

‘EDUMATION’: NEW LIGHT ON AN OLD ACTIVITY*

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So many of use talk glibly of the necessity of improvements here and increasing efficiency there without putting in the requisite effort to determine what the disease is. Treatment of symptoms, as we should very well understand, can cause more difficulties than it sets out to solve.

Many of use feel a genuine air of detachment making pronouncements armchairwise and continue to relax as if the difficulties or inefficiencies have resolved themselves. More likely Aladin’s lamp would do the trick! We classify science and technology as Western as if they are products marked ‘Made in Japan’, ‘Made in France’, ‘Made in Germany’..... Knowledge belongs to him who finds it and Islam enjoins us to travel far and wide to acquire the same---*Rabbi Zidni Ilma*. Of course, knowledge by itself is sterile; we must learn how to apply it if we are to reap any benefits.

We have to start somewhere, and what could be a better place than the mind of man? It is here and nowhere else that the necessary infrastructure conducive to the use of the scientific method is created.

Even a superficial examination of our education system shows how well our mind travels in ruts. Is our thinking so ossified that it cannot rise out of and above the “traditional” routine way of doing things? We have done scant little---let’s face it---to improve upon our “inheritance”.

GOAL OF EDUCATION

It is not, therefore, out of place to mention that we expect of education (policywise), ie the dissemination of knowledge, the cultivation of the intellect and a familiarization into the uses of reason. Quite a mouthful, but what does it mean in practice? Is it that we look towards individualized instruction as a goal, or that our taught should learn to think straight or that they should learn to understand our cultural heritage. Should it be all of this or yet more?

Have we truly understood that sustained progress can only come from putting the results of knowledge acquisition into knowledge application? If so, why this dichotomy between the seats of learning and he institutions and application? The answers to these questions are twice told tales, but can bear repetition because we must never permit ourselves to forget that the interchange of ideas and experiences between our knowledge applicators is absolutely vital for survival in our world of today. Such interchange is more commonly known as feed back.

In order to ensure we can achieve this synergistic interchange we must learn to appreciate the dangers of resisting change as this often shows up as the rationalization of resistance

* Pakistan Times – November 13, 1968

in terms of organizational benefits, a very sorry situation indeed. Are we aware that tremendous strides have been made, principally since World War II, in a number of new disciplines? Who has not read or heard of cybernetics or automation? What about "Edumation"? Let us not fool ourselves that we can insulate ourselves from such advances, that they have nothing to do with under-developed countries. On the contrary, we are in a position to reap much greater benefits, effort for effort, because so much more slack exists here.

Most of our educators continue to rest on Gutenberg's laurels: that the only way of knowledge dissemination is the written word. Are there not so many other ways of augmenting the written word? There is no reason why all urban cinema houses should not be made use of between the hours of 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. to project on TV "canned" lectures of the best in the country. The purist will throw up his hands in despair and talk quite irrelevantly of personalized attention, as if any teacher can attend to any of the taught when the number exceeds three (or two?) dozen in a class! Again others will ask, has this been done elsewhere and if it hasn't relax and say "this is impractical" as if creative thinking should be alien to us!

INQUIRY

Again, we must make ourselves aware of the new methods of treating information (does not a teacher deal in this commodity?) or bits and pieces of knowledge from the point of view of acquisition, storage and retrieval? Since we are dealing with literally millions of such bits and pieces, it means we have to organize our own thoughts in order to understand what we are up to in the first place. This must make penetrating inroads into our minds, equally it will enforce a good measure of discipline on (do we not ask this of the taught?) ourselves. Such disciplining of one's mind makes possible the formation of the proper atmosphere for purposes of instituting objective enquiries, as such it lays the foundation for putting one's own house in order (is it not a good example to set?) which will mean increasing our productivity by stretching our limited rupee as far as it can go.

Continuous reassessment of what we are doing can be likened to one continuous spring cleaning of a huge house; by the time one has done the last room we are ready to start all over again! How can we get about it? We can be quite sure that we will continue to have to alter and develop our curricula to reflect the changing requirements of society. We can be quite sure that we will continue to have to deal with classes of increasing size so that, with the traditional way of instruction, individualized attention is out of the question. We can be quite sure because of the increasing time lag in adapting to changed conditions, given our present attitudes we will always be behind rather than one jump ahead. This leads to frustration. We witness students getting "unrulier and unrulier" and the reaction to such frustrations is panic action wherein the clash is between the determined/ indefatigable and the unflappable/invincible with expected results. We can be quite sure more and more of our teacher's time will be taken up in non-productive pursuits. Such are the dictates of today's administrative machinery! It is quite possible to increase the productive output of teachers, but we must recognize the vital importance of putting first things first.

The magnitude of problems will continue to increase (and why not?). The lag between planning and implementation is already so great that the proverbial stable is being locked for the sake of going through the expected motions! Since planning depends on accurate data for purposes of analysis of drop-outs agewise/ disciplinewise / areawise/ subjectwise/ sexwise.... and to be able to compare the situation from year to year. If we can do this there is not the slightest doubt that we can expect to get more out of the resources (both human and otherwise) that we commit to this effort. For we will be able to validate curricula better, to correlate examination results quicker, to analyze attendance records meaningfully.... and what is of primary importance to make such information available as and when required not months and months after the event and that too with no hope of intelligent cross-checking for error elimination.

BEST METHOD

The world is moving far too fast to permit us the luxury of masterly non-intervention. In the words of our President, those who do not take cognizance of this, will find that they "cannot win the game". There is no harm if we examine some of the ways and means that "others" have adopted to deal with problems arising out of expansion of facilities way beyond their original thinking and that too by the addition of ad hoc thinking.... The techniques used for unraveling an accretion of ad hoc thoughts are of secondary importance as our attitude must be problem-oriented rather than solution oriented. The use of the multi disciplinary approach has proved to be the best in problem analysis and development. One difficulty that does arise, if we truly wish for an effective multi-disciplinary attack, is that all the individuals comprising such a team must work as equals, only some are older and some younger. This idea must raise the hackles of the old guard and cause the soft corns of others to generate warning signals. After all is not the idea impractical? So what if it works elsewhere, we are quite different. This completes the circle where we came in, so back to our pipe on the easy chair!