

INUNDATION BY MEDIA

SCHOOL people must face up to a modern dilemma—one magnified by the accelerated pace of our era. Advocates of “method” are now much enamored of a curriculum bent upon change; not necessarily change based upon psychological needs of the individual, but change dictated by the technological-mechanical gadgets devised to inform the student. Wherein lies the intellectual stimulation, the curiosity so necessary in discovery? When does the student have a chance to react?

In trying to escape the rigidity of the single textbook, too many educators have discarded the key tool—books, and have failed to provide incentives to encourage students to use books as references. Jerome Bruner in referring to passion says, “Passion like discriminating taste grows on its use. You more likely act yourself into feeling than feel yourself into action.”¹ If one could paraphrase this to read, “You more likely read yourself into interest, than interest yourself into reading,” motivation for learning might come from familiarity with great thinkers’ ideas, and reliance upon teachers as operators of mechanical gadgets could cease, thus freeing the teacher to serve as an intellectual model.

Those who revere the new—the original, and who pride themselves on being pioneers in curriculum change might pause to assess those things that endure despite the ravages of war or the softening effects of affluence.

There are features of the human condition that change only within narrow limits whether one be cave dweller, a don in medieval Oxford, or a Left Bank expatriate of the 1920’s: love, birth, hate, death, passion, and decorum persist as problems without unique solution.²

Can we really compress learning and still capitalize on the inherent traits embodied within each individual? A child needs time to grow. Many educators fail to provide opportunity for study and thought. Books then become only a tool, not a friend and companion serving as a source of pleasure as well as a reliable

¹ Jerome S. Bruner. *On Knowing*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 1962. p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

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resource. Textbooks are treated with disdain and a teacher must use them in secret, or run the danger of being considered "factually oriented"—a criminal offense for the modern pedagogue. This accusation by the proponents of the media, which must by their nature provide more fact than feeling, is causing the intellectual and emotional development of our children to be stunted.

A Captive Audience

The accusers fail to note that the vacuum has been filled by the incessant intonation of the teacher's voice or a substitute audio device. The student body becomes a captive audience and each pupil soon learns to adjust his individual volume controls to shut out harsh voices, and escape into his own intimate world. At times students contribute to this audio world by making reports and they become a contributor to this cacophony of sound. An observer will note the apathy, and will understand why the volume controls are adjusted to shut off the dull speeches and the unpleasant and uninspiring voices. Exposure to learning, not assimilation of it is the only possible result of mass methods.

One teacher was recently overheard saying, "Thank goodness today is the last day for reports on our unit 'Explorers.' I wonder what choice words of wisdom Carl can give us on Cabeza de Vaca?" Can you imagine what narrow, limited understanding Carl must have of this so-called unit?

Learning should not be crystallized at the intake stage. According to Suchman,

We have a need for cognitive activity, a need that can be met only by the intake of data, the processing of it, the drawing of inference from it and the making of decisions. Another way of saying this might be that we have a need to inquire, not because inquiry leads to the joyous experience of discovery, but simply because inquiry itself is a highly satisfying and stimulating activity.³

Students reading, thinking, observing, and applying themselves do not have

³J. Richard Suchman. "The Child and the Inquiry Process." *Intellectual Development: Another Look*, A. Harry Passow and Robert R. Leeper, editors. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1964. p. 64.

time to listen to lifeless reports and when an entire class contributes, this is the kind of delivery that frequently predominates. Respect for the audio aspects of communication must be maintained despite misuse of communication devices. The teacher who wrote "Conversation on Explorers" in her plans rather than reports, films or lectures may have the answer.

Freedom To Think

Ingredients that may need to be reinjected into the students' lives are peace, tranquility, freedom—freedom to think and formulate ideas.

The great danger we must avoid in our contemporary educational practices and curriculum is a kind of skepticism and impatience frequently found when the sometimes shadowy, ephemeral and elusive antics of imagination come under study. The strict logician or positivist too often has insufficient toleration for chasing butterflies.⁴

Each and everyone needs an opportunity to ponder, discuss, reflect, or disagree. Failure to provide constructive outlets for students has created unrest and rebellion. There is no peace for the student who thinks and then cannot share. A speaker needs the approbation of his audience if he is not to falter and stumble or become defensive and antagonistic. A listless group of listeners hardly fulfills this need. Suffocation of the intellect—mass murder through mass media—and machine-like people may well be the harvest of education by machine.

Deprivation of mental stimulation may be crucial. The following statement by Bruner, though made in reference to the mental growth of the culturally deprived, appears to apply to any student not given an opportunity to resolve problems and to sharpen thinking processes:

The principal deficits appear to be linguistic in the broadest sense—the lack of opportunity to share in dialogue, to have occasion for paraphrase, to internalize speech as a vehicle of thought.⁵

The proliferation of gadgets may well have preceded widespread functional training in "audio-visualization." Technological change, not an understanding of human reaction to technology, has dictated curricular change. As the machine replaces communication skills, rather than enhancing them (as was the original intent of educators), the mind becomes corroded from disuse.

A number of social forces are at work to reduce reflective awareness of experience. A primary force is that of mass communication media, particularly television. . . . The child has no opportunity for interaction, for dialogue.⁶

Students in a curriculum devised to stimulate growth of communication skills need worthy models to emulate, and a setting with usable, dependable tools which involve and absorb their intellects. Architects of curriculum planning and admin-

⁴ Erling Skorpen. "The Educated Imagination." *Educational Forum* 30:40; November 1965.

⁵ Jerome S. Bruner. "Education as Social Invention." *Saturday Review*, February 19, 1966; p. 72.

⁶ C. Harold McCully. "Conceptions of Man and the Helping Professions." *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 44:916; May 1966.

istrators who implement these plans are often shortsighted or are victims of tunnel vision.

I am disturbed by the encapsulation of logical positivism, and resulting deterministic points of view in psychology, in education, and in guidance that seem based upon the image of man as a robot.⁷

Education today seems designed to perpetuate this encapsulation. The complexity of a schedule, when dealing with large numbers of students, often imposes the strait-jacket of conformity and TV or large classroom instruction, euphemistically called team teaching, is the expedient solution for schools in a highly automated society.

Since there is no such thing as a standardized boy or girl, conscientious educators need to give each child a chance for verbal expression. As the TV tray replaces the dining room table and denies children the opportunity for a major communication center at home, the school inherits a task that no machine or large group can perform. Let the schools, as the principal bulwark of democracy, try to meet this challenge, through experience in sharing, which ultimately shapes our destiny. ☞

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 913.

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