

COMMUNICATIONS

Concealed Aims of Education?

It was good to see from your December number that the years of official retirement have not diminished the fervour and liveliness with which Charlie Phillips has been attacking pious platitudes in education for the past quarter century or more. The trouble with his article on seven concealed aims in education, however, is that he sprays his buck-shot in the direction of so many targets simultaneously he cannot fail to make the odd hit, while the general effect — upon one reader at least — is complete mystification concerning his main purpose. What exactly is it that continues to rile him so much?

Surely this business of articulating aims and defining objectives in any activity involving human feeling, reasoning, and the need for some immediate action, only to discover that accomplishment has fallen far short of the mark set, is just one more reminder of our common frailty. Hope always outdistances experience, deeds tend to mock words, and works fall short of faith. But, in his free-wheeling Savonarola style, Phillips prefers to call us all hypocrites (himself included I'm sure), since clearly we are all guilty of failing to practise at all times what we have preached and, God help us, continue to preach. It might be worth recalling that Dewey, who did everything humanly possible to avoid defining educational aims while he theorized about and illustrated ways and means for schools and teachers to make democracy real, had eventually to disassociate himself from his ultra-progressive disciples who forgot that immature pupils had to be told frequently what to do and how to do it in a systematic manner.

A few examples of the Phillips spray-gun technique are necessary to explain why the tone of this letter is more critical than laudatory.

(1) He ridicules a recent (in Ontario?) decision to teach oral French in primary and intermediate grades as an example of the concealed, hypocritical, and politically expedient objective (on paper) that all Canadians become bi-lingual. How much substance is there to this charge? Surely the official hope is the informed public's common-sense expectation that in future many more young Canadians will come to enjoy speaking a little French and reading at least some current French literature. Only a small percentage of Ontario youth will ever become bi-lingual, as necessity or opportunity determines, but the total will be much larger than in the past and will continue to grow.

(2) To illustrate the hypocrisy of what he calls "the concealed aim of concealing reality," Phillips describes a personal experience in a Las Vegas elementary classroom where the pupils obviously did not question the justice of their country's cause in Vietnam, and thought of all opponents as enemies and aggressors. Surely such a reaction at this age level is to be expected rather than deplored. And why blame the school? Powerful educational agencies outside the school are constantly conditioning such responses in the young. But why not take some account of encouraging signs of spreading dissent among American youth of senior high school and university age, and give their schools and teachers some credit for this?

(3) It is while he is expounding concealed aims 5-7 that Phillips gets me totally bemused. Apparently our cant phrase "education for leisure" is a cover-up for the school's inculcation of a materialistic philosophy in support of big business and its proliferation of luxury goods which the kids learn to covet as symbols of the good life: colour TV, two cars in the garage, and the rest of it. This materialism, in some mysterious fashion, is supported by the authoritarianism of the school, which in turn stems from the Christian doctrine that "truth and error, right and wrong, have been defined authoritatively for men by God and/or His agents by a process in which man had and has nothing to say." Then comes the astounding assertion that "all of this is taught openly in school as Christian democracy." In all my experience as a high school teacher in Ontario (the background of the Phillips article), I never encountered such teaching or heard of it going on. Instead, we stuck closely to our subject-matter and, for a few minutes every morning, engaged in that travesty of all religions and/or moral teaching which I believe still goes on in secondary schools: daily Bible readings without comment, followed by incoherent chorus mumblings of the Lord's Prayer.

I have of course no quarrel at all with the desire to substitute serious attention to the process and procedures of good teaching for wordy talk about ends or aims. What happens on the journey is much more important than speculation about the journey's end. Unfortunately, the hints that Phillips gives in his article on this point are all too reminiscent of the progressivist excesses of the thirties which Dewey spent the last twenty years of his life discounting: pupil choice of course content, no required assignments, no formal examinations, school rules established by staff and students together. While a lot can be said for moving in some or all of these directions more purposefully than we have done in the past, particularly in the upper levels of the high school, it seems to me that Phillips' all-or-nothing position is untenable, in particular his criticism of duty as opposed to voluntary acceptance of responsibility by the young. But the latter can also amount to cant if it does not embrace the discipline of accepting consequences. In that context, duty and responsibility amount to the same thing, social obligation. There

are times when one simply can't avoid doing what one must do, or opt out of society altogether. . . .

It's the old educational dilemma of freedom of choice in continuing dynamic tension with social responsibilities or duties. I and Thou are inextricably linked and interdependent, yet always in conflict lest the one dominate or diminish the other. Phillips tries to cut this Gordian knot by suggesting that freedom is the good word and duty the bad, that the educational leftists are the good guys and all the rest bad guys or hypocrites. Does he *really* mean it?

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Universal Values and Different Cultures*

As I understand it, Dr. H. W. Kitchen's article follows somewhat the following lines:

Canadian society is undergoing a limited convergence of values on two planes. There is a horizontal convergence between regions which tends to meld cultural variations. There is a vertical convergence which tends to meld toward the urban middle class professional value structure. In the author's words, "The convergence, or tendency for Canadians to become more like each other . . . is largely of the urban, middle-class, large-scale-organization way of life." He sees this convergence as being due in part to mass media, and in large measure to our educational system which he finds to be predicated upon the principle of equal educational opportunity for all, but which at the same time promotes and exemplifies the urban middle class professional value structure. He suggests that the pro-professional middle class bias shows up in "texts and other materials," which portray disapproval of other classes and their values, "school regulations and disciplinary practices that emphasize private property and the avoidance of improper language" and "teaching methods that stress 'grammatical' speech and interpersonal competition." Such a system, he says, tends toward "cultural euthanasia" for all cultures other than the middle class. Then, arguing that there are very few, if any, universal values, Dr. Kitchen suggests that it is immoral to practice "cultural euthanasia" in the name of education. In other words, he is saying that (in his view) since there *are* no universal values there ought not to *be* any universal values.

This strikes me as exemplifying both a certain weakness and bad philosophy. It demonstrates weakness because, by implication, his rejection of universal values suggests that the author refuses to commit himself to saying the admittedly dangerous thing, that anything is good for all

*H. W. Kitchen, "Differences in Value Orientations: The Broader Implications," *The Journal of Educational Thought*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (December, 1967), pp. 166-175.