

Help Us to Think!

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERS are continually talking about what *they* think is best for the student, what *they* think he should have, but the pupils, who also play a large part in this educational process, are not consulted. Why shouldn't we be given a voice in the choosing of the teaching method, instead of having it shoved at us with no alternative?

As a student, through class experience and outside discussions, my observation has been that the most popular class, contrary to general opinion, is the one in which the student is stimulated to think, in which he plays an active part, not just sitting passively by, supposedly absorbing. I have attended classes where students, nearly in a "hypnotic" state induced by a lecture, suddenly straightened up and became alert to the situation when a vital problem was thrown out before them; every mind was challenged; "wheels" in every head started whirling; students stimulated each other with their ideas—and they enjoyed it—that is the best part. This may result in group thinking, one of the most cooperative and successful methods of solving a problem, if well directed. One mind alone may not be competent, but

ten or fifteen minds working toward a common goal may accomplish surprising ends. John may have one idea, Celia another, and George still another, but none are sufficient. However, quiet Henry in the corner, who has been listening intently, may coordinate the three, and bring them into the right relationship or perspective.

*Do We "Pound It In"
or "Draw It Out"?*

A certain satisfaction is derived from a new thought that can be found nowhere else, something akin to the thrill of a scientist who, after long searching, has finally made his world-rocking discovery. Let a student uncover a few basic principles for himself, and he'll never forget them. You can count on it. Few of my teachers have done much towards stimulating any thinking on the part of the class, but those few are the ones who have most influenced any mental development I may have had. Things I had previously thought very dull became quite interesting. It may take longer and be more difficult to get any real thinking started, but once the student has the thrill of a new idea, he'll remember it and want more of the same. Both teacher and pupil will be rewarded. It is common knowledge that the best way to learn is to discover a thing for yourself, no matter how many times it has been done before. We say "experience is the best teacher," limiting it usually to the physical aspect of experiencing; however, can this not also be applied to mental experiences? What about a little experience in original thinking?

Young people want to learn. But they can't—and won't—learn under the hypnotic spell of "pounding-it-in" lectures. Lue Ibach makes this plea for better teaching as a student in an American college. It could have been any college—in any part of our country—for the situation she protests against is not unique. Here is a clear demand for the workshop-type way of working in general undergraduate classes, as well as in pre- and in-service teacher education.

Some teachers seem to feel that they are the only ones capable of using their brains and will not give the class an opportunity to show its ability. The average student is not aggressive in his thinking, but this doesn't mean that the teacher has the right to pound knowledge into the heads of his pupils; rather, it is the teacher's job to draw it out. The modern trend is toward this type of teaching, but it is progressing far too slowly; far too many teachers still follow "pound-it-in" methods.

Stimulation of thought is more difficult than merely presenting facts to be absorbed or to rebound. It requires much more energy and effort on the part of the teacher, which is probably the reason why the lecture method is more often followed. Of course, it's easier "just to tell them," the same as it is easier to "do it yourself," but nobody learns anything that way. With a few suggestions, or questions, and patience and tolerance, students will usually respond with a flash of ideas and an interest that will convince the teacher that the I.Q.'s of his class are not as low as he imagined. Problems will be delved into and remembered that would otherwise be skimmed or overlooked.

When We Think as a Group

In only one of my classes has any experiment with real group thinking ever been tried. The members are unanimous in agreement that it is the best and most

enjoyable method of learning yet encountered. Group thinking in the words of one professor who uses it, is "a process by which a group arrives at an understanding or a decision. It produces something the members individually cannot produce. It creates a group idea that may be better than the best individual idea, or all the individual ideas added together."

His general plan is: "Each member of the group must put all he has into the common stock, sharing, cooperating. . . . The group must adopt some procedure, a process of thinking in orderly sequence. . . . There must be a leader to keep the group going along together, to encourage sharing, to pass on from point to point, to keep the group aware of the ground covered and the road they are traveling. He starts things, keeps them going and winds them up, but *does not do them.*" (Italics mine.)

There is no "absentee" problem in a class such as this. And I, speaking for the students, would like to see many more like it. A generation of youths who have developed even a part of their potential thinking capacity would surely be an improvement over the many unimaginative, unquestioning, and sluggish minds that are turned out of our schools every spring.

So much depends on the teacher! We cry, "Don't teach us. Just help us to think. Then we will really learn."

SCHOOLS HAVE LONG PROFESSED to be concerned with the development of intellect. In practice, however, the school has conceived intelligence to be individualistic, largely uncooperative. We must turn sharply to an emphasis upon the social nature and social functioning of the mind of Man.—Howard A. Lane in *Group Planning in Education*, 1945 Yearbook of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development. This book will come from the press within a few weeks.

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