

A Challenge to

“Lecture, Read, and Write”

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THERE are a number of fallacies related to the educational process which must be challenged and exposed if progress is going to be made toward the goal of universal education.

Universal education is defined as that state of being which goes beyond the mere training to perform a vocational job or task and enables each individual to feel dignity in his own unique being, respect for himself as a functioning citizen in a society of many human beings, each one of whom has his own unique way to serve the human society. The ultimate goal, then, of universal education is one of reaching for mutual respect among people for a satisfying life, which must depend upon man's understanding of man and the nature of his interdependent world.

Three Fallacies

There are many fallacies throughout the educational system, but this article will deal briefly with only three of these.

1. The higher you rise in the lockstep educational institution, the greater the status and the more inflexible are its processes. Thus teaching methods of the colleges and universities go unchallenged and each school becomes a preparatory school for the next higher level.

High schools justify lecture, note-taking, required reading, required writing, regurgitation-testing because they are the predominant methods of the colleges. The whole process becomes one of learning how to beat the system, and any relationship to meaningful education is accidental. Students succeed in college by becoming skillful in “casing the joint.” The process is one of learning from other students, what each course and each professor is like. What does he use as criteria for grades? Does he lecture? If so, are the examinations based on how well you can take notes and remember what he said? What are the final grades based on:

term papers, required readings, or attendance? Do you talk in class? Do you argue? Do you express only ideas which support the professor's ideas?

Armed with this information the student selects the courses that he believes best suit his own strengths or abilities. The tragedy of this system is revealed in comments of the students whom I advise in certification programs for junior high school teaching. I frequently ask my students how they feel about their readiness for teaching. Do they feel inadequate in some areas? The response is almost always that they wish they had more understanding in such areas as science and math, adolescent literature, or others.

When I suggest that there is still time for background course work in such areas, they protest that they would not dare take such a course, for instance, as general mathematics. They say that since they have little understanding in such areas, they might find themselves in a class with students who have much more ability and wind up with a "D" or an "E" on the transcript and that would be too damaging.

We have apparently built a monster in that a student does not dare to try to improve a weakness; to be safe he must take courses that he already knows.

2. The concept of *teaching* is not only much overworked, as Carl Rogers said in his speech at the ASCD 1967 Conference in Dallas, but in reality, the concept itself is a fallacy in a dynamic society.

Teaching is frequently a belief that there is one who knows and one who does not and that the teacher can tell what he knows and then the learner also knows. This concept of teaching could be true only if there are single right answers, such as those necessary to survival as in tribal history. It cannot be true in a dynamic society where change is constant and where there are almost no single right answers. The concept of content to be taught would not be a fallacy if experience were not unique to each learner. Since past experience is the only basis each individual has to make meaning out of his perceptions, personal meaning for every individual has to be different from that of every other individual.

Teaching is a fallacy when it is assumed that learning is an intellectual process apart from the experiences which each different individual brings to the learning. Every individual must do his own learning in his own way—he must teach himself. Since experience is the main denominator in personal learning, the process can be enhanced as avenues are made free and open to new experience. The concept of teaching is a closure-narrowing process because of its implied demand for the single right answers valued by the teacher.

The helplessness of college students in prescribing for themselves is a small damage from the practice of this fallacy when it is compared with what happens to millions of young people who lose all respect for themselves and for learning when they consistently seem not to have the teacher's "right" answers.

If you wish to make a college class immobile, you have only to ask the students what they intend to do to help themselves understand or become more effective. Almost without fail when I meet a college class for the first time, someone asks

what he is supposed to read. My response is, "How can I tell you that? I just met you. I couldn't possibly tell at this moment what you need to know, to read, or to understand."

If I suggest that a student try to put into writing what an experience has meant to him, his concern is reflected in his wanting to know how long it should be and what references he should use. It seems to me that sooner or later colleges will have to recognize that this lecture-read-write and regurgitate method must be replaced if anything like a liberal education is going to have a chance.

The process of teaching is that of helping individuals discover "what is really important." This can never happen where there is only one-way communication from the front of the room to the back. Rather, there must be interaction in an environment where it is safe to explore ideas, feelings, values, opinions. This can never take place where consequences of a wrong idea or answer may ruin your transcript.

3. The third belief that defeats the goal of liberal education is that the subject fields are educative in and of themselves.

It is assumed, that when one knows each field well, sometime in the future, everything will fit together and "lo and behold," there will be an educated man. Nevertheless, rarely does a college organize in reference to helping students see relationships between and among the disciplines. The focus seems to have only vocational objectives. The first course in sociology is the first course toward becoming a sociologist and so it is with economics, political science, mathematics, or science, or nearly any other field. We obviously need people trained in all these fields but let us not mistake training for education.

Training is the elimination of wrong responses—a narrowing process. Education is an expanding process—an opening to new and differing ideas and possible courses of actions. Seldom can you find a professor in the liberal arts college who describes himself as a teacher. He calls himself a historian, an anthropologist, or whatever. So rarely does a teacher exist that when one does fill the role of respecting, facilitating, and exciting students, he is revered, sought after, and called great.

Research has continually revealed the ineffectiveness of college teaching. It seems that college students learn very little from attending the traditional lecture, read, test classes, yet frequently they learn a great deal from being in college. The Philip Jacobs study found that there are some colleges that seemed to make a difference in the lives of their students. In all such instances, the common factors seemed to be the kind of overall environment which makes it possible. The difference lies in the degree of freedom that students have to interact, and to hold and express ideas and feelings.

Educational efforts can aim at the personalization of meaning, can free itself from exclusive use of the deadly lecture-regurgitate method, and can give back to students the freedom to be responsible for their own learning. This will happen when the colleges recognize that there are many right answers and that college students are unique human beings. ❧

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