

“ We are glad to note an increasing recognition and application of the principle of self-activity. While we still find prevalent in some quarters the old idea that the starting-point of education is a passive of sensations, we have, on the other hand, some schools where there is proper opportunity for the infant child to develop his individuality. One or two schools are well equipped with Montessori apparatus with its consequent education of the senses, according to the Montessori plan. We are watching the experiment with considerable interest. Some enthusiastic teachers feel somewhat discouraged in that they are unable to obtain Montessori material, but it is quite practicable apart from the ‘ didactic apparatus ’ for them to devise methods that will encourage initiative. In connection with the more ideational teaching of the upper school, we think that the principle of self-activity could with advantage be more widely extended.”

It has often been said of the schoolmaster that he tends to become a recluse and to lose touch with the community in which he lives. That is not a charge that can, we think, be laid against many New Zealand teachers to-day. The original grading scheme laid stress on the importance of teachers playing their part as citizens, and much evidence of teachers’ interest in the welfare of the community came before the grading officers. In America great importance is attached to this phase of a teacher’s activities, particularly in country districts, but there widespread adoption of the consolidated school system gives American teachers an advantage in centring the educational interests of a very large number of people. The central school, with its large rooms and assembly-hall, provides facilities for drawing parents together to attend school functions that aim not only to increase interest in the progress of the children but also to provide mental stimulus and intellectual pabulum. In many country districts in New Zealand, notwithstanding the drawbacks of decentralization, the school forms the only community-centre. The school building is frequently the only church, the only hall for concerts and dances, the repository for the books of the public library, the arena for the candidate for political honours, as well as the polling-booth where his worth is weighed in the balance. It is surprising how greatly teachers and communities differ in the degree of pride with which they regard their school. In some country districts almost the first question a stranger is asked is “ Have you seen our school ? ” and the people are justly proud of the part they have played in beautifying the grounds or in providing increased comforts and educational facilities for both teachers and pupils. There is no doubt at all that in most instances this keen interest is the result of the present system of local school-government. Many thousands of pounds are raised annually by local effort to extend school-grounds, provide tennis-courts, swimming-baths, and the like. In many cases the monetary donations are supplemented by the industry of “ working bees,” when the farmer with horse, dray, and plough gives time and talent to the improvement of the school-grounds. Here are some of the Inspectors’ comments on this matter:—

“ Though in some parts of the district the school is largely a centre of interest and the parents and others help on special occasions, it is to be regretted that on the whole little has been done to make the school a centre of culture for the community it serves. There are, however, some notable exceptions. In some schools there are regular ‘ parents’ days ’ when the parents can visit the school and see the pupils at work ; at others, parents are invited to be present at school debates. It is hoped that much will be done to develop community interest by the agricultural clubs recently established in the district. An extension of this work will be made during the coming year.”— (*Wanganui.*)

“ We are of opinion that the prime factor in developing a live interest in the school is the teacher himself. Nothing breeds enthusiasm in the community so quickly as disinterested enthusiasm in the teacher. Movements for the promotion of welfare in the school have been initiated and carried out successfully in many of the schools. In some, the movement takes the form of beautifying the school surroundings, in others of increasing the school library and providing pictures, in others of supplying hot lunches and apparatus. During the last few years thousands of pounds have been raised in the district for general improvement purposes, and there seems little reason to doubt that the parents are always ready to help when the teacher leads the way.”— (*Hawke’s Bay.*)

“ One side of this work to which teachers could well give more attention is in the matter of having a ‘ parents’ day ’ at their schools. There is no surer way of enlisting the sympathies and co-operation of the parents than by this means, and we strongly recommend the practice to all teachers.”— (*Wellington.*)

“ Community interest is gradually growing, and teachers generally appear to be appreciating to a greater extent than formerly the advantages to be gained by securing the co-operation of parents and residents, but in very few places has it yet taken any definitely organized form. A constant procession of teachers through a school makes such organization impossible. In several of the schools united efforts on the part of the teachers, committees, and pupils, and the public generally, have resulted in large sums of money being raised for improvements to school-grounds, for school libraries, and for the provision of school music in the shape of pianos and gramophones. Parents, especially in country districts, take a keen interest in the education of their children, as is evidenced by the fact that on the occasion of every visit paid by an Inspector parents are present to interview him on matters pertaining to school welfare. A fair proportion of teachers base their first lessons of elementary ideas of local government and law on home and school government, and so inculcate some notions of community interest. In some schools a parents’ day has been instituted, and the parents visit the school to see the children at work and at play. In at least one district parents have formed an association for the good of the school and the district. Parents’ meetings, exhibitions of work, and the co-operation of farmers with teachers in the matter of agricultural instruction are increasing. It is pleasing also to note that in the case of one school the senior pupils have made it part of their duty to keep in order the soldiers’ graves in the local cemetery.”— (*Auckland.*)