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Toward an Integrating Consciousness

There can be little doubt that certain fundamentals of Eastern thought are being integrated or assimilated into Western culture. This development preceded, but is related to, the radical theology and the drug movements. The confrontations produced by the "Death of God" and LSD movements emphasize a global swing of the pendulum: from the rational to the intuitive, from the seen to the unseen, from the conscious to the unconscious.

The challenge would appear to be not so much toward science outcomes but to rational thought as such. The empirical methods which science has used to obtain its outcomes have forced upon Western culture a linear, part-by-part, "show-me" perception. Since empiricism has proven to be a disappointment in dealing with life's essential nature — the metaphysics of Being — the instinctive and unconscious forces of mind may be rising again, even in an era when scientific rationalism had appeared to be solidly entrenched.

A state of "highness" is the chemical-induced objective of the LSD cultist. His intellect no longer functions and he feels he knows ultimate truth. His experience has a holistic quality which cannot be divided and it transcends all partial abstractions. In somewhat parallel fashion, Thomas Altizer's God is Dead theology aims at a "highness" as well. It leaves out the intercession of some supernatural agency. Man is on his own with no other course to follow except inward to the sources of his own inner Being.¹

Although much concern has been expressed about the "bad trip" under LSD, or the vacuous nightmare courses of the inward voyage, the problem of the "good trip" represents a concern as well: how to maintain a continuing state of "highness." This state would assure a continuity normally associated with those whose accident of birth had given them royal status, or with those whose esoteric knowledges had yielded mystical power and influence over others. What would happen, one must ask, if

¹See, in addition, William Braden, "The Private Sea: LSD and the Search for God," in *Motive* (November, 1967), pp. 35-43.

everyone could rightly be said to have attained a state of highness? What new and unexpected intelligences will emerge as the confrontations of the East and West philosophies accelerate? And what must be the character of education during this interval of the shift and broil of time?

Clearly, the fragmented, episodic progression which is now directed against the integral human organism will not do. Never in history has there been so much unrest in education. The slow, painful, cultural evolutions of the past are being short-circuited by the electric possibilities of what Whitehead called the "insistent present," which is also past and future.²

The response of Western societies has been, unfortunately, to program more and more of the environment into a vast, all-encompassing teaching machine with an amazing insensibility for the humanity which is now trying to re-create itself.

There are those in educational circles who despair and simply "drop out" to the shelter of the conservatory of the past. Others move with almost frenetic verbal activity towards change — which generally means increasing the efficiency of something which perhaps should never have been attempted in the first place. The *brake*, accordingly, would seem to be a critical component of the breakthrough. This restraining force must mean, however, that by taking account of environment, perceptions will specify needed action more clearly.

There are certainly some obvious facts of environment which are documented now and can give us guidance for action. One example comes from the geometrically increasing factor of human knowledge. We know that we are in the midst of an explosion of knowledge which is rapidly taking the form of an implosion. Only a few years ago it was quite conceivable to regard the areas of chemistry, physics, botany, zoology and many of the physical sciences as quite separate entities for isolated study. We now know that these areas are rapidly being combined; that without cross-fertilization among the disciplines little advancement can be made in any single area. We know as well that the emergence of critical social problems has forced the physical sciences to turn increasingly to an examination of their common bases, so that they can be put much more clearly into the service of man.³

And in the social sciences and the humanities there are interesting signs of synthesis among disciplines, even in the face of what appears on the surface to be increased specialization and fragmentation. As large socio-political issues become more dominant in the world and as nations look to universities and schools to uphold their prosperity and prestige by providing the scientists, technologists, teachers, doctors and managers, the

²A. N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 14.

³Northrop Frye, editor, *Design for Learning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

luxury of unintelligibility among disciplines becomes much more difficult to defend.

So, as knowledge explodes in terms of amount of new information generated, there is a concomitant movement for synthesis and integration of information. At one period in man's history, art and science were not separated.⁴ C. P. Snow's "Two Cultures" caused some sizeable concern a few years ago but may not be of any significance in the information implosion of the next decade.

Another example which should call for a shift in educational perception comes from a second geometrically increasing factor: the world population. In developing countries and emerging societies, the leap from a pre-literate to a post-literate age is now being taken without any of the intervening stages. These countries cannot survive by permitting any wastefulness in the development of human intelligences which will perform the critical functions which the society needs immediately. Thus, in a tropical or semi-tropical country, there is normally a critical need to maintain the health of the working population, so that the economy can be kept viable. The skilled diagnostician is critically needed here and no lock-step procedure for training doctors can be afforded.⁵

In several African countries persons have been taken out of tribal communities to work in a setting where diagnosis and treatment of illness is taking place. The trainees are confronted immediately with sick persons and are shown by specialists what diagnoses are being made and what treatments are being recommended. Generally, these trainees work as a team so that they might learn from each other and aid each other in their learning. The results have been generally spectacular. Although unable to read or write, these persons from tribal communities can become brilliant diagnosticians often within three months time.

The intelligences released under such procedures are not verbal in nature at the outset. The trainees respond wholistically to the patient. Data comes simultaneously from a number of sensory modalities; odours, fine gradations of sound and colour, tactile qualities of skin, tissue and muscle, minute variations in atmosphere and many more inputs are integrated to create a diagnostic pattern. Numerous experiences have now shown that such diagnosticians can succeed eminently better than the specialists who at the outset were "the teachers."

Similar illustrations are reported in the development of aircraft technicians, pilots and in many other areas of technical skill development.⁶ These are events now taking place on a global scale in emerging societies.

⁴See, in addition, W. M. S. Russell, "Art, Science and Man" in *The Listener* (January 9, 1964), pp. 43-45.

⁵UNESCO, *Educational Planning Mission to the Ivory Coast, 1963* (Paris: UNESCO Publications, 1964).

⁶Elliott J. Berg, *Manpower and Education in Senegal, Guinea and the Ivory Coast* (Harvard University, Centre for the Study of Education and Development 1963), p. 38.

Similar learning phenomena have been reported on those wartime occasions when specific functions had to be performed as a result of some manpower emergency. For example, during the second world war Eskimos quickly became top machinists with the United States and Canadian Air Forces.

In the face of evidence of what might be done in education, it is sad to note the widespread insensibility of educators to significant human conditions of learning. Most schools and universities still fragment and compartmentalize learning and discredit quite effectively those powers which the human organism possesses in abundance. The situation is not new. Even Coleridge urged his generation "to value earnestly and with a practical seriousness a means, already prepared for us by nature and society, of teaching the young mind to think well and wisely by the same unremembered process and with the same never forgotten results as those by which it is taught to speak and converse".⁷

There are some hopeful signs of a changed awareness in education, however. Much of Piaget's work⁸ and that of Bruner⁹ have gained much interest in the last five years. Their work has sparked considerable investigation and curriculum modification in which procedure is becoming as much a concern as content. It is to be hoped that such cognition studies and curricula reform will succeed beyond all expectations. The danger in all these activities is that we shall succeed in developing increasingly more exact but increasingly more abstract principles of learning and lose track of significant intelligences about which we may already be intuitively aware. "When hewing an axe handle" said the Chinese philosopher, "the model is already in the hand."

The common conception of a skill learning period in the life of a child to prepare him for complex theorizing tasks which will be taken up at a later period is simply no longer valid. Generative understandings can be introduced to young children which will give a solid base or stem upon which intellectualizing can be mounted later, if needed, regardless of the order or the complexity.¹⁰

Such procedures take into account the intelligences which make it possible for young children and "primitive" people to operate efficiently and with confidence a complex piece of machinery. In a similar fashion, young children can learn complex languages, play difficult music and undertake many other complicated tasks, provided they do not have to read about them or labour through intensive analyses.¹¹ This is a form of simplifica-

⁷Biographia Literaria II., p. 117.

⁸Jean Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* (New York: Norton, 1963).

⁹J. S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

¹⁰A. R. MacKinnon, *How Do Children Learn to Read?* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1959) and also A. R. MacKinnon and Northrop Frye, *Learning in Language and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

¹¹See, for example, R. M. Schafer, *The Composer in the Classroom* (Toronto: BMI Canada Ltd., 1965) and also R. M. Schafer, *Ear Cleaning* (Toronto: BMI Canada Ltd., 1967).

tion which reduces distance between sources of data and the utilization of such data. More attention is paid to experiencing instead of talking or reading about the experience. The procedures require that a learner start, as it were, at the *top* of the activity which is to be performed.

There is evidence now of the validity of such an approach in teacher education.¹² In this program, students who have had no previous courses in education spend an initial eight weeks working in a school situation with a team, under the guidance of an individual who is genuinely concerned with the improvement of children's learning. In this situation, students recognize their particular strengths and weaknesses and they get an immediate feel for what human learning is about. They then come into the university for an eight-week Reading Period through which they expand their perceptions and engage in general and specific planning which is directly relevant to their next period in the schools. The second contact with the schools is sixteen weeks in length. The students no longer work with a team of their peers but with "professionals" in the fundamental task of contributing to the reordering of schooling. Another period of sixteen weeks takes place at the university during which time courses and programs anywhere in the university can be elected which can be justified as relevant to the student's continuous growth. In all of this program the emphasis shifts from institutional programming to individual programming, so that the learner takes increasing responsibility for his own learning. The biological principle of all growth predominates: no living organism can be assisted in its growth by giving it something which it does not need.

In such a situation, textbooks and courses become increasingly less relevant; departmental boundaries are obscured; programmatic experience replaces episodic information-gathering. Students, in such a context, report awarenesses which are similar to those which they experienced in early childhood. And with this re-awakening there arises a motivation to engage in the reform of teaching which they had encountered in schools and university. Apparently a feature of "highness" is an increasing commitment to social action.

The action, however, is not where the frenetic verbal activity is; it tends more and more towards an enhanced perception, on a wholistic level, of those intelligences which learners intuitively know to be present but which have been allowed to stagnate as a result of the institutionalized, fragmenting machinery which predominates in education.

There are exciting possibilities now for attaining to what might be called *the integrating consciousness*. The chemical-induced state of "highness" is transitory and can at best only provide a shaky base for a continuing state. The young child and the "primitive" demonstrates that an integrating consciousness is possible without the use of chemical agents,

¹²A. R. MacKinnon, "Toward a Theory of Teacher Education," *Education* 6:1 (W. J. Gage Ltd., 1967).

provided the conditions for releasing the integrating powers are present. The pre-eminent tasks of education would appear to be:

1. To acknowledge the genetic possibilities of "highness" in every single being; and
2. To create those conditions whereby the integrating consciousness will advance continuously.

A state of highness will become, accordingly, not something static within a social hierarchy, but a significant advance in the enhancement of the limitless possibilities of the human being.