

In addition to the usual classes that have been carried on in the Nelson Technical School for the past two years, classes in agriculture were held for the first time at Wakefield, Richmond, Motueka, and Nelson with a considerable amount of success. This class of instruction is, of course, as yet in quite the experimental stage. With the advantage of a chemical laboratory, for which the necessary grant has now been made by the Department, we look for a further development of this most important study. Science, apart from physiology and physical measurements, which are taken as branches of handwork, is taught in the form of physics or agricultural chemistry in but few schools; but we hope that the establishment of a chemical laboratory in connection with the Nelson Technical School will so educate and stimulate teachers that it will prove a veritable science workshop for the whole district.

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE INSTRUCTOR IN AGRICULTURE.

Since my appointment in the end of October, 1906, under the combined Education Boards of Nelson, Marlborough, Westland, and Grey, I have been engaged in visiting schools, arranging for gardens, and conducting evening classes in elementary agriculture for farmers and a botany class for teachers on Saturdays. My yearly itinerary under the four Boards was arranged as follows: Six months in Nelson—viz., January, April, May, June, August, and November—three months in Marlborough, and three months in Westland and Grey. At the end of 1906 the number of school classes in elementary agriculture in Nelson District was five, two of which were recognised. During the past year the number has increased to twenty-five. At all these schools, with the exception of one, small gardens have been established. The work done during the year has been chiefly in fencing and breaking up the land, subdividing it into plots, planting and growing the vegetables usually found in a cottage garden. Each child has a plot of land, or more frequently a plot is shared by two children. The children are made responsible for the complete cultivation of these miniature gardens. Notebooks are required to be kept by the children containing records of the principal operations done in the garden, and observations on the growth of plants, and rough drawings of plant-members. As the gardens are only in course of formation failures must be expected, but in spite of the many difficulties to be contended against and inseparable from the earlier stages of the work the progress made during the short time is very satisfactory. The excellent collections of garden-produce staged by several schools for competition at the horticultural and agricultural shows in the district, and which succeeded in winning first and second prizes, is a good indication of the work accomplished. Experiments have been tried at several schools to show the effect of different kinds of manures on the growth of plants. This course is very promising, as there is a tendency in school gardening to subordinate the educational side of the work to the useful, the only aim being—as the common saying is—to have a fine show of vegetables and flowers. To grow plants under uniform and favourable conditions may become mechanical and of little educative value. I may here point out that the purpose of the garden is first as a means of education, and this should be kept steadily in view. Grow plants and grow them well, but vary the conditions under which they grow, so as to learn as much as possible from the growing of them. The methods employed to obtain the results are often of more importance than the results themselves. To make the garden effective as a means of education a continuous course of simple experiments on plant-life should be carried on by the children and accurately recorded. The habit of observation would be stimulated, and the exercise of the reflective powers on the results would have a beneficial and lasting influence on character. In April, May, and June evening classes for farmers and teachers were held once a week at Nelson, Richmond, Wakefield, and Motueka. The subjects dealt with were the chemistry of air and water, the most important constituents removed by various crops from the soil, and the properties of manures and their application to farm and garden crops. Experiments were performed to show the properties of the substances dealt with. The attendance at Wakefield (thirty) and Motueka (twenty-one) was good, but at Nelson (sixteen) and Richmond (fifteen) not so satisfactory. The interest taken in the subject by the students was of a very encouraging nature, and fully justified starting these classes. On Saturdays a course of eighteen lessons in elementary agricultural botany was given to teachers. A large amount of individual practical work was done in the examination of the common plants of the farm and garden. The class was large, forty being on the roll. The attendance was good at first, but owing to the class being held intermittently there was a falling-off near the end. The want of suitable accommodation, apparatus, &c., interfered greatly with the efficient working of these classes. Now that the erection of a laboratory in Nelson is assured, the students in science classes (teachers and others) will be afforded an opportunity of doing practical work, so essential to the proper understanding of all scientific subjects. A series of field experiments on the manuring of barley, hops, fruit-trees, and pasture was arranged with several farmers in the Waimea, the manures being supplied free by the Potash Syndicate of Australasia. Owing to the unfavourable weather-conditions the trials are only partially successful. The results are not available yet; however, the indications point to a fair increase in some of the barley and hop trials, and should thus be a valuable object-lesson to farmers in the neighbourhood. There are now in the four education districts over sixty school gardens in course of formation. The number of children receiving instruction in nature-study leading up to agriculture is approximately over a thousand. As the united education districts are so extensive, and I have to visit the different districts at fixed times, the work in any one is consequently intermittent and disconnected. To get the best results the school garden requires constant supervision. In conclusion, I tender my best thanks to the Inspectors for much valuable aid and advice, and to friends who have assisted the movement in a practical manner by giving prizes and other help, and to the teachers and children for their energy and enthusiasm, without which very little would have been achieved.

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