

## Please Visit The Marietta Johnson Museum



**Bell Building**  
**10 S. School St.**  
**Fairhope, Alabama 36532**

The Marietta Johnson Museum serves to protect, preserve and promote the work of visionary progressive educator Marietta Pierce Johnson who founded the Organic School in Fairhope, Alabama in 1907. It is located in the back of the Historic Bell Building on the original Organic School Campus which now serves as Faulkner Community College in Fairhope. Visitors are welcome at no charge Monday through Friday from 2 PM until 4 PM or by special appointment. Please contact the Museum Director at (251) 990-8601 or by emailing: [mariettajohnson@mindspring.com](mailto:mariettajohnson@mindspring.com).

For additional information please visit the Museum's webpage at [www.mariettajohnson.org](http://www.mariettajohnson.org) or view the Marietta Johnson Museum Collection on Alabama Mosaic at [www.alabamamosaic.org](http://www.alabamamosaic.org). The Organic School Director can be reached at: (251) 928-9347. The Organic School's webpage is: [www.fairhopeorganicschool.com](http://www.fairhopeorganicschool.com).

## Organic Education: Teaching Without Failure

Selections from

**By**

**Marietta Johnson**

Selected and Edited by  
Jan and Don Sawyer

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10 South School Street, Fairhope, Alabama 36532

[www.MariettaJohnson.org](http://www.MariettaJohnson.org)



Statement by Marietta Johnson from the  
Organic School's 1929 yearbook, Cinagro  
("Organic" spelled backwards and chosen by students as the annual's title)

## CINAGRO

### "The Story of the School"

The School of Organic Education at Fairhope, Alabama, began in a little cottage in the fall of 1907. It now has a campus of about ten acres, nine buildings, and all grades from kindergarten to college.

It is an effort to study the development of the child and adapt the school program to the needs of each stage of development. The usual questions which parents and teachers ask are—what have the children learned, what can they do, or do they behave themselves properly?

It is important that the child shall be guided and controlled, so our school is not as a "do as you please" affair. But the standard on which we are working is an inner one, that of providing conditions which will secure as fully as possible the finest unfoldment of the nervous system, the keenest mental activity, and preserve the sincerity, unconsciousness and joy of the spirit.

Nothing in the school may violate the order of the development of the nervous system. The school may not demand work which destroys the unity of the intellectual and the emotional life. No child may get near-sighted, round-shouldered, or nervous, getting an education. No child may develop an inferiority complex. No child may know failure. All must succeed. The inner standard is one that makes the institution responsible for providing the right conditions of growth and if the child is growing right physically, mentally, and spiritually, he is being educated.

Without grades, marks, and promotions, which develop self-consciousness and so are inimical to health, the school has been able to provide a school program in which the children automatically move from group to group, entering high school at fourteen years of age and college at about eighteen or nineteen. The high school graduates have entered many institutions of higher learning and have done well.

The school has been free to the children of the town that it might be of value to the public schools. It has been supported by voluntary contributions, most of which have been solicited by the director. A boarding department is maintained and children from a distance pay a tuition which is now yielding the school a substantial income.

Great attention is paid to creative handwork, folk dancing, singing, and sports throughout the school. In reality the school is one of research in health education. Every school should be a health center.

After twenty-two years of experience, we have a profound conviction that if the school authorities can provide conditions which will secure the finest use of the intellect sound scholarship will be acquired; that the school must provide conditions which minister to the coordination and integration of the nervous system, and that if the school preserves sincerity, unconsciousness, and joy of the emotional life, detailed results may be trusted to that mysterious thing called life.

It is hoped that the school may find support until it becomes self-supporting and thus be continued as a permanent center of research in education.

## Table of Contents

|                                         |        |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|
| Who was Marietta Johnson? .....         | 1      |
| Book One .....                          | 3      |
| How It Began .....                      | 3      |
| Managing the Parents .....              | 5      |
| Finding Support .....                   | 7      |
| Little Children .....                   | 7      |
| Older Children .....                    | 11     |
| The Adolescent .....                    | 14     |
| The Young Adult .....                   | 17     |
| Teacher Training .....                  | 18     |
| <br>Book Two .....                      | <br>21 |
| Whose Responsibility? .....             | 21     |
| The Nature and Needs of the Child ..... | 22     |
| Fundamental Impulses .....              | 23     |
| Creative Work .....                     | 25     |
| Creative Play .....                     | 26     |
| Developing Thinking Power .....         | 27     |
| Discipline .....                        | 28     |
| Can Morals Be Taught? .....             | 29     |
| Religion and the Child .....            | 30     |
| What about Sex? .....                   | 31     |
| Social Development .....                | 32     |
| A School Program .....                  | 33     |
| Editors' Note .....                     | 36     |

### *Who was Marietta Johnson?*

Marietta Johnson founded one of the country's first progressive schools in 1907 in Fairhope, Alabama. She called her philosophy of education "organic" because she felt it best described her idea of what education should entail. Marietta Johnson believed that education should be a living, growing process lasting an individual's entire lifetime. In addition, she felt that education should address the entire organism of the child: mind, body and spirit. Her school came to be known as the Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education, The Organic School or simply Organic. As one of the oldest progressive schools still operating in this country, the school continues to follow Mrs. Johnson's original philosophy which honors the interests and creativity of the individual child. The school serves students from Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade and is located on a beautiful four-acre campus on Pecan Avenue just off South Section Street not far from downtown Fairhope. A map with directions to the school is included in the back of this pamphlet.

Marietta Johnson penned two books in her lifetime: *Youth in a World of Men*, published in 1929 by the John Day Company and *Thirty Years with an Idea*, which Marietta Johnson finished before her death in 1938 and was later republished in 1974 by the University of Alabama Press. It is with the consent of the Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education which retains the copyright to *Thirty Years with an Idea* that the Museum has published the selections from that work. Through the generosity of Organic School graduate and founder of the Marietta Johnson Museum, Dorothy Beiser Cain, in 1991 the Marietta Johnson Museum combined and published unabridged the two books in one single volume titled *Organic Education: Teaching without Failure*. The selections for this pamphlet were taken from this publication.

The Marietta Johnson Museum is sincerely grateful to Jan and Don Sawyer for compiling this publication. We hope the selections increase your interest in, and provide an overview of Marietta Johnson and her beautiful, nurturing philosophy of educating children. We also invite you to visit the Marietta Johnson Museum which is housed in the back of the historic Bell Building at 10 S. School St. on the original Organic School Campus which now serves as Faulkner Community College in Fairhope.

Selections from

*Book One*

# ORGANIC EDUCATION: TEACHING WITHOUT FAILURE

By

**Marietta Johnson**

Selected and Edited by Jan and Don Sawyer\*

(Pages of selected quotations from

*Organic Education: Teaching without Failure* in parentheses)



Marietta Johnson's major aim was to produce life-long learners who not only could think and reason, design and build, make music and art, but who also cared deeply for their community and fellow humankind.

Milly Cowles, Preface

(Completed in 1938; originally published as 30 Years with an Idea: The Story of Organic Education, edited by Diane Stitt Arnold; University of Alabama Press, 1974)

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## *How It Began*

One of the most important duties of the adult is to protect the child from his own ignorance, caprice, or lack of control. This is a part of providing the right conditions for growth. Some of the so-called progressive schools are so devoted to the idea of children leading that they often allow quite unsuitable activities. (16)

Sometimes we find what is often called a poor teacher, but I am comforted with the thought that if the teacher does not teach much, at least no harm is being done and life does something for the children. (18)

I enjoyed a measure of success and used to pity those who had never taught school. It was the most thrilling work I could imagine. It still is the most thrilling work in the world. It is true that many teachers do not find it thrilling, but this is when the work is mechanized by external standards. (18)

The external standard robs the child of spontaneity and robs the teacher of the most precious experience that can come to her – the creative element in teaching! (18)

The Development of the Child (Nathan Oppenheim) became

my educational Bible, and its frequent perusal has been a marvelous stimulation and support through many years of experimental work. (21)

“Training” and “growing” are quite different. In training, we often dominate or force in order to accomplish certain definite external results. In growing, we provide the right conditions and the end is human and immediate — included in the process — and the moving power is within! If the child is wholesomely, happily, intelligently employed, he is being educated! (21)

Nathan Oppenheim says: “The child whose sense of right is wrongly or too early taxed, whose power of food assimilation is abused, whose order of mental development is ignored, is suffering from poor nutrition. The child who prematurely participates in experience and ways of living, who is allowed to wander outside of the limits that a conservative idea of growth imposes, who becomes subject to conditions that only the strength of maturity can withstand, is thus subjected to adverse conditions that must surely leave their mark upon his later organic form. (How often parents and teachers are guilty of subjecting the child, in study, work, discipline, and even in play, to such conditions!) Such a child is suffering from a vicious nutrition.” (21)

The main work of the child is to grow. (22) Instead of being taught facts, children should be helped to understand their experiences. (22) The inner standard is one that the school must meet, not one to be imposed on the children. It is that of providing conditions which strengthen and vivify the physical being, enlist the finest use of the mental endow-

ment, and preserve the sincerity and joy of the emotional life. (24)

In the summer of 1907, Mr. And Mrs. W.S. Comings, of Fairhope, asked me to come and open a free school, offering to provide twenty-five dollars a month. (25)

Not “what do they know” but “how do they grow” is our slogan. (25)

I was trying to put into practical application the principles expressed in Oppenheim, Mondereon, Dewey and others. (26)

It was the greatest joy of my life just to have the privilege of trying out a theory which I felt to be so absolutely sound: that education is life and that the school program, to be educational, must be life-giving! (26)

### *Managing the Parents*

Formal work should be postponed until at least ten years of age, but the parents’ protest was so overpowering that we introduced this work at eight, though no particular standard is required. The teacher uses the best method she knows, the aim being to have the children enjoy learning to read — and when they love to do it, they do their best and that is enough. (28)

One of the fallacies of our graded educational system is the idea that a student must have studied or mastered the work of all previous grades before entering upon that of the pres-

ent grade. "Having had the work" of the previous grade is not so important as interest, desire, and mental grasp. (30)

Children really love nature and it is their right to have experiences which strengthen that love and increase appreciation. (30)

Sometime we are going to recognize free play, initiative, and social adjustments as real "subject matter." (31)

When interesting work furnishes direction, there is joy and enthusiasm and little or no danger of fatigue. When schools are wise enough to provide the finest discipline through creative activity, parents will not desire the discipline of personal authority. The old quarrel between the advocates of the theory of interest and that of discipline must cease as soon as people realize that Interest and discipline are connected, not opposed. (32)

The all-important art of human relations cannot be acquired unless children are allowed the fullest opportunity to humanly relate! (33)

The idea that education is a preparation for something in the future has such a strong hold upon the imagination that few parents can believe that if the need of the present is met fully, the future is assured. Growth has no external end. The end and the process are one. If the child is happily engaged in wholesome activity, he is growing, he is being educated. (33)

...we do have a daily program which is followed, though it is

always subject to change without notice. (34)

We are trying to eliminate everything from our school which could possibly militate against the all-round health of the child, and we are trying to include everything in the school which will make for a fine body, and intelligent mind, and a sweet spirit. (36)

Organic education does not mean that children shall "do as they please." (37)

Eventually, adults will prize the signs of healthy growth in children. Spontaneity, initiative, interest, mental grasp, sincerity, and unselfconsciousness will be counted more desirable than mere attainment and achievement, and this will be a splendid foundation for learning, when the natural unfoldment and gradual strengthening of the mind is ready for the more exacting and sustained academic work of later years. (38)

### *Finding Support*

When John Dewey was visiting the school, he was asked] about the manual training, he replied, "It is good. On the whole, it is the best I have ever seen. Usually, when the children are free, the technique is not good, and when the technique is good the children are not free. Here, the technique is good and the children are free." (44)

### *Little Children*

Ministering to growth, meeting the needs of the organism, is

the sole function of the educational process – hence the term “organic.” (52)

We do not present our program as final. The youngest teacher may find a better way. But we offer the following program as the best we have at this time. (52)

We group the children according to chronological age; this is really the only age of which we may be certain...Children should grow mentally as they do physically – without effort or strain. Grading makes the child think that an educated person is one who knows a great deal, or has unusual skill, or one who has met the requirements of the system and perhaps has received honors. Isn't it strange that we should feel it right and proper to reward people for learning? (52)

Learning is merely satisfying mental hunger. If society ever has rewards to offer they should be in recognition of a real contribution in actual service! And this is unnecessary, however, for whole-hearted, disinterested service is always its own reward! Therefore, it seems perfectly logical to eliminate the “reward” idea entirely. (52-53)

The child should never feel that he must “keep up” with others mentally, any more than he should be stimulated to “keep up” in height or weight. (53)

Education is the process of meeting the needs of children. (54)

The teacher endeavors to provide activities and exercises which are adapted to the stage of development of the group, giving special attention to any individual child...to merely see

that he understands what he is doing. (54)

At six years of age, we put them in what we call the “first life” class. A “life class” is where children live as wholesomely, happily, and intelligently as possible, and incidentally learn something. We do not want to be under any obligation to the parents for what they learn. (56)

Reading should be postponed until ten years of age. If children were allowed to think through experience, wait for data, search for truth, then use it for authority, reasoning abilities are developed. Children tend to act on thinking. This is intelligence. Excessive or too early use of books may interfere. The use of books too early often develops an unsocial attitude. (59)

In this machine age, the greatest responsibility rests on the schools for developing the power and inclination to use leisure profitably! If inner satisfaction and consciousness of power are experienced through the growing years in creative work, the profitable use of leisure is assured. (60)

At eight years of age they enter the “second-life” class.

Learning to read, write and spell is now added to the program of arts and crafts, wood-working, singing, folk dancing, and nature. Here stories of history, literature, and geography are given. The stories of children of other lands and the making of maps are absorbing. (61)

Many slowly developing little people have suffered intensely in timed tests! (61)

To carry a large, twisting, squirming snake around one's neck, with its tongue lapping one's face, is an experience developing courage and self-control. One also acquires a marvelous feeling toward such creatures which no amount of exhortation to kindness could ever secure. (62)

The facts of physical geography are studied first-hand in gullies, at the bay shore, in the woods, and acquaintance is made with the animals of the neighborhood, their activities and importance. Much attention is paid to the adaptation of the plants and animals to their environment. (62)

It is a great pity that "courses of study" have developed the wrong attitude toward and the wrong conception of education. The aim is to awaken the spirit of inquiry and the desire to understand. Gardens constitute a most interesting part of the nature study. They plant vegetables and flowers – each child having a plot of his own. (63)

We believe the folk dance is better adapted to the school room than any other form of dancing. The folk dance is the fundamental, elemental unself-conscious expression of the folk and belongs especially to the young and the old whose spirit is still young. It is simple – few, if any, steps to learn. It is objective and purposeful; it is highly social and very beautiful. It does not require a special costume, only a little space. (63 – 64)

The school day has been four hours long, given to varied interesting occupations, with two hours at noon for lunch and rest and play. We have always insisted that at least one half-hour be spent in perfect quiet after the noon meal. (64)

There is no fixed curriculum, but the teacher keeps a sample of work done as a guide to the next teacher. The teacher must also feel free from external pressure. Personality, poise, resourcefulness, and power – the qualities most essential to the good teacher – are often thwarted, stultified, throttled, prevented from developing, by the demands of the "system." (64)

(For more specifics on school programs, see pages 54, 55, 56, 57)

### *Older Children*

The ten and eleven-year-old group is called the "third life" class. The children have been learning to read, write, spell, and use figures. Now they almost, if not quite fully, are able to use "tools" independently. Most of them may now read their own stories, though they still enjoy and profit by hearing stories told by the teacher. (65)

Too often, even in progressive schools, teachers are conscious of the necessity of "getting over" certain facts, of "showing results" in knowledge and skill, of reaching some external standard! This is the standard of attainment and achievement which is believed to be "measurable." But keenness of interest, concentration, and perseverance for immediate ends in cooperation with one's fellows is the finest "subject matter" at this age. (66)

The true ends of education are always human and immediate, never remote or material. All learning and skills must minister to growth – human power – and may never be acquired at the expense of power. (66)

It is far more important that children shall love history, literature, and geography, than any particular amount of subject matter shall be mastered. (66-67)

Every class is a free discussion of the matter in hand. There are no desks in any of the rooms and no assignment of tasks. No examinations are given, nor tests, nor homework. There are no report cards. (67)

We believe children of this age should have long hours in the open, free from demands of the school, and also time to dream. (67)

...school should be a place for good times – a place to do many things – and the teacher is a person who helps. (68)

The real test of the work is in the attitude of the children. If they are interested and sincere in their work and study and the activity is wholesome, they are having an educational experience. (69)

To arouse interest, to keep the mind stimulated, is the art of the teacher. (69) Learning is satisfying mental hunger as eating is satisfying physical hunger. (70) At twelve or thirteen years of age the children automatically pass into the fourth-life class...we make an effort to keep these children as simple and unsophisticated as possible. (71)

So often children are dumb in a language lesson, but exceedingly talkative among their friends out of school. The consciousness of form is always inhibiting...Children should have ample opportunity and encouragement for the fullest,

freest expression of their thought, without fear of criticism. (71)

No child is required to do any particular amount of work in order to continue in his group. The teacher's effort is to keep every child keenly interested and doing the best work possible for him. In cases of superior ability, more work is provided or extra time allowed in crafts, but they are not grouped with older children. (72)

We sometimes say that we do not teach music or dancing, arts, nor academic subjects, neither do we teach children; but rather, provide conditions for children to express themselves – to grow through these activities! The time must soon arrive when the emphasis in all schools will be placed upon the effect of the activity upon the student rather than upon external results! (73)

There are no tests or examinations – no requirements for promotion. (74)

Children should gradually develop a consciousness of their responsibility to one another.. Dewey says that when an individual thinks he can stand alone, he is suffering from an unnamed form of insanity. A social atmosphere is preserved in all of the work of the school. (74)

If the school constantly makes external demands, the children come to believe that education is attained when demands are met. (75)

Isn't it strange that we have built up an educational system, which is often unwise, unjust, and sometimes injurious, de-

feating our avowed aim – and still we are unable to change it, or even to modify it to meet most urgent needs? (75)

Children do not know what is best for them. They have no basis for judgment. They need guidance, control, but this must really be for their good, not merely for the convenience of the adult! (76)

By providing occupations which are creative and which meet the need of his nature, the child is in the deepest sense disciplined; that is, he persists and concentrates for things which he sees to be desirable or necessary. This discipline gives him the inner satisfaction and consciousness of power which is the only true reward of all study and work. (77)

### *The Adolescent*

It will take a long time, no doubt, for general education to accept the idea that the school process should be one of meeting the needs of growth at the various stages of development, rather than making requirements which the children must meet. (78)

In this day when we seem to be so utterly commercialized, it is very difficult to persuade parents to give their children more time! Childhood and youth are so short anyhow, and once gone can never be repeated. Why hurry? (79)

In our high school, homework is assigned and there are examinations; still no child may fail when he does his best. (80)  
[Examinations] are quite valuable, however, in helping the teacher to realize how the work has been presented and grasped. (81)

Will the teaching profession ever develop the ability to recognize human power as the chief aim in education? (82)

Every class claims the privilege of a number of week-end hikes during the year, besides time given for camping. We consider these experiences highly educational. The art of living together for a few days, of preparing food, of using the time to advantage, of adjusting to one another, is most important. (82)

We consider our shop the most important place on the campus...Many a trifling, indifferent student has made remarkable strides in concentration, seriousness, and devotion to school work through power developed here. (83)

Many high school teachers and college professors fail to realize that they are often personally responsible for failures in scholarship and behavior even in college! (84)

There are no rules that children may break. (84)

There is no "passing grade." Here in the high school, as in the lower school, no child may fail. In cases of an undeveloped condition more time may be necessary, but this is in no sense considered a failure nor is a decision to require more time reached by any form of examination. (84)

We believe that all children do their best when they are interested, so the great problem is to stimulate and preserve this fundamental interest. (85)

The teacher uses his own method in this as in all teaching.

We have no "method" – no "system" – but are working from the point of view of the development of childhood and youth, rather than the development of "subject matter." (86)

All teachers should bear in mind constantly that the subject matter mastered is not as important as the stimulation of thought, the joy and satisfaction of the student. (86-87)

We contend that high school work is not a preparation for college, but the satisfying of a present need. (87)

If there is any one subject in the world that should be delightful, it is English...But to be marked and graded on the form one uses in expressing matters of vital interest is to drive back the creative flow of thought, imagination, and expression. (88)

...the atmosphere of the classroom must be sympathetic enough for students to express themselves freely, and be able to accept correction and suggestion without being inhibited. This is the art of the teacher, and this would no doubt be constantly in evidence if the teacher were free! The chilled dead souls of the adult would bear constant witness to the evil effect of the wrong point of view in the teaching of English. (88)

When thinking is in progress and children feel free to express themselves without fear of criticism, a power of expression is developed which welcomes suggestion. (89)

We must never forget that the adolescent period is a very wobbly, uncertain time in the life of the human being. We

need not expect mature responsibility, nor compelling aim, nor fully controlled desires. To see young people supremely absorbed in any wholesome interest is one of the greatest rewards. (89)

Some critics insist that the very best teaching is done in the kindergarten and the worst in the college. The kindergartners and the elementary school teachers are trained to respect growth and to provide the right conditions for childhood; whereas, in the high school and colleges the main emphasis is upon the mastering of subject matter, and teachers are constantly criticizing the work of the student rather than judging their own ability to instruct. (89-90)

"What a delight it would be for us all if we could take more time to enjoy these selections of prose and poetry," bemoaned a high school teacher. "But we must 'cover certain ground' or these students will not be accepted in college." (90)

We value "sound scholarship" – we aim to develop concentration and perseverance. We believe that high school students should develop mental grasp and grow in self-control and ideals. (90)

### *The Young Adult*

From the point of view that education is life – growth – and not a preparation, it follows that the school program must be a life-giving process for the little child, a life-giving process for the young college student. (93)

The testimony of wise observers supports the idea that those students whose work up to twenty-one or twenty-two has not

been in connection with any vocation but rather for the purpose of "awakening, enlightening, and enlivening the mind" have become superior workers in any profession. (94)

The prolonging of childhood is still the hope of the race.

Specialization always tends to crystallization. Care should be taken to avoid over-specialization, at any age. (95)

Life is growth... Education must come into its own. It must become the conscious agent for building a better world. (95)

A degree is medieval and does not belong to education. No one should ever study for a degree. The only reward for study is knowing. (96)

### *Teacher Training*

The three fundamental requisites for all teachers are that they love, understand, and are sincerely interested in children; second, that they have sufficient scholarship; and third, that they are interested in all matters of social welfare. (97)

Every teacher should be able to go into any school room anywhere and, after a few moments' observation, know whether the children are languishing or flourishing – and why. (97)

How could it be possible for a teacher to guide children adequately if she had never known the delight of work in clay, painting, drawing, wood and leather, and all other craft materials? How can she be "fit to live with children" if she knows nothing and does not care for all the things in nature? (98)

All teachers should also take a deep and active interest in all social or economic problems... They should not be afraid to face, understand, and cooperate with efforts toward a better social order. (99)

In a changing world, the finest influence the high school pupil can have is that of a teacher unafraid of change, open-minded, with an understanding confidence and an earnest desire to cooperate with those who would correct social evils in a sane, controlled manner. (99)

Teachers, however, cannot be ignorant of – nor indifferent to social wrong or injustice – and young people should develop a sensitiveness that impels them ever to work earnestly for right human relations. If young people are to escape prejudice and intolerance, they must have tolerant, sympathetic, understanding teachers. (99)

Too often, in training schools the student studies the development of the child, but is obliged to teach according to the curriculum. (100)

It is very thrilling to contemplate what society might be in a few years if our educational system could accept and apply this point of view. No examination – no tests – no failures – no rewards – no self-consciousness; the development of sincerity, the freedom of children to live their lives straight out – no double motives – children never subjected to the temptation to cheat – even to appear to know when they do not know; the development of fundamental sincerity, which is the basis of all morality. (101)

The development of the open mind – that is, the ability to

wait for data – is most important. The development of power to find out what is true and take it for authority – rather than hastily taking truth on authority. (101)

It is the work of education to assist the self-realization of every human being. Education must lead society. Education's responsibility is that of building a better world. Education must become a vital force in the modeling of our economic and social structure. Education cannot repudiate its responsibility. It dare not fail. (102)



### *Book Two*

(Originally published as *Youth in the World of Men*; New York: John Day Company, 1929.)

### *Whose Responsibility?*

The only excuse for a tremendous machinery of education is that it shall be the means of producing better people. Is it doing this? Is our progress really human or only material? (106)

But we still have the brothel, the slum. There is still infinite sorrow, injustice, and disease, and we still have child labor. We still have war and prejudice and failure. Undeserved poverty, despair, and hate are still in evidence. Suicide among young and old, lack of purpose and joy it life, suggest that education has not fulfilled its mission. All despair and failure, broken bodies, undeveloped minds and crushed spirits testify to the failure of education to do its work, and point out the necessity for reconstruction. (107)

Man has always been evolving; but has, perhaps, moved blunderingly and unconsciously. The time has come for civilization to make up its mind what it wishes to be, and to cooperate with nature's forces to that end. Man must become a conscious agent in human evolution. He must learn how to control machinery for human ends and avoid becoming a victim of material progress. (107)

At present many of us study the child only to see how we can make him fit into our notion of what he should be. Teachers endeavor to make him reach certain standards or conform to certain requirements. Our effort should rather be to see what we need to do to meet the demands of his nature; to determine what the finest growth is, and to provide conditions that will secure it. This purpose is great enough to fire the imagination of the dullest. (108)

In our emotional-spiritual lives, we are still individualistic, personal, selfish. We must become universal, impersonal, unselfish. (109)

### *The Nature and Needs of the Child*

Since the aim of education is to minister to the growing child, we must try to understand the nature of the child and dismiss all thought of him as a little adult. We must think of childhood as a unique stage in the development of the human being, important in itself, making demands which we are obliged to meet. (112)

As society becomes more complex, it is more and more important that habits shall not be fixed; that the child shall not be

subjected to drill and repetition which may interfere with his ability to adjust. (113)

The happy, wholesome, occupied child usually does not have time to notice adults. (115)

We are too apt to blame the child rather than the conditions which we have provided. A bad child cannot come out of a good home. However good the home may be for others, it is bad for him, or he would be good. (117)

Many teachers think that treating children alike is being impartial. This is far from the truth. An impartial environment is one in which every child flourishes. No child should ever know failure. This is bad for the spirit, and at once condemns the environment. What sort of a home is it in which some of the children are allowed to starve while others are well fed? What sort of a school is it in which some succeed and some fail? (118)

The difficulty in dealing with the next generation is that we ourselves are undeveloped, and in consequence are often quite indifferent to, as well as grossly ignorant of, the child's real needs. (119)

### *Fundamental Impulses*

It is perfectly normal for the child to fight on the physical plane. He uses whatever weapon comes to hand to attain his ends or in self-defense. If he is allowed to grow normally, he will gradually outgrow this form of defense or aggression and will use only intellectual and spiritual means. That men

still fight with physical weapons is proof of their arrested development. The righteousness of one's cause is the only defense that a developed individual needs. This will also be true of nations when armies and navies disappear, and the only defense is truth and justice. (125)

The struggles of peace time in ministering to human welfare are great enough to develop the finest spirit of self-sacrifice and consecration. Do not people suffering from injustice need redress? Are all children given equal opportunity for finest development? Does not this call for struggle? Surely heroism and self-sacrifice are needed to establish health and remove disease, to abolish poverty and establish universal well-being. We do not need to destroy our fellow men in order to be heroic. (125)

The grading-marking-promoting system develops self-consciousness and fear. The child is unable to live his life confidently. Even when he has been sincere, honest, and industrious, he may fail. The result is often a loss of confidence in himself and he becomes possessed of an inhibiting, nameless fear. Aware of adult expectations, he develops a hesitancy that is weakening. (127)

Education should develop, never destroy power. To control children through their fears is demoralizing. (127)

The fear of failure causes unhappiness and weakness. No one can be himself or do his best when he is self-conscious. No teaching is ever really done, no learning is ever really accomplished, until the consciousness of the relation of teacher and pupil disappears. (128)

Joy in his work and play, concentration to the utter oblivion of all else – these are the rights of every child. (128)

### *Creative Work*

Every child has a right to lose himself utterly in some work of his own choosing, which grows under his attention and which gives him an inner satisfaction and consciousness of power when the conclusion is reached...Every human being is entitled to an environment which will develop in him the strongest, finest, most permanent and ever-increasing power. (131)

A creative experience is one in which the work attracts, which grows under one's attention, and then, when the end is reached, gives us an inner satisfaction and a consciousness of power. This is the only reward one ever needs for any sort of work at any time. (131-132)

To establish economic conditions so that everyone may work at the thing he loves to do, without fear, without waiting for permission from others – this is a vision to enlist the most creative spirit. (133)

True, the creative impulse in big business is sometimes used for selfish ends; but the truly creative impulse which is not arrested in it development is always unselfish. Eventually industry will be controlled and conducted for the social good. (133)

Industry is becoming more and more mechanized, but with the added machinery come also higher salaries and shorter hours. This means greater leisure, and unless the creative impulse is

developed in the young, social problems will increase tremendously... The most important thing that the school can do for every young person is to help him to find things in which he becomes utterly absorbed, even though he may thereby neglect some precious item in the course of study. (134)

We want critical minds, but minds that are critical in recognizing truth, not in condemning others. (134)

The child comes to school throbbing with a desire to make things; to use things; to manipulate material things. Then he finds the school is not a place to do things, but rather to listen to the teacher. (135)

Young people often have the idea that they are educated because they have met requirements, when perhaps the inner life has not even been touched. (135)

Children who are subjected to constant direction never find themselves because they are never allowed to lose themselves in any sort of creative works. (136)

There is only one sincere reason for study, and that is because on wishes to know, and when one wishes to know, nothing can keep him from making an effort to find out. That is creative work. (136)

### *Creative Play*

Parents often encourage boys and girls to go into industry early in the hope of "getting ahead" in skill or financial recognition. Such "little old young people" should always be viewed with sadness. (139)

The play spirit is always experimental. It is trying things out, then continuing for the pleasure of the activity. Watch children at their play. They are very serious. They do not engage in fooling or aimless activity. (140)

We are starving for fun and love and leisure and spontaneous activity. We are surfeited with responsibility and nervousness and serious devotion to material ends. Schools are doing little or nothing to remedy this shocking condition. We need to be humanized. (144)

It is only in the utter abandon of the self in the play spirit that we develop an understanding of one another and the universe, and when we understand one another there can be no hate or war. (146)

### *Developing Thinking Power*

In a republic it is very important that the young shall be taught to think, since the existence of society depends upon the intelligence of the voters. (147)

"If a student has nothing to say," exclaimed a teacher of English, "but says it well, his work is accepted; but if he presents the finest thought in the world in incomplete form he is counted a failure." (151)

Every subject in the curriculum should be studied, not to prepare for college, not to master the subject, not even to "prepare for life," but rather for the joy of clear thinking, for the development of power, the establishment of a center of thought and understanding, a love of truth that cannot be

shaken by prejudice or greed. (153)

Children should be active in all their learning; in fact, learning is a consequence and accompaniment of activity. Not only do we learn to do by doing, but all learning is through experience. (154)

It is more important for a child under college years to build an automobile or a boat, if these things interest him, than to do months of forced study. (154)

### *Discipline*

Self-control is always based upon understanding, thoughtfulness and ability to see consequences. Therefore, in getting conformity, adults should be very careful to allow the child the fullest opportunity to see the reason for his act, to suffer whatever consequences are wholesome for him, and to be very careful not to use merely personal or capricious control. (160) The fundamental way of securing this cooperation is to cooperate with the child. (161) No one can ever be truly disciplined by another. One may persuade another to engage in disciplinary activity, but true discipline is always self-discipline. (165)

We dare not enslave our children's minds by making them work for grades and marks and promotions. Working to escape punishment or to secure a reward, without interest in the subject, is destructive of character and mental integrity...And we might add nearly all school work "is" interesting if presented in the right way and at the right time. (165)

All systems of rewards or punishments are intrusions. The work itself is sufficient reward and affords the highest discipline. (165)

### *Can Morals Be Taught?*

We should not try to make children good; provide the right conditions and they are good. Even religious training may be immoral, especially when it develops a feeling of separation from others, or a spirit of criticism of others. (168)

Geography and history may be real sources of immorality if taught so that a critical, unfriendly attitude toward other nations or people is developed. Children should not get the idea that the people of other countries are "queer" folks quite different from Americans, but rather that they are human beings worthy of the deepest respect, differing only in habits and customs. (170)

Children should never be taught about wars. That war occurred is sufficient for them to know. The study of history should help us find the way to avoid the mistakes of our fathers. (170)

True moral teaching develops a consciousness of oneness. The study of history, literature and geography should be a moving power for uniting mankind, breaking down prejudices and establishing a fundamental good will which increases with the years. (172)

## *Religion and the Child*

True spiritual consciousness rejoices in the presence of an infinite love, a love that includes all life. It is a consciousness that reaches out with perfect confidence and joy toward the finer, higher life that is man's by right of his divine essence. (177)

Society has developed physically and intellectually, but we are still children spiritually. In our emotional lives we are still narrow, selfish, personal, undeveloped. We spring instantly to our own defense, and are often so cautious that we act on the defensive before there is the slightest sign of danger. (178)

Life, and life more abundant, is ours for the taking. This does not mean we should teach religious dogma to the little child. It means we should merely let him live sincerely, frankly, and child like. He should be saved from creeds and doctrines. He should be helped to adjust his difference with his fellow in the finest way. He should be helped to grow in unselfishness. (178)

One should be educated not only that he may live a fuller life, but that his contribution to society may be larger and more perfect. Instead of demanding higher salary or greater honor because of one's schooling, one should feel that he owes more to society because of this; also, one who has had this privilege has greater resources for his pleasure and satisfaction, and so might well accept less compensation. (179)

If we could provide right conditions of growth, surely we

might hope for great changes in society in a few generations. The materialism and commercialism of our industrial and economic life is due to arrested development. Surely a way must be found for industry to be conducted in a less materialistic, selfish way. (179)

## *What about Sex?*

The young people of today are seeking truth. They need our sympathy, understanding, and confidence. We dare not fail them. (180)

There is so much more to marriage and companionship than sex. If men and women were accustomed from childhood to work together without self-consciousness, there would be little time or desire for sex irregularities. (186)

The concentration of the mind upon creative activity always develops the finest sex control. (186)

It is the aimless life lacking creative activity in which sex problems develop. The sordid story of sex perversion is a story of arrested development. The vain, selfish, idle person is usually a storm center for sex problems of every sort. Tragedies of the divorce courts, the red-light district, the white slave traffic, all the sorrows and horrors of perversion of the sex impulse, indicate a failure of education to foster individual growth. (186)

By thus beginning at the source young people should be helped to control the sex life until proper maturity and balance have been attained. Creative activity throughout the growing years, sincerity and unconsciousness of self, frank

and happy associations with the opposite sex, the development of ideals and power of control, with scientific instruction – all these should guide the young through the period of the rapid, uneven development of adolescence. (187)

### *Social Development*

Race prejudice and religious antagonism are due to arrested development. (189)

True patriotism is love of country, which is primarily concerned with making one's country lovable. This can never be done by developing a consciousness of separation from other countries or by criticism of them. Children should develop a true patriotism through a consciousness of unity – love and understanding of all nations. (190)

Some enlightened individuals go a little farther and are willing to include in their affection the tribe or nation, but few have developed so far as to become lovers of their kind. This is the flowering of the social impulse, the development of the consciousness of the oneness of mankind. (190)

The story of wars when fully understood will be one of individual greed. The socialized mind is unselfish. It works for the general good, knowing that no individual good can be real unless it is also for the social welfare. (191) The race is one. We belong to one another and we cannot escape our responsibility. (191) The highest individuality is attained through losing one's self in the service of others. The highest social welfare is attained through providing the greatest good for every individual. (191)

Reformers are not to be pitied. They are having the best time in the world. (192)

Any school system in which on child may fail while another succeeds is unjust, undemocratic, uneducational. (194)

The socialized mind is always the open mind. It waits for data before reaching a judgment. It is never opinionated. It questions to find out what is true rather than support a preconceived opinion. It takes truth for authority instead of truth on authority. (194)

All teachers and parents should use the motto: "Direction without domination; liberty without license." (195)

The problem which now confronts education is to find a way to socialize such work as mathematics, science, history, and literature. One step in this direction is to make no external demands of the students, but to have every class conducted in the form of a discussion. If there were no "recitations," but ample time allowed for study and for discussion with instructors and classmates, new life would be given to the dullerest subject. (197)

### *A School Program*

The best preparation for tomorrow is a well-spent today. The best preparation for the stress and strain of adult life is fine coordination, integration, sound health, keen intelligence, and eager joy and confidence. These should be the present objectives of the school. (198)

If education is life, it follows that the school program must be life-giving, to the body, mind, and spirit. (199)

If the schools were to consider the needs of the child...and to try sincerely to meet these needs, it would mean a complete change in our educational system. Let us consider first the elementary grades (199):

1. All desks would be removed from school rooms; chairs and tables at which the children might work should be supplied. Children need room in which to move about.
2. No teacher should have more than twenty children on her register. This would require money, but there is plenty of money for anything the people really want.
3. Reading and writing and all formal work would be postponed until the ninth or tenth year.
4. An infinite amount of materials through which the children can express themselves freely would be provided.
5. No child would be accelerated, nor would he be subjected to specialization.
6. Knowledge and skill would not be over-emphasized; the chief concern would be to secure interest, spontaneity, intellectual joy, and mental grasp. (200)
7. Every class should be a discussion of the subject in hand, worked out in projects or merely enjoyed as a discussion.
8. No lessons should be assigned, no burden from the school should enter the home.
9. There should be no examinations, no grading, and no failures to be "promoted." No child, I repeat, should ever be conscious of failure. (201) All children need handwork. All sorts of materials should be provided; clay, sand, blocks,

tools, paints, scissors, and directions should wait for the child's desire for help. The presence of material is suggestive, work in progress is always infectious. (203)

All children need nature. Our cities are a great criticism of education. If education lived up to its opportunity, that is, if it were really the means of producing a better world, society would be so organized that all children would grow up out of doors, in the fields, in the country. (204)

To gallop to the gully to see what the rain did last night, there to find miniature river systems, mountains and valleys, is very thrilling to children under ten. It is marvelous to listen to sounds with one's eyes closed, to look into the sky and detect colors, to peer into six square inches of grass to see how many living, crawling creatures are there. Then to wonder where the tadpole's tail goes and which legs come first, to watch the buds bursting, to acquire a tree or a vine which one is keen to protect from vandal hands, to wade the brooks, to paddle in the water, to enjoy and experience all of the things out of doors – all this is highly educational for younger and also for older children. (204)

I insist that every normal fourteen-year-old boy or girl needs to be with other fourteen-year-old children. The main element in growth at this stage is social...Every effort should be made to provide experiences through which these young people come into a consciousness of their dependence on others to attain their own ends. (206)

Education must prevent prejudice, and preserve the open mind. If education ministers to growth, the reward at each

step will be capacity for more growth. This capacity will be evidenced by keenness of interest, by strength of concentration, by spontaneity and sincerity, and by a growing appreciation of others, and a consciousness of interdependence – the developing of the socialized mind. (207)

**\* Editors' Note:** While every effort has been made to represent Marietta Johnson's philosophy and practice fully, objectively and accurately, an abridgment inevitably reflects the editor's experience and perspective in deciding what to include or leave out. For a more complete overview of Marietta Johnson's ideas, readers are urged to refer to Organic Education: Teaching without Failure by Marietta Johnson, available through the Marietta Johnson Museum. All selections are as Marietta Johnson wrote them using her style and the language of the day with small punctuation and minimal word changes to fit this format.

## The Organic School Today



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