

Photography as a High School and College Course

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In spite of the fact that many of the critics of public education are raising a cry that our curricula are too full of fads and frills there are a few persons who have the temerity to propose a new addition to the already long list of subjects offered in our secondary and higher institutions of learning. That addition is the subject of photography. In a few isolated places the subject is even now being taught, probably due to the enthusiasm of some pioneer soul and the farsightedness of an administrator or two, but the subject is certainly not yet looked upon as a standard course in most schools.

Ten years ago photography was in a state of development that was not far enough advanced to allow it much consideration as a subject. In the last ten years advances have been made that have apparently escaped the notice of the average layman and educator. No longer is it necessary to buy expensive lighting units requiring bulbs of great cost; we now have the inexpensive photoflood and photoflash bulbs. Films are so much faster and finer grained (when such film is chosen) and chromatically corrected that it is now possible for the rankest amateur to do year-round work. Chemical developers are so superior to some of the older ones that tremendous enlargements are now possible without the former grainy results, and the developers today are less toxic and longer lasting. Cameras are no cheaper, to be sure, but in the last five years improvements in cameras and accessories have been so startling as to leave even the seasoned camera enthusiast gasping.

Why should we teach photography? The answers are manifold.

From a consideration of the commercial importance of photography one can easily see that there is justification for teaching it on that score. We teach free hand drawing in many of our schools. There are more people earning their livings at photography than there are at drawing. Furthermore, there are more people taking pictures for the sheer fun of it than there are people amusing themselves by sketching. We hold no brief against drawing and feel that there is a distinct need for it in our schools, but we feel that larger numbers of people could be attracted into a study of and appreciation for the graphic arts through photography than through drawing. That photography may today be considered an established art is seldom contested.

Those of us who are engaged in some form of educational work are continually being told by other educators that it is imperative that we prepare the oncoming generations of young people for intelligent and

profitable use of leisure time. If we are really serious in our statement and acceptance of such teaching, then here is a subject made to order.

Photography appeals to those scientifically inclined and helps to prepare them for other scientific pursuits, since photography so ably assists the sciences. Think for a moment what the following suggest: micrography, telephotography, crime detection, x-ray, spectrographs, photocells, photo-timing devices. Anyone contemplating becoming a teacher, architect, doctor, engineer, lecturer, traveller, gardener, artist, scientist, policeman, journalist, publisher, printer, or parent (just to mention a few) could conceivably be of greater service to society and himself for knowing something of photography.

Photography appeals to both sexes equally well. Some of our greatest photographers today are women. Anyone with a critical eye and who looks for the photographer's name when he sees a good picture will recognize such names as Tony von Horn, Margaret Bourke-White, Christine Fletcher, Dorothea Lange, Tony Frissell and Dorothy Wilding.

Photography appeals to those mechanically inclined. There are almost limitless accessories and gadgets that one can construct for himself such as enlargers, lighting units, camera stands, trays, print washers, printing boxes, backgrounds, and copying stands.

Photography appeals to those artistically inclined. There are many people with the urge to create something pictorial but who lack the necessary muscular control and coordination to draw or paint who find in photography the necessary outlet for their emotions. Color blind people are actually fortunate in monochrome work because the frosted glass image in the camera does not mislead them by beautiful color that will subsequently be lost in the picture.

Photography appeals to the traveller or one who contemplates travelling because it offers him an opportunity to capture much of the charm of the things he sees but may never see again. Few of the box camera snapshooters ever approach the fine results obtained by one who has had training or experience.

In photography we find a subject well correlated to many of our other school subjects. Applications of physics, chemistry, mathematics, and art are all obvious.

If photography is ever to become a part of the curricula of our schools it will be through the enthusiasm and initiative of the teachers. Since so much of the technical end of photography is chemical the chemistry teacher will probably have to carry the brunt of the load. As for student acceptance of the subject there should be no fear. In the few instances where it has been tried the students have flocked to the course. It is one of those subjects that can be made difficult enough for the good student to get his teeth into and easy enough for the weaker ones to profit by. At present America leads the world in photography and there is little reason why we should not lead the world in photographic education.