

Are We Discriminating Against INTELLIGENCE?

Do schools and colleges cherish and develop the unique aptitudes, abilities and gifts of each individual? Or are we throttling and discriminating against various kinds of intelligence simply through our failure to recognize and to provide opportunities for developing these important assets? Here lies one of the basic professional issues of our time.

DESPITE OUR MASSIVE educational system, our thousands of schools and colleges, our democratic ideal of functional literacy, culture and occupational training for all, we miss our mark by a wide margin. In part this results directly from widespread discrimination against intelligence. This discrimination is rampant not only among people in general but in our educational institutions whose business it is to nourish and discipline intelligence in all students, at all levels and in whatever form it may take. Let us cite some examples.

Which Intelligence Is Valued?

Academic Intelligence

We discriminate against the scholastically brilliant. In elementary and high school, under the pressure of double sessions, crowded classes and teacher shortage, among other factors, we tend to force these "bright" youngsters with avid interests at high levels in many fields to focus upon subjects and to go at the pace of the average. When they rebel and go exploring and adventuring on their own, we punish

them. In comparatively few classrooms, schools and systems are special provisions made for them so that they may read the books and carry out the projects by which they might grow and learn.

Partially this discrimination stems from our great American humanitarianism, our compassion for the lame, the halt and the blind. In my own state of California, for example, there are some twenty-two laws on the books providing funds, institutions, personnel and special services for the handicapped "exceptional children," but there is not one offering benefits to the potential future scholar and scientist. This imbalance between our treatment of the very able and the handicapped is indicated further by the fact that, in the NSSE yearbook on *The Education*

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of *Exceptional Children*, one 19-page chapter and a few scattered references are devoted to the "gifted" child while all of the rest of the 348-page volume deals with the slow-learners, the hard-of-hearing, part-seeing, the crippled, etc. Few would deny our responsibility for the care and education of the handicapped, but obviously our duty is just as great to bring about the best possible development of the academically brilliant. This unfortunate discrimination against them results in only about half of them going to college and university where their powers might be brought to further maturity.

Mechanical Intelligence

We discriminate against mechanical intelligence. In the popular mind and in that of too many of the teachers of traditional subjects, there persists the false notion that there are only two kinds of students, the "academic-minded" and the "hand-minded." Accompanying this idea are two other erroneous assumptions: (a) that if a student does not do well in history, math and English he will do well in shop, dressmaking or beauty culture; and (b) that a student with academic intelligence is a higher order of being than one with mechanical intelligence. This kind of discrimination leads to the "dumping" of thousands of youngsters yearly into vocational and technical courses for which they may not be fitted at all and, at the same time, it robs many with academic ability of the chance to develop most important mechanical knowledges and skills. It results, too, in unwarranted social and professional conflict between teachers of the two kinds of disciplines.

Little by little we are becoming aware that these false concepts must be corrected because the success or failure of millions of us at high occupational levels depends upon mechanical intelligence. For example, the surgeon, the dentist, the artist, the musician, the aviator, the laboratory physicist, etc., must all possess to a high degree the neuro-muscular coordinations, the precise sense of space relations, and the sense of time and timing that are the basic elements of mechanical intelligence, and these must be schooled over the years of growth and development if, in maturity, professional practice is to be carried beyond mediocrity.

Clerical Intelligence

We discriminate against clerical intelligence. Almost universally we visualize the clerical worker as one who pounds the typewriter, takes dictation, tucks papers in files or pulls them out—a mousy and neutral personality who does routine and unimportant tasks. The facts destroy this picture. They show that: (a) our diplomacy, national affairs, business, industry, health, and education itself depend in large measure upon competent clerical work; (b) that millions make their living at clerical jobs and that all of us have to do more or less of this kind of work throughout our lifetime; (c) that, unless this work is well done, a business may go bankrupt, a battle be lost, a newspaper be sued for libel, a patient get the wrong operation, the meaning of a law reversed; and (d) that it is a unique kind of intelligence involving the power to differentiate the arrangement, order and significance of symbols, at high speed, with fine accuracy;

to organize and arrange materials so that they are neat, clear and effective; to order them so that each is in its proper place, readily available, among great masses of material. In a civilization that rests heavily upon "paper work," on printing, advertising, letters, mimeography, etc., it is obvious that discrimination in school and college against the process of teaching and learning in this field is absurd. Nor is it less foolish to try to compare clerical intelligence with academic intelligence and say that one is superior to the other. They are not comparable.

Artistic Intelligence

We discriminate generally against three out of four kinds of artistic intelligence. The fourth kind, because it involves and is close kin to the academic, is approved. This is what may be called the *analytical*. Teachers with interests in music, fine and graphic arts, the dance and theater are accepted in school and college if they become dissectors of things beautiful and of their creators. This they do by picking to pieces a novel, play or poem, an opera or symphony, a painting or etching—by studying their creators—names, dates, loves, diets and deaths, and teaching these things as art, or music, or literary history.

With the first form of artistic intelligence, the *appreciative*, we do somewhat better, for nearly every school and college has one or more courses in appreciation. Nevertheless, even the best of these is usually discriminated against since they are given less credit than academic courses, or no credit at all. Moreover, we commonly refer to courses in history, math and science as

"the solids" as if courses in appreciation were so much froth.

Somewhat similar attitudes are reflected in our treatment of the third kind of artistic intelligence, the *interpretive*. Until recently the training of painters, actors, designers, amateur and concert musicians, was left to studios, institutes and the like, private and commercial, outside the formal educational institutions. Now we have many courses, departments, and schools within the formal framework devoted to the "applied arts." However, unless these are heavily stocked with required work in history and analysis, they have difficulty in attaining respectability.

The last form of artistic intelligence, the *creative*, is much misunderstood and poorly handled in education. Our treatment here is clouded by false notions: that creativity is a "divine fire," "intangible"; that it is "impractical"; that people who have and practice it are "queer"; or that students learn how to create by dissecting beauty. We suffer, too, in all art learning and teaching, from faint or strong aftermaths of our tradition of pioneering which found art a "waste of time" and from that of the Puritans who thought it "sinful."

Practical Intelligence

We discriminate against practical intelligence. Although in our capitalistic democracy most of us are small or big capitalists in our own right, own goods, manage money, buy services, etc., and we look upon the "Yankee trader" and Tom Sawyer as admirable prototypes, in education we look upon training for the fine practice of these abilities as of less merit than literature,

biology and social sciences. Parents and teachers have fought to force the schools to return to the teaching of arithmetic, for example, by rote memorization of tables instead of by having elementary students learn it operationally by running school banks, stores and postoffices.

The attempts to introduce courses in personal finance, money management, consumer economics, etc., at the high school and college levels have had hard sledding. In the universities, the schools of business administration have fared better, in part because they have attached the practical to the theoretical and scholarly, and in part because they have had the financial and moral support of business and industry.

Social Intelligence

We discriminate against social intelligence. Getting along with ourselves and with other people, knowing when and how to love them, to fight them, to lean on them, or to run away from them, is generally acknowledged to be one of the most important of life's learnings. We know that social behavior is learned behavior, and that in this learning school and college have a most important role. And yet, because of our concentration upon the conditioning of academic intelligence and our illusion of its superiority to other intelligences, we frequently discriminate against it. In elementary school we penalize youngsters who "talk too much" to their classmates, who prefer the activity of hall and playground to the routines of study. In high school and college we give credits almost exclusively for academic performance, and relegate even the best of social

achievement to extracurricular and noncredit status.

We often bar those with high social intelligence from taking part in activities unless they pass all of their courses, making scholastic ability the criterion for eligibility, although the two are little correlated. Many teachers believe that participation in social learnings, in clubs, theatricals, athletics, is a waste of time and is detrimental to scholastic work despite the fact that it is chiefly in these activities that social growth and development take place. Finally, among those who try to teach for social competence, there are many who take the view that all students should be taught to like everybody, to win all and influence all others, and so they discriminate against the aggressor even when aggression is demanded, and against withdrawing from group activities even when being alone is essential to carry on creative work or to recover balance from the heavy over-scheduling to which most students are subjected in their daily lives both in school and out.

The above statement is brief, blunt and oversimplified. It is intended to sketch the broad outlines of present attitudes and practices of discrimination against intelligence. With equal brevity we may point to some of the trends towards improvement.

- Research in differential and individual psychology and in education is defining more clearly for us the different types of intelligence of which those cited in this paper are probably but a few. Research is also refining our knowledge of the special abilities, primary or secondary, and the skills essential to make each type operationally

effective in school, at home, on the job and in society.

- The testmakers are devising, administering, analysing and validating more and better instruments to identify both the types of intelligence and the special abilities in students so that we may know better and earlier with what human materials we are having to deal.

- Educational leaders and many teachers, trained in the steadily improving teacher-training institutions, are keeping up with the findings of these researches and experimentally applying them in laboratory schools and in some few high schools and fewer colleges, learning thereby how better to "educate the whole child" and especially to give learning experiences to each child according to his type of intelligence and his special abilities.

As a result, very slowly we are learning not to make invidious comparisons of talents that are not comparable and not to assert that one talent is better than another. Thus we find it quite proper to say that one child is more able than another in arithmetic or reading; but we know that it is stupid to say that such a child is a better child than one who is highly competent in art, or in the industrial arts shop, or in music, or in acceptance and leadership among his classmates in the social club or on the playground. Thus bit by bit we inch along towards the fulfillment of the American dream of educating all the children of all the people, and each child according to his unique personality pattern of intelligence, abilities and interests. Only thus can we build an ever stronger and more democratic United States.

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