FACTS TOLD PICTORIALLY

Statistics Are Prepared In Graphic Form for Use in Schools

By RUDOLF MODLEY.

PICTORIAL statistics—a modern device for showing quantitative facts in pictures—came into the news the other day when Mayor La Guardia disapproved a proposed WPA study of their educational advantages. Possibly he thought such a study superfluous, since for the past ten months WPA workers on another project in this city have been detailed to produce charts of such statistics for educational and government agencies. Half a dozen men are regularly employed in WPA offices at 131 Water Street "to interpret social and economic facts graphically," to use the government phrase. In that capacity they are making pictorial charts for the public schools of New York, for the Museum of Science and Industry and for the United States Department of Agriculture.

Moreover, in Washington the Federal Emergency Relief Administration is about to report to the nation on its activities through a book composed almost entirely of pictorial statistics. And the method has been recently used by several other Federal agencies as well as by the National Education Association and other civic and educational bodies. About a year ago a non-profit membership organization called Pictorial Statistics was incorporated in New York State.

A Return to Hieroglyphics.

What, then, is this new graphic device and how does it function in the classroom?

Pictorial symbols are a deliberate return to hieroglyphics. If the Mexican Indians or the Chinese or the Egyptians wanted to make a record of some fact, they showed that fact in a simple picture. The value of such a picture was that anybody who saw it could read it. Many highway departments have done the same thing in indicating crossroads, curves and railroad crossings.

Pictorial symbols differ from older graphic devices in bringing the actor himself on the scene. If populations are dealt with, men, and not dots, circles or shaded areas, are shown. Thus a picture is implanted on the reader's mind which reappears when the subject again comes up.

Curves and bar charts are not easily remembered because the reader has seen other curves and bars similar in appearance but showing totally different facts. Pictorial charts portray facts by use of associated symbols.

A Selection of Facts.

Like the classroom teacher, pictorial statistics select the essential facts from the overwhelming quantity of available material. Details are eliminated; figures are rounded up; symbols show only what is necessary to make the whole clear.

Suppose, for instance, a geography class is studying the population of the nations of the Pacific. The teacher points out that great numbers of people live on the western shores of that ocean, distributed in countries containing from a few millions to several hundred millions.

Now, ten or twenty persons mean something to an elementary school pupil; but a million is a tremendous number, and the difference between five million and 500 million is hard to grasp even for a more mature mind. Understanding stops when the limits of imagination are reached.

Pictorial symbols offer a solution. A map of the Pacific nations with their several populations represented by relative numbers of men's figures in national costume will give the student something he will remember. He will count and compare populations and areas.

A Chart of Arithmetic.

Arithmetic is often confusing to the pupil who finds appreciation of abstract things difficult. If such a child could see numbers as realities, his arithmetic might be simplified. In studying fractions, for example, a pictorial chart of the students in the class would afford practice in the computation of that fraction of the class who are boys, who attend the movies or who play basketball.

In the study of social conditions, too, the student can obtain a tangible conception of our shift from an agricultural o a commercial and industrial nation by means of a simple chart. Health conditions in the nation or community can be expressed in pictorial symbols showing the increase or decrease of deaths from diseases of different types.

To attain maximum effectiveness, however, the pictorial chart necessitates careful planning as to symbols, color and layout. The men who have founded Pictorial Statistics, Inc., are interested in making use of past European experience to develop a pictorial method fitted to American needs.

Dr. Otto Neurath, originator of the Vienna Social Museum, is usually credited with the creation of the method, which has had wide use also in Germany and Russia. Though long before Neurath began his work, pictorial charts had been produced and used in the United States, it is in Europe that the pictorial method had been developed to its present degree of perfection.

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