

# The Importance of People

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## A Farewell to Jargon?

*It is a mistake to believe that the argot of early London's thieves, developed later into the jargon of English-speaking criminals around the globe, was ever designed primarily for security within the trade. The uninitiated refused very long to remain baffled by the secret code and cant. They took it over. Molls, mitts, dukes, grafters and many other terms of the underworld became first the slang and then often the purest coin of communication in the upper world.*

*This transfer was made because and to the extent that the thieves' argot was precise, had color, and served current needs. A transfer of this kind was not made from the professional jargon of certain other groups. Why? The erudite prairie dogs in the following story might suggest answers to this question, if they could be broken away from their panel discussions. I do not know why Charles J. Keene, George Peabody College for Teachers, picked these particular rodents for this task. Do prairie dogs, like pocket gophers, have pouches in their cheeks?*

Harold Benjamin

## Acute Analgesic Adient Alexia

ON MY LAST WESTERN TRIP, I encountered a most unusual colony of prairie dogs. Observing that hundreds of them were entering the same hole, I inquired of one prairie dog, who had hesitated a moment at the entrance, the reason for this strange behavior. He replied, "We are having a conference-institute-workshop. Would you like to join us?" Having no pressing engagement I entered the hole.

Upon emerging in the assembly room I found the prairie dogs ranged in orderly rows focusing their attention upon a stage at the front of the room. Seated on the stage were several sleek, fat, imposing-looking rodents. As I took my seat one of them arose to speak.

"Fellow teachers, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I welcome you to this first session of our annual professional gathering. You will recall that our theme for this year is, *Developing Integrated Techniques by the Utilization of Developmental Tasks for a More Effective Participation of Our*

*Youth in a Dynamic Society.* I am happy to report that your committee, of which I have the honor to be chairman, has been able to secure for you a group of outstanding consultants who are recognized experts in their respective fields. Immediately after I introduce the consultants they will hold a panel discussion on the theme. There will be a fifteen-minute period at the close of the discussion for questions from the floor."

## They Were All Dogs of a Kind

The chairman then introduced each consultant, designating the first-named as panel leader. As nearly as I can recall they were as follows:

J. Printwhistle Prairie Dog, Professor of Socialized Bookkeeping, Scant City College for Teachers.

Hornblower R. Prairie Dog, Professor of Eurythmics, Redundant State University.

Q. Bimodal Prairie Dog, Director of Psychometrics, Leptokurtic Normal.

Professor Printwhistle, acting as discussion leader, made the opening statement. "We all know that any new movement is always handicapped by being necessarily indefinite in its philosophy and subjective in many phases of its organization. However, we are interested today in developing desirable attitudes and measurable outcomes. In other words our tangible goals must be symbolic of our real goals! Do you agree, Dr. Hornblower?"

Professor Hornblower, having the issue flung directly in his lap by this statement, replied, "I think one of our greatest difficulties will be encountered in getting at the deep, fundamental principles involved. It appears that in developing social ideals we must first clarify such concepts as issue, objective, purpose, function, and aim. What do you think about this aspect of the problem, Dr. Bimodal?"

Director Bimodal stated his position, "My own position in the matter is much the same as that presented in the *Correlative Study*. You will recall that the coefficient of correlation between social understanding and peer group participation was found to be .68 significant at the .05 level. My only criticism of this finding is that the reliability of variability is open to question. In my opinion the sigma was extrapolated making the frequency distribution skewed. No doubt the functional analysis approach is essentially correct and will prove fruitful, but the validity of the fundamental assumptions should be established. On the other hand—"

Dr. Printwhistle could contain himself no longer. As chairman he had to break in on Professor Bimodal's remarks to prevent a monopoly of discussion. "In my opinion it is educationally vital to stimulate, guide, and coordinate directed living experiences.

I would be the first to admit the necessity for a full, rich, well-organized extra-curricular program. However, in implementing these desirable goals we must bear in mind the necessity for a clearer definition of responsibilities. Have you not found this true at Redundant State University, Dr. Hornblower?"

Professor Hornblower replied, "I was reading a piece of research the other day that might throw some light on this point. The title of the study was, *Music As an Accelerating Factor in Teaching the Principles of Propulsion and Repulsion Used in Swimming the Breast Stroke*. At one point, the thesis is presented that the extrinsic-dualistic system is permeating the entire education set-up. (In fact there are some who would say that this constitutes a distinct threat to the prairie-dog way of life.) I do believe that the members of the panel would agree that the chief criterion of a developmental process for democratic living should be the felt needs of the individual pupil. I also feel strongly that finding the self should be one of the chief criteria with regard to both the child-centered curriculum and the socially dynamic group. And there is this matter of guidance. To see it simply as a concomitant of extraversion-introversion homoscedasticity is to—"

At this point Dr. Bimodal cleared his throat and interrupted briskly. "I just happen to have with me this histogram which I think illustrates the problem graphically. You will notice that we have here two frequency distributions: one representing the work of homogeneously grouped superior students in a progressive system, and the other ungrouped problem children in a non-progressive system. Now the standard deviation—"

Dr. Bimodal was interrupted by the chairman who announced, "Time's up,

gentlemen! To summarize the discussion, I think each member of the panel would subscribe to the following statement, "To insure measurable outcomes in the developmental process for democratic living we must integrate individualization of instruction and the total experiences of the child. This, in turn, must be articulated with the active cooperative participation of the community, the home, and the school!"

Professor Printwhistle then called for questions from the floor. After an embarrassing silence, a question was asked. "Dr. Hornblower, don't you think the unit-of-work plan has a great deal to contribute to the techniques we are seeking to develop?"

Dr. Hornblower replied, "Without a doubt the unit-of-work plan has much to recommend it. However, we should bear in mind the values derived and the difficulties encountered. Such matters as motivation, relative values, minimum requirements, and administrative details must be weighed in an attempt to get a final action-reaction-satisfaction *gestalt* that is both desirable and justifiable."

After the answering of this question the chairman announced that the panel was concluded and that everyone should retain his seat for the brief business session to follow. Despite this announcement, over half of the prairie dogs arose and rushed toward the exit.

Although I wished to remain and observe the business session, I was caught in the crowd and irresistibly propelled in the direction of the exit. As I emerged from the hole, the prairie dog who had invited me to the meeting said, "Some of us are becoming a bit concerned over the development of a technical jargon within our teaching group. We believe it tends to limit rather than to facilitate intra-group communication. Others think it inhibits the development of a really effective public-relations program. Since your society is much more advanced than ours, you must have reached some solution to this problem. Will you give us the benefit of your experience?"

While attempting to compose an answer to this question, I closed my eyes for a few seconds. "We are working on the problem in our society but it is not yet solved," I replied, "I am afraid our educators have not escaped from periphrasis. Many have been known to tautologize without provocation. Some have even been accused of being pleonastic! Others actually verbalize without cerebration." Opening my eyes to observe the effect of this revelation upon my prairie dog guide, I was astonished to find that he had disappeared!

—Charles J. Keene, Jr., George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee.

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