

Are Our Schools Peddlers of Delusion?

Speaking before 300 delegates to Great Plains Conference on Higher Education, a distinguished layman offered hard-hitting views of educational system. Conference held October 18-20 at O. U. drew delegates from 10 Plains states to discuss mutual educational problems.

By JENKIN LLOYD JONES, Editor, Tulsa Tribune

I WISH TO MAKE a plea for genuine progressive education. I believe that many of the theories that have gone under that name in the Gospel according to St. John (St. John Dewey, that is) have been progressive in theory only and have proved retrogressive in result.

But I believe that there are new methods available, already adequately tested, that could vastly improve the quality of education, that could speed up the learning process, that could make it more palatable and at the same time more impressive. In short, I think in the electronic age we have gadgets that the schools are either ignoring or using only timidly which would help solve some of their problems.

. . . Your teachers constantly complain of the tremendous impact on their children of lurid television programs and junk movies. Yet in their complaint they pay unconscious tribute to the effectiveness of these learning media. It is not the media that are evil but the stupid use to which they are put. Well, how about putting them to a better use? The same fire that burns the house also heats the boiler that runs the pumps that bring the water to put out the fire.

When the black clouds rolled up from Pearl Harbor . . . the Navy took us—bewildered and raw material—and in 90 days they expected us to know enough to handle a ship under combat conditions. Of course we worked hard with books and we listened to many lectures. But movies showed us the methods of mooring and casting off, the technique of damage control, the process of giving and executing orders, the new tactics of beach landing. Animated cartoons depicted the science of combat maneuvers, the workings of recoil mechanisms, the rules of the road, the theory of celestial navigation and the practice of pilotage.

The Navy, you see, was in a hurry. There was no one to say it shouldn't be done because it hadn't been done. The Navy had only a pragmatic interest in turning out the most capable trainees in the shortest possible time. Well, shouldn't that also be the aim of public education?

By and large, my children have been taught in about the same manner in which I was. True, their textbooks are vastly superior. And there have been some fumbling and timid steps at visual education, but usually done

so amateurishly and apologetically that the children laugh at it. Why shouldn't we be bold? Why don't we seize these new tools and use them as they can be used?

I have, in recent years, sat in high school English classes and listened as sexless and desiccated teachers read Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron in tired, flat voices, paying particular attention, of course, to the footnotes. And as I watched I saw man's normal interest in poetry, which is nothing but word-music, driven from the pupils. In fumbling hands, a poetry course is worse than none at all, for it produces aversion to poetry.

And yet with the flick of a switch those kids could hear John Gielgud or Emyln Williams read these English masters as they should be read. With the flick of a switch Sandburg could read Sandburg and Frost could read Frost in every American school, no matter how poor or how remote. Why don't we use the world's greatest artists to teach their own works? Their voices, their interpretations can now last indefinitely.

Shakespeare wrote his plays to be played. But in school today, as in my school and the school of my grandfather, we are still only reading Shakespeare, and usually reading him badly. Shakespeare wrote of human beings. He did not write to be interrupted while the class flips the pages in the glossary looking for the meanings of "exeunt" and "hautboys." This dissection of Shakespeare should come only after the student has an appreciation of the grand sweep of his genius, only after the student has seen the drama itself. For, as the Bard said, "The Play's the Thing."

And the play has never been better. In the past few years Henry V, Richard III, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet have been magnificently depicted on the screen. These pictures can be endlessly reproduced. You can make 20,000 prints from a negative. Is there any reason why any American student should study one of these plays before he has seen it?

IN HOW MANY starved high schools does the science department consist of a tyro teacher, a Bunsen burner, and a rack of test tubes? The nation cries for

scientists, yet we have thousands of schools that as yet are incapable of firing bright youngsters with an enthusiasm for science. They tell us it is hard to find teachers. They tell us that laboratories are expensive to equip.

Well, here's the camera again. And here's a splendid university laboratory. And here's a world-famous professor who can really teach. The camera can make the test tube as tall as a grandfather clock. Animated cartoons—not the crude ones that are too often used in so-called educational films—but cartoons done with a Disney polish and a Disney humor can trace the action of catalysts in a compound, or the forces of tension and torsion on a suspension bridge, or the fission and fusion of atoms . . .

When a European businessman decides he must learn a new language he generally goes to a private school where some form of Linguaphone is heavily used. He wants, as he puts it, to develop an "ear" for the language. He is not interested in credits or grade points. He is interested only in results. And he usually emerges capable of conducting rapid-fire and abstruse conversations while our American students are still rocking along on the "Ou-est-la-chat-de-ma-grandmere" level.

Where are our tape recorders? Where are the earphones through which our students will hear the language spoken week by-week at an increasing tempo until they, too, get the "ear"?

Please understand me. I am not looking for devices to make learning easy. I only think we should search out ways to eliminate unnecessary difficulty. The science of teaching does not involve making a subject difficult or easy. The science of teaching involves making a subject clear. Until we have exhausted all feasible means for advancing clarity we have not done our teaching job.

I know your problems in obtaining competent personnel. The situation is not going to improve soon. Well, industry faces the same problem. So it takes refuge in automation. Today the motor block, bored from 60 directions at once, is a better, more polished, more precise motor block than any ever made by the most skilled craftsmen . . .

Now, I'm not waiting for someone to invent a robot teacher, any more than I expect to have to compete with a robot editor. But the visual and electronic devices of which I speak can perform unique services for the class while the teacher prepares for other things. They may be an answer to the work load that drains the teacher's

energy and cuts down the zest and inspiration of the job.

. . . Because of the difficulty of grading essay type quizzes, the multiple-choice examination has recently become very popular in our schools and colleges. I'm not sure that much hasn't been lost, for the multiple-choice quiz will not teach a student to write clearly and incisively. Moreover, it hands an advantage to the intuitive guesser. But there is no question that such examinations are easier to grade. Still, teachers complain, for in large classes it takes considerable time to grade these papers.

BUT WHY? Twelve years ago I watched multiple-choice quiz papers graded electronically at Harvard. You fed each examination into a black box that contained a master paper with perfect answers and the box immediately marked the score and grabbed for the next one. One single trustworthy lad could run a machine that in a single night could grade 3,000 examinations on 50 different subjects. If we are really worried about the load on our faculties, why aren't these machines in mass production?

I think that a movement in these directions could be honestly styled "progressive education." Unhappily, under cover of that pleasant phrase we seem, in many cases, to have done violence to our schools . . .

We have been bemused by the phonobalonus grading systems in which the child is supposed to be graded subjectively against his presumed capacity, instead of objectively against his actual performance. This has proved a conspicuous failure, for the young man or woman is turned loose into a world that grades objectively, namely on what he or she can accomplish in comparison to what other people can accomplish. It is not only a failure. It is a cruel fraud.

The theory that everybody passes, the theory that the youngster must be protected from knowledge of his own shortcomings in order to save him from the trauma of an inferiority complex, the theory that lazy work and sloppy work and stupid work are rewarded just about as well as diligent and able work—these theories have put hundreds of thousands of our children in a dream world—in a world where the awakening will really bring shock and frustration and bitterness . . .

It is to the credit of our colleges that they have been least deluded by unsound egalitarian theories of teaching. It is to the credit of our colleges that the average professor still wants results, that he is neither niggardly of praise nor sparing of condemnation.

But while the privately-endowed schools may be able to pick and choose their freshman classes through rigid entrance examinations, the tax-supported institutions are faced each fall with a horde of ill-prepared youngsters, all of whom demand admittance because they have been handed parchments by their local high schools.

A very able president of a large midwestern university, the initials of which are O. U., told me a couple of years ago that much of the freshman year at his institution is lost as his faculty struggles to repair the inadequacies created by rotten high school preparation. Why should a college or university have to disperse its energies teaching high school? Our universities need more than the freedom to flunk. They need the freedom not to admit at all.

Such is the freshet of post-war babies that in a few years you will not be able to admit all your applicants. Increasing numbers must be shunted to the junior, the agricultural, the teachers colleges. Here, then, is your opportunity. Here will be the opportunity to set up competitive entrance examinations to the old, established state senior colleges and universities, and let those who can't make the grade turn to the smaller junior schools. Where you plainly won't have room for all, no legislature can blame you for insisting on taking the best.

I think this will have a marvelous effect upon backward secondary education. The high school that can place only a fraction of its graduates in the top state-owned college is a high school that is going to have to answer questions from its patrons. As long as you take all the graduates, townspeople may never learn how bad their high school may be.

YOU MIGHT even cure the preoccupation with teaching method that has caused teaching substance to be overlooked. Too many teachers are so surfeited with courses on child psychology and classroom theory that they have overlooked learning what they are supposed to teach. Too many teachers colleges have tried to raise the business of teaching to a mysterious and occult science, which it isn't, instead of making it the common sense art, which it is.

A couple of years ago my young daughter returned from her junior high school puzzled because she had been marked down in a geography quiz for failing to include Portugal among the Mediterranean nations. I roared over to the school and pointed to a map. The lovely little lady behind the desk seemed agreeably surprised to find Portugal on the Atlantic, but she turned

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with the Army at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He is chief of the combat construction branch of the engineer test unit there.

Lieut. Robert R. Sullivan, '55med, Carnegie, recently completed the Army Medical Service School's military orientation course at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Sam Tannebaum, '55bus, recently has become a certified public accountant and now is associated with Alford, Meroney and Company, Dallas, Texas.

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Dr. Charles A. Rockwood, Jr., '56med, Oklahoma City, is now interning at Gorgas Hospital, Panama Canal Zone.

Lieut. Billy C. Pyle, '56ba, Norman, has completed the military police officer basic course at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

Lieut. Lester H. Dacus, '56ba, Oklahoma City, has been assigned to the Army's medical service school at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. He is assistant chief of the school's schedules branch.

Lieuts. Jerry S. Parker, '56bus, Davis; Stewart E. Meyers, Jr., '56bus, Oklahoma City, and James T. Weeks, '56journ, Muskogee, were graduated recently from a field artillery officers basic course at Fort Sill, Lawton.

Ira F. Brown, '56bs, Healdton, and Jerry D. Kennedy, '56eng, Oklahoma City, are continuing their educations as recipients of advanced study awards made to them by Lockheed Missile Systems Division. Brown attends Stanford University, while Kennedy is a student at the University of California, Berkeley. Both work part time for Lockheed.

Dale G. Shellhorn, '56bs, has been awarded a master of science fellowship enabling him to continue his education while employed parttime at Hughes Aircraft Company in Culver City, California. He was one of 200 students studying in Los Angeles to receive the Hughes grant.

Joe M. Nelson, '56eng, Shawnee, and J. L. Skinner, '56eng, Bartlesville, both O. U. graduate students, won fellowships totaling \$3,200 in October. Nelson received the W. A. Schleuter \$1,000 grant, while Skinner won a \$2,200 Celanese Corporation award.

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the subject deftly by telling me that she had just completed a summer school course at Greeley, Colo., in advanced methods of teaching geography!

This summer the Phoenix school board said it would no longer hire graduates of teachers colleges to teach liberal arts subjects, that it would seek, instead, masters or doctors from liberal arts colleges. Phoenix, as one board member put it, was getting tired of teachers who returned each year to teachers colleges piling up academic credits learning more and more about less and less until their students understood their fields of instruction better than they did . . .

I would merely leave you with two thoughts. If you want to meet your challenges, if you want to bring about the brave new world of better instruction on which the survival of the nation may depend, there are two things in which you must not fail.

1. You must press for the introduction of teaching methods, however unusual or unconventional, that will utilize the latest devices of science to make instruction more dramatic, more impressive, and clearer to our children. This should be our criterion. Let us grab that which teaches more effectively. Let us boldly seize the method that permits instruction to be more eagerly received and more readily retained.

2. You must throw your influence toward the return to some basic integrity in our teaching theory. Let's quit coddling the weak and lazy and stifling the smart and industrious. Let us grade both teachers and students on what they can accomplish in comparison to what others can accomplish. While we give due understanding to the slow, let us put spurs to the fast. For that school that conceals the fact that the world holds vastly different rewards for the fumblees and for the catchers is no school at all. It is a peddler of delusion.

The Happy Life . . .

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The closer the time came to leave for the Orange Bowl, the harder certain people were to please. The wives agree they wouldn't trade places with their husbands, but we would like to trade places with someone as the pressure begins to build. If no calendar was present, we could still recognize the approach of a game.

Have you ever seen a lion pace in his cage; refuse to eat; toss and turn at night, and wake up to a new day hating just about everyone? That's not just one individual, it's typical of most of the players.

We couldn't trade our husbands in on a new model now, though. They've spoiled us so no one else could stand to live with us.

And, besides, we're rather fond of them, anyway.

Help for People Who Try . . .

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way through high school, urging him toward a degree.

"I've been the guy they say 'Go to college and get an education' to," Ted said. "They didn't get the opportunity."

Ted is considering the idea of medical school. It will be a long and hard road, harder than this first year when his scholarship has enabled him "to settle down to the routine before I get a part-time job." But he has few doubts about staying on. He keeps thinking of a good friend who went to college last year, then gave it all up in a surprisingly short time and dropped out. Ted was shocked, because his friend had the reputation of being able to stick out just

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