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Education: *Wither Thou Goest?*

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The following paper is a reflection of recent thoughts and research into the question of education, what it should be and whether or not we are providing children with a well-rounded, well developed education leading to the development of young adults capable in many areas, independent enough to continue developing their mental and physical skills on their own. The essence of this paper was presented as a lecture to the All-Kyushu High school PTA conclave held at the Nagasaki Civic Auditorium and the Citizen's Center on July 6, 1984. The lecture was entitled "Do You Really Love Your Children?" or "Jibun no Kodomo o Honton ni Aishitemasuka?" as it was presented in Japanese. It attempted to suggest that present day schooling directs itself to what can only be labeled as a limited area of human development, namely scholastic skills. Moreover, the result of present day schooling in scholastic skills is not what it should be. Finally, we must re-examine what human mental activity may be and, once having done so, provide training for our children that will take them far beyond the traditional "3 R's", so to speak. The point being that if we truly love our children we will provide them with the best possible education, the best possible training for success and happiness in life.

It is presently said that education is in a decline. Whether this is true or not, or to what degree, it seems obvious that given the social, economic and political problems facing us today, there has been much where education has not filled needs, has not done its best, has not provided the widest and deepest possible training to its charges - young developing minds and hearts. Nor is this to say that the problem is an exclusively Japanese problem. Quite the contrary, it is a world-wide problem, in developed and developing nations alike. Among too many observers around the world, the prevailing mood is one of pessimism.

Students everywhere are experiencing feelings of alienation, disillusionment and boredom, which lead to anxiety and dissatisfaction, not only with school, but, worse, with society in general. Today we are witnessing an increase in violent outburst on the part of young people, in schools, homes and the streets of our cities and towns. The cause seems no longer to be politics, as it once was in Universities; but dissatisfaction with parents and teachers and, anxiety about school studies.
Why? we may ask ourselves. Because we are not teaching skills in ways which young people can see as being useful or understandable. School taught mathematics are very advanced but how much is ever used in everyday life once students have graduated? Very little, in fact, probably none of the mathematics taught beyond 5th grade. Science? much the same. In other words, skills with numbers and problem solving taught beyond the elementary school level are never used in real life, yet ALL students are forced to deal with them for six years in Junior and Senior High School over and over again at an ever increasing pace. There are those, of course, who can assimilate all this with ease and who will go much further in mathematics and science. But individual inclinations and natural abilities, or more accurately, individual rates of absorption, should be taken into account by providing a curriculum in JHS and SHS which attempts several things: One, further development of practical skills in speaking, reading, writing, using numbers and problem solving for all students; Two, the option to leave and re-enter school at the end of any school year, because disinterested students are practically impossible to teach, and; Three, a multi-track or elective curriculum. This last would mean, naturally, that admission to the next higher level of education would have to take into account this multi-faceted JHS/SHS curriculum, at least, beyond a minimum standard. Perhaps engineering school candidates might be required to take a more difficult test in mathematics and science, while others, bound for the humanities, say, would be given a different test in these two areas.

This does not mean, however, that humanities students would be coddled. On the contrary, such students might be required to take additional language skills classes in JHS & SHS and then take a more difficult test in their native language and literature and a more difficult test in a foreign language than would be required of, for instance, engineering school candidates.

Fundamental skills in all areas should - must - be given to ALL students. Not only skills with numbers, problem solving and writing, and even public speaking, but exercises leading to the ability to identify and control one’s emotions in a variety of situations are necessary, if we are to lead the next generation safely through a much more complex and dangerous world than our species has ever faced in the past.

Training in memory is necessary. Today, however, all too many students are spending twelve or more years in school without ever becoming acquainted with even the simplest techniques of memory. The most widely and longest recognized technique is that of association. "You can remember any new piece of information if it is associated to something you already know or remember." (The Memory Book, p. 7).

Word substitution is one very effective way of remembering words from your native or from foreign languages. "The idea applies to any word, short or long.
The French word for grapefruit is pamplemousse. Picture (in your mind) huge yellow pimples all over a moose; each pimple is actually a grapefruit." (The Memory Book, p. 41) Since the English pimple + moose sounds very much like the French pamplemousse, once you have such an association in your mind you will never forget the word or its meaning. Or perhaps you are a Japanophone and wish to remember the word moose. If you were to picture a moose in a huge pot being steamed (perhaps with a very redolent look on its face), knowing that to steam is ‘musu’ in the Japanese language, this mental picture would certainly help you to remember the English word ‘moose’.

A key problem that faces us as educators is that "The long years of education are mostly concerned with knowledge....little if any time is spent with the basic techniques of thinking." (The Five Day Course in Thinking, p. 7) What, we may ask, is meant by training various forms of thinking? After all, there is, to this writer’s knowledge, no scientific definition of the word thinking that is widely accepted. If we mean the control of ideas by use of language and numbers, this, surely, is not enough to be considered a fully functioning adult. Problem solving through the use of logic is an important form of thinking that must not be neglected. However, often as not, this form of thinking leaves something to be desired as de Bono indicates in his Lateral Thinking. When faced with a problem we tend to focus on the immediately obvious aspects of the problem and close our minds to extraneous factors, factors wherein may lie the very solution we seek, e.g.

Many years ago when a person who owed money could be thrown into jail, a merchant in London had the misfortune to owe a huge sum to a money-lender. The money-lender, who was old and ugly, fancied the merchant’s daughter. He proposed a bargain. He said he would cancel the dept if he could have the girl instead.

Both the merchant and his daughter were horrified at the proposal. So the cunning money-lender proposed that they let Providence decide the matter. He to’d them that he would put a black pebble and a white pebble into an empty money-bag and then the girl would have to pick out one of the pebbles. If she chose the black pebble she would become his wife and her father’s debt would be cancelled. But if she refused to pick out a pebble her father would be thrown into jail and she would starve.

Reluctantly the merchant agreed. They were standing on a pebble-strewn path in the merchant’s garden as they talked and the money-lender stooped to pick up the two pebbles. As he picked up the pebbles the girl, sharp-eyed with fright, noticed that he picked up two black pebbles and put them into the money bag. He then asked the girl to pick
out the pebble that was to decide her fate and that of her father.

Imagine that you are standing on that path in the merchant's garden. What would you have done if you had been the unfortunate girl? If you had had to advise her what would you have advised her to do?

What type of thinking would you use to solve the problem? You may believe that careful logical analysis must solve the problem if there is a solution. This type of thinking is straight-forward vertical thinking. The other type of thinking is lateral thinking.

Vertical thinkers are not usually of much help to a girl in this situation. The way they analyze it, there are three possibilities:

1. The girl should refuse to take a pebble.
2. The girl should show that there are two black pebbles in the bag and expose the money-lender as a cheat.
3. The girl should take a black pebble and sacrifice herself in order to save her father from prison.

None of the suggestions is very helpful, for if the girl does not take a pebble her father goes to prison, and if she does take a pebble, then she has to marry the money-lender.

The story shows the difference between vertical thinking and lateral thinking. Vertical thinkers are concerned with the fact that the girl has to take a pebble. Lateral thinkers become concerned with the pebble that is left behind. Vertical thinkers take the most reasonable view of a situation and then proceed logically and carefully to work it out. Lateral thinkers tend to explore all the different ways of looking at something, rather than accepting the most promising and proceeding from that.

The girl in the pebble story put her hand into the money-bag and drew out a pebble. Without looking at it she fumbled and let it fall to the path where it was immediately lost among all the others.

'Oh, how clumsy of me,' she said, 'but never mind—if you look into the bag you will be able to tell which pebble I took by the color of the one that is left.'

Since the remaining pebble is of course black, it must be assumed that she has taken the white pebble, since the money-lender dare not admit his dishonesty. In this way, by using lateral thinking, the girl changes what seems an impossible situation into an extremely advantageous one. The girl is actually better off than if the money-lender had been honest and had put one black and one white pebble into the bag, for then she would have had only an even chance of being saved. As it is, she is sure of remaining with her father and at the same time having his debt cancelled.
Leaving aside the problems of memory skills and mental processes, perhaps even more important is control over our emotions. When in the experience of most of us have we been told that: When you feel this emotion, this is what you should do? Very rarely at home and almost never as part of a school curriculum. The principles as laid down by the late Dr. Haim G. Ginott simply stated are: When you feel in yourself or observe an emotion in another going out of control, identify it, do not deny it. In his book, Teacher and Child (pp. 162-3), he gives the following example: After a teacher insulted a young high school boy by discarding his composition without even reading it, the boy was so angry the only way to keep from striking the teacher was for him to run away. And run he did, five kilometers all the way home without stopping even once. Stomping into his house he loudly denounced the teacher. His mother, had she been like most of us, would have told him in no uncertain terms that he must return to school immediately. But, in this case, the boy was lucky, for his mother did not scold him but sympathized with him, thereby allowing the boy to calm down. Also she did not do or say anything to belittle the teacher, as this would have made it difficult for him to return to school. She, instead, simply concentrated on his feelings and verbally identified them for her son. In this way, the boy was indeed able to return to school. This mother's behavior is the kind that we should all be trained in but so seldom are.

Schooling should be equal, as far as possible, for all, everyone should be given the necessary training to do the estimations, calculations and decision making they will be confronted with in everyday life. A good, solid generalist education is necessary for all, because the world is changing too rapidly to train a large proportion of its citizens as specialists, for, as generalists, they would be better adaptable to the inevitable changes that will take place. This does not mean, however, that beyond this generalist training, no further specialized training should take place. As it must, it will. However, anyone undertaking such training must be prepared psychologically to abandon the skills thus achieved when such skills become obsolete. This, in essence, will be the risk of higher education in the future.

The late Robert M. Hutchins and his protege Mortimer J. Adler, general editor of Encyclopaedia Britannica, both point out the need is for general education over practical education, for the very practical reason that practical education cannot anticipate the skills that will be necessary in future, so it is more efficient to train people to be adaptable. This, plus life-long education to supply the community with such skills as they become necessary, should be our ideal, or goal. As Hutchins said in "The Learning Society" (p. 713), "...the leading characteristics of the education the world will be seeking [are:] Its aim is manhood,...It prepares the young for anything that may happen; it has value under any circumstances. It
fits the rising generation to be citizens of the two world republics [political and intellectual]. It gets them ready for a life of learning. It connects man with man. It introduces all men to the dialogue about the common good of their own country and of the world community. It frees their minds of prejudice. It lays the basis of practical wisdom." As Immanuel Kant said in Education (pp 14-15):

Children ought to be educated, not for the present, but for a possibly improved condition of man in the future; that is, in a manner which is adapted to the idea of humanity and the whole destiny of man. Parents usually educate their children merely in such a manner that, however bad the world may be, they may adapt themselves to its present conditions. But they ought to give them an education so much better than this, that a better condition of things may thereby be brought about in the future. Here, however, we are met by two difficulties - (a) parents usually only care that their children make their way in the world, and (b) sovereigns look upon their subjects merely as tools for their own purposes. Neither have as their aim the universal good and the perfection to which man is destined, and for which he has also a natural disposition. But the basis of a scheme of education must be cosmopolitan. And is, then, the idea of the universal good harmful to us as individuals? Never! for though it may appear that something must be sacrificed by this idea, an advance is also made towards what is best even for the individual under his present conditions. And then what glorious consequences follow!"

Change is upon us in such a bewildering array and at an even increasing pace that fixed institutions, especially those as enormous as is education, can never expect to keep up. As Margaret Margaret Mead says in Gross, (p. 271):

"That we as yet have failed to recognize the new character of change is apparent in a thousand ways. Despite the fact that a subject taught to college freshmen may have altered basically by the time the same students are seniors, it is still said that colleges are able to give students "a good education" - finished, wrapped up, and sealed with a degree. Consistent with these ideas and with our conception of what a student is, our educational institutions are places where we keep "children" for a shorter or longer period. Once they have left, we regard them as in some sense finished, neither capable of nor in need of further "education", for we still believe that education should come all in one piece, or rather, in a series of collected pieces, each presented as a whole, a whole at the elementary school, the high school, and the college level.
Thus we avoid facing the vivid truth of the new age: no one will live his life in the world into which he was born, and no one will die in the world in which he worked in his maturity. For those who work on the growing edge of science, technology, or the arts, contemporary life changes at even shorter intervals. Often, only a few months may elapse before something which previously was easily taken for granted must be unlearned or transformed to fit the new state of knowledge or practice. In this world, no one can "complete an education." The students we need are not just children who are learning to walk and talk and to read and write plus older students, conceived of as minors, who are either "going on" with or "going back" to specialized education. Rather, we need children and adolescents and young and mature and "senior" adults, each of whom is learning at the appropriate pace and with all the special advantages and disadvantages of experience peculiar to his own age."

We are at the stage of development where man is just a step or two away from being emancipated from the drudgery of labor. We should anticipate life long education now, because the trend toward increased leisure is making it possible. As Toyenbee says in Gross (pp 134–135):

The gift of leisure may be abused by people who have had no experience of making it useful. Yet the creative use of leisure by a minority of the leisureed minority in societies in process of civilization has been the mainspring of human progress beyond the primitive level. In our still archaic industrial society, leisure continues to be thought of, by all but a privileged minority, in its negative aspect of "unemployment" in gainful labor; and for the industrial worker, the prospect of unemployment is at present a nightmare because it carries with it a loss of income and, worse still, a loss of self-respect. In our world an unemployed worker feels as if he were an outcast from the working community. The Greeks had a truer vision in seeing in leisure the greatest of all human goods. In our world, the dawning age of automation is soon going to provide ample leisure for all industrial workers without loss of income or self-respect or social esteem."

In conclusion, perhaps it should be pointed out, that the origin for the English word school is to be found in the Greek word for leisure. Though in ancient Greece leisure for the few was made possible by slavery, today, not only do machines free us from hard labor, but, with technology, we are being freed from even operating the machines themselves. Moreover, the 'we' of today is not the few, but all of us.
Hopefully, all of us may one day see a world bound together, not in the quest for material goods for themselves, but in the quest for understanding and the recognition of the bond of our common humanhood.

What has been said in these few short pages? That education is in trouble is hardly necessary to repeat, yet the problem is too important to be ignored by anyone with any concern whatsoever. The few subject matter, emphasis on learning skills vis-a-vis specific items of knowledge, skills that are necessary for young people to become independent of school and their teachers so they can continue with their education on their own; and, finally, human relations and emotion control training.

As Ashley Montagu wrote a few years back: "Love is the ability to communicate by demonstrative acts to others our profound involvement in their welfare.... That's love, and that's what we should be teaching in the schools, and everything else should be secondary to that. Reading, writing, and arithmetic, yes—but not of primary importance, of secondary importance in the development of a warm, loving human being." Does more need to be said?

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