



MANY remarkable inventions have taken place in this century. Many more will no doubt follow. Perhaps television has done more to alter the daily living of the people wherever they live than any other one invention. Families devote a good deal of time to watching and listening to events far away. These events are brought right into the living rooms of rich and poor alike.

There have been many others. Perhaps the computer may modify the lives of the people more in the long run than television has. Some jobs will be lost on account of automation. More people will have to find other things to do than they are accustomed to. This, however, is not new to our readers. It is a way for me to get started.

It is here contended that the most important part of education is the meeting, in a friendly way, of the mature, educated teacher with the immature and uneducated child. We are always seeking shortcuts, to avoid this meeting, in the hope that an easy, *inexpensive* way of education can be found. So we have become faddists, taking up one way or another to make use of mass media with large numbers of learners. Anything to save the trouble and expense of furnishing a compassionate teacher for children is sought.

It is also contended here that our rich country can afford a good teacher and a good classroom for each group of twenty-five children which we have brought into the world. There is no magic in the number twenty-five, but I settled on this number because I believe that a teacher who sees himself in a helping relationship can relate to that many. If it goes much above that, and if the room is small, the teacher will have trouble relating to so many.

## **We Are Unique**

The teacher in this situation can take into account the uniqueness of each individual; can know that not everybody can or will learn the same things in the same way. This understanding can be an enormous relief to teachers everywhere, since they have tried for centuries to bring classes through all knowing the same things, and have always been defeated.

This is what, for as long as I can remember, we have been calling individual differences. We have talked a great deal about these differences, but if we really believed in them we would change our expectations.

We can now understand uniqueness better than we formerly did. It has always been easy to see that no two people look alike. We have long known how nature has contrived to make it impossible for two people to have identical cellular structures. When nature contrived to have one from two parents, instead of two from one, great possibilities for change came about.

Fairly recently we have come to understand how the psychological self is built so that it cannot be like any other. It is built through the perceptive process, based on unique experience and uniquely received.

Perhaps the most important fact about any individual is that, while the physical and psychological selves live together and cannot be separated, there has never been anyone like this one, and there never will be again. Surely we must keep this important fact in mind when we teach. And we must be in situations where it is possible to do this.

## **The Nature of Subject Matter**

I have come to believe that one of the great stumbling blocks in our educational practice is a basic misunderstanding of the nature, and consequently the misuse, of subject matter. I have been accused of being "all process." I cannot understand how anybody could be all process. What would he do? This comes about when one advocates a change in method from that to which people are accustomed. Of course we cannot change method without changing outcomes. Neither can a teacher teach without teaching something, nor can a learner learn without learning something.

The proper subject matter for each individual is his particular surroundings and concerns. Without this, there could be no self or other, for I believe that the self cannot exist without an externality. Therefore it would be quite silly to be against subject matter.

What fills me with apprehension is the almost universal misuse of subject matter. Mostly we see teachers who think the textbook represents the proper material for the child. I can illustrate this best by using battles and wars, since these are the parts of our past which most history teachers find fascinating. So we start a seventh grade class in World History with the battles of the ancient Greeks, concerning which the seventh grader sees no relevance, and is unlikely to care anything about.

Confining myself to battles, what the seventh grader would be most likely to want to understand is the conflict now going on in Vietnam. He may even have a brother in it. This pursued will bring him to other conflicts, in a reverse chronological order. He might get to the Punic Wars in graduate school, instead of in the seventh grade.

There is little wrong with textbooks except in their misuse. They are badly padded to make them last through the semester. This padding adds to their dullness, and this in turn blunts curiosity. They could be used as resource books, rather than as the total proper subject matter. Textbooks are not bad in themselves, except for the padding referred to above, but like many other things, they are misused. In fact, I cannot think of any item of information which is bad in itself.

### **Can We Use Audio-Visual Aids?**

Certainly we can, whenever they are relevant to what is going on in any particular class. I would like, for example, for every classroom teacher to have a fairly complete film library and a projector. Then when a subject becomes relevant, all the teacher would have to do is to put on the film that has a bearing on what the class is doing. Some will say that this would be expensive, and it would. I have no figures on this, but I have an idea that enough money has been spent on educational television to supply this. Perhaps this is not true, but certainly it would go a long way toward supplying these films.

We ought not to neglect any device which can make the learner's externality clearer to him. But we must always keep in mind the relevance to the particular class. And knowing what we do about uniqueness, it is not possible to broadcast a lesson which will be relevant to all the classes in this disparate society. A possible exception might be big national events, such as the inauguration of a president.

We must not, I think, continue to look for panaceas in the solution of our educational problems. The heart of the educative process is still the relationship of the mature teacher with the immature learner. The cost of this is high, but we in America can afford it.

We must stop being faddists, thinking that each new invention can take the place of that relationship. Teaching machines can have their uses, but these uses are quite limited. Whenever drill is called for I can see using a teaching machine. The best case I can think of is in learning a foreign language. But the learner using a teaching machine is isolated from his teacher and his peers.

Let us use audio-visual aids for all they are worth, but let us at all times keep relevance, readiness, and the learner's uniqueness in mind.

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