certain ideals and appreciation are kept uppermost.

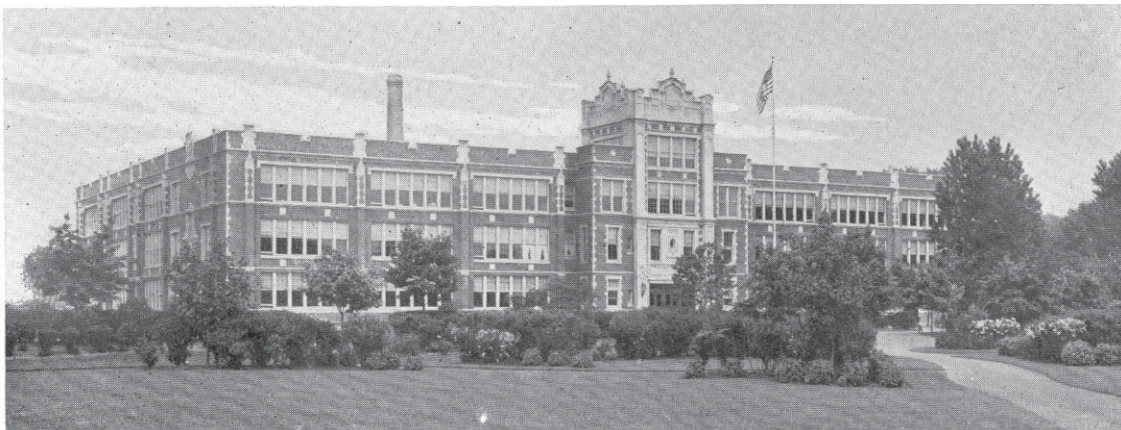
Child Study of Industry

With this idea in mind, there has been developed in the Public Schools of Passaic, New Jersey, a study of industry which, starting in a simple way during the first year of a child's life in school, is gradually amplified in each grade during the first six years.

Taking the textile industry as an example, the study starts with its primitive beginnings and traces its development to the present day. It deals with the source of the raw materials—cotton, wool, silk, flax, etc., and the processes through which they go to become a finished product. The student handles the raw materials and makes simple things from them, which help to fix firmly in his mind the facts he has learned. He gets an appreciation of the importance of the industry, the workers in it, and their value to society. It makes him a better and more intelligent consumer, a better buyer, and gives him the apperceptive basis on which to gain further knowledge through observation. During all these six years this work has been definitely tied up with the academic curriculum of the school, thus vitalizing it and making his school work an actual part of his life in the community and the everyday things he sees in the world around him.

Textile Shopwork

With the beginning of his seventh year in school, and continuing through the eighth year, he is given intensive courses covering the



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basic industries. This work is done in well equipped shops among which is the textile department. The textile shop is equipped with both hand operated equipment and the latest power driven machines suitable for school work. (See Figure II.) In this department, the student spends approximately ten weeks of seven hours per week. Here he studies in a non-technical way the characteristics of the textile fibers, preliminary processes, preparation of yarns, design, ordinary weaves and weaving, etc.

He also has the opportunity to operate, or see in operation, both hand and power driven machinery. He hears talks on this, on the important developments in the industry and the vocational opportunities for those who enter this field of work. No attempt to develop skill is made, but natural aptitudes are noted and interest is fostered and encouraged, so that later on when a choice of occupation is necessary, he will be helped in arriving at it intelligently.

During all this time, the work of leaders in the field is being constantly brought to his attention, fine examples of workmanship are exhibited and an appreciation of such work developed in the youth. (See Figure III.) He is encouraged to bring to the attention of the instructor, samples of fabrics he may obtain and discussions relative to the good or bad qualities of workmanship or design are held. In other words, the idea is instilled in him that man should be satisfied only when

he has done his best and the satisfaction to be gained by doing one's best is one of the great rewards in life.

Relation to the Industry

One might ask at this point, what has all this to do directly with the textile industry? It might be answered by telling what many parents of boys, themselves workers in the mills, have said to the writer when discussing the future of their sons. Invariably they say the same thing, i.e., "I don't want my boy to be a mill hand." and almost without exception, after talking with them at some length, it is found that they get no satisfaction from the work they are doing, and the part they are playing in a great industry.

Briefly, this can be explained by a study of their background before and after entering their field of work. Usually, they have had a very limited education, sometimes none. They have been trained to do a particular job, beyond which they have no knowledge or ability to progress. Life seems to them a hopeless sort of treadmill. They have few ideals of service, little pride in the part they play in industry, and do not sense the opportunities which exist for men with latent ability and the desire to develop it. They have probably never sensed the satisfaction which comes from knowing that in their small way, they are contributing to the welfare of society, or that intangible something which caused

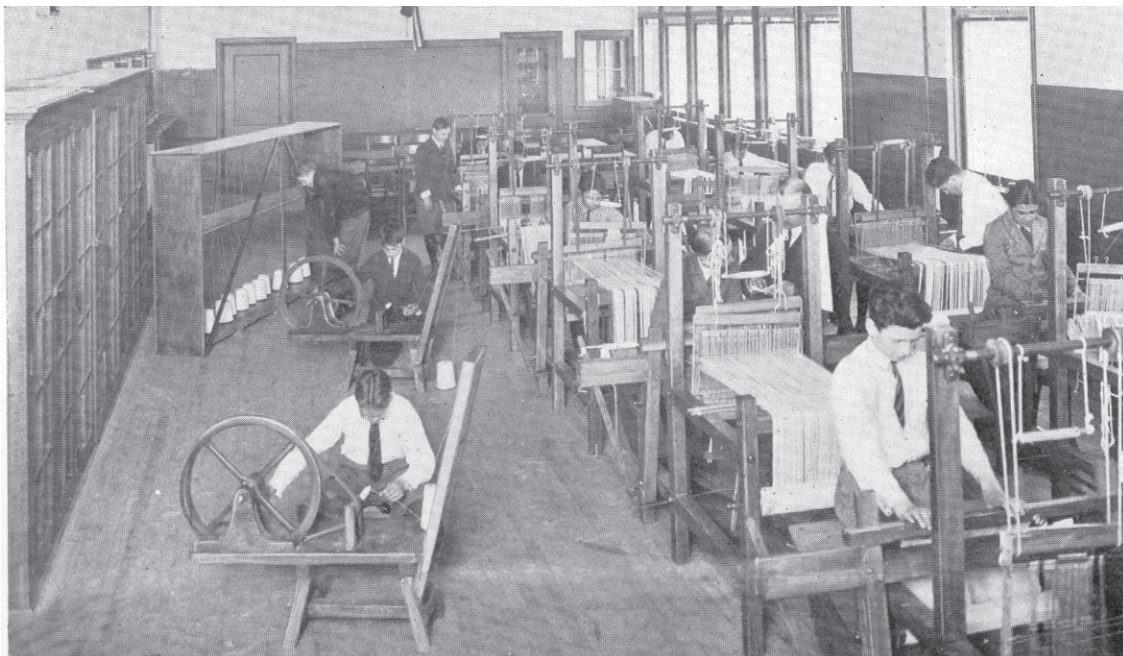


Fig II

men in the past to speak with pride of *our* mill.

Passaic has tried to solve this problem, as it is known that a large percentage of the youth eventually will be employed in the textile industry in two ways: first, by building up a background of appreciation, as has been previously stated, and also by encouraging young men to go into the industry and enroll in the Vocational School where they will receive an intensive two-year course in the fundamentals of textile manufacturing. This course is set up to give enough practical experience so that the young man will be worthy of employment. It also aims to develop standards of accomplishment, a sense of responsibility toward his work and his employer, and a desire for further knowledge of his craft.

Men who have visited the school have said it was a revelation to see the quality of work turned out and the industriousness shown by the students at their tasks. Coming to this school as they do, with the background of industrial experiences gained, as has been stated before in the elementary grades of the schools, it is comparatively easy to develop enthusiasm for the work in hand.

Vocational Guidance

The Vocational School is organized in accordance with the plan worked out by the Federal Board for Vocational Education under the Smith-Hughes Act of

Congress and adopted by the State Department of Public Instruction in New Jersey. Any boy who has reached the age of fourteen years and the sixth grade in public school, is eligible to enter the school, but owing to the fact that there is usually a large number of applicants and the capacity of the department is limited, preference is given to boys who have completed the eighth year, and those below this grade are advised to remain in the general courses until they have reached the higher grade.

In the work of the Vocational School, much thought and effort is directed toward building up in the student what might be termed an inquiring mind. This is done by bringing to his attention problems which require him to do considerable work in gathering facts and information from reference books, Trade Journals, literature published by research organizations, and large textile manufacturers.

It is felt that in this way, individual initiative will be gradually developed and the student will become resourceful in meeting and solving problems which may confront him. It also has a tendency to make the individual more adaptable to conditions as he finds them when he obtains employment. Another and perhaps more important result, is the desire for further training and knowledge which is instilled in him. This leads him to continue in the evening school, plant school or elsewhere, courses which will help him on his job.

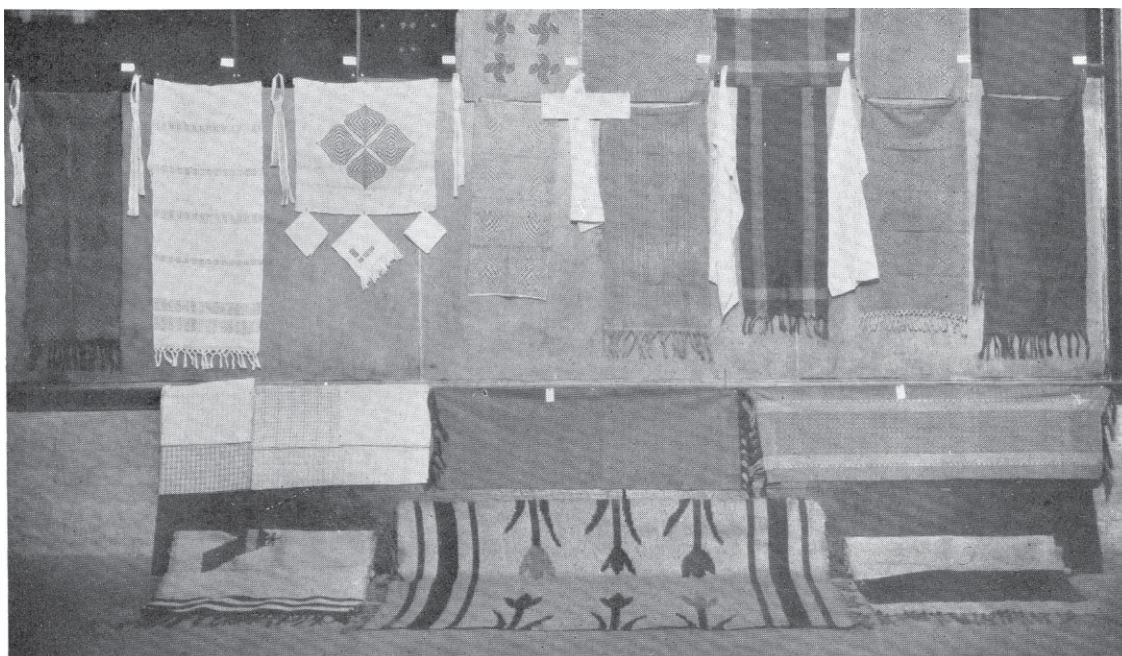


Fig. III