

*Understanding*. I believe *The Educated Mind* has replaced the intended publications on Philosophic and Ironic Understanding, and at this time is the summation of Egan's original four fold idea.

*The Educated Mind* offers very little development of Egan's ideas. The first 100 pages recapitulates the first two books in the sequence, and the last 100 pages is an odd mixture of further recapitulation, inadequate examples of how themes or subjects may be taught to the different kinds of understanding, and a humorous chapter answering questions he anticipates the reading audience may have; however in most cases these questions have long been asked and are a small cross section representing a decade long debate in which Egan has already been involved. I remember attending a presentation Egan gave at the University of Calgary in the summer of 1992, and the challenges to his theory such as, Is this not another reductive theory of stages? In giving such air to the many questions, I found him overly defensive, and despite the open offer of his website to receive responses, I felt he was using the question and answer chapter in an attempt to deflect criticism and to pad the book.

For past readers of Egan, the mid section (approximately 70 pages), was the two volumes for which we had been waiting: now Chapter Four, Philosophic Understanding; and Chapter Five, Ironic Understanding and Somatic Understanding. For a while in Chapter Four, under the title Ancient Greek and Modern European Theoretic Thinking, it was Egan at his best. Applying history and philosophy we are given insights into how Plato and Aristotle and then later in the 17th century, Descartes and Bacon were instrumental in developing what Egan calls, Philosophic Understanding. We hear how the philosophic approach went into all areas of inquiry.

Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Shelley's *Defense of Poetry*, Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill's ideas are all examples of applied philosophic discourse and thinking. Egan summarizes: "Philosophic thinking exercises and develops the capacity to see patterns, search for the recurrent, perceive processes, look for essences, and make ordering principles and theories" (p. 134).

It is an enjoyable chapter, especially for those of us who like to be reminded of the names and ideas of literary, philosophical, and

historical people of note. However, Egan has an agenda, and with only one chapter to make his point, juicy insights fall away. An example was Francis Bacon arguing that he never let bribes affect his judgement of cases, when even he was forced to resign the chancellorship due to accepting bribes. And the development of argument coupled with extensive research, as found in *Primary Understanding*, is less convincing. The rest of the chapter is spent in showing how the mode of thinking particularly developed in the period named The Age of Enlightenment, fits into Egan's recapitulation scheme.

Egan states that the transition from Romantic Understanding to Philosophic Understanding is the second significant change in the growing child. The first change from Primary Understanding to Romantic Understanding he suggests may be likened to the loss of Eden. He gives many compelling reasons why this may be so, and one is reminded of the eight or nine year old child who can no longer believe in Santa Claus: mythic thinking (Primary) can no longer sustain this child. Somehow, the grade six, or teenage change is completely bypassed, meaning grade 3 to 4 children are grouped in the same category (Romantic) as grade 8 or 9 and then at 15 years we are at "a later departure from another Eden" (p. 124).

In an extremely brief paragraph we hear that W.H. Hudson experienced an epiphany at the age of 15, and we are assured by Egan that "this is something that nearly all educated people I have surveyed recognize" (p. 125). This suggested change in thinking seems hopelessly out of synchronicity with the period of development during which most young people are intensely subjective. Egan tries to deal with this by stating "students' interest in the world is not so much for its own sake as for what the discoveries will reveal about themselves" (p. 126). I find this sets up a confusion between the notions of Romantic and Philosophic Understanding and points to the problem of becoming too immersed with categories or stages: growing children simply do not easily conform to archetypal patterns. The idea of student learning being dominated by curriculum driven by the Philosophic notion also strikes one as skeletal and barren; as such, Philosophic Understanding is underdeveloped.

The other new chapter is Ironic Understanding and Somatic Understanding: the promised fourth book is now half a chapter. The Ironic idea rests on seeing the flaws in philosophic systems of thought. As the metacognitive component in Egan's structure, it is somewhat elusive; it is not taught to, like the other three forms of understanding, but it is suggested in the questions and answers chapter that we are more likely to attain Ironic Understanding through the process of a University education which should focus on Philosophic Understanding. I was surprised that this did not also include the possibility of learning through life experience, and did not rest so heavily on a metacognitive intellectual position. It is often the knowledge arising from experiences in life which points to the dissonance between our youthful ideas and ideals and life's harsh realities. In this sense Ironic Understanding may help us to mediate the differences, appreciate the paradox, laugh at ourselves or the world, and move on as a more experienced human being. Surely Ironic Understanding recognizes the chasm between the theory learned at school and university and the experience of the working world. Egan does not think so. Ironic thinking (or the nauseating term 'the Ironic Understander') is a product of the above scheme evolving from Philosophic Understanding, and the dental technician (pp. 193-194) is only offered the opportunity to relate to communities that support Philosophic and Ironic thinking through books, journals, and media, noticeably not through life experience.

Somatic understanding is an after thought, and like much of *The Educated Mind*, it seems to be a defensive response to Egan's critics rather than a new and inspiring stage of understanding. The inspiration appears to be found in Merlin Donald's *Origins of The Modern Mind*, and Egan does little more than give a brief synopsis and then cut and paste the general theory into his own scheme.

I was disappointed with *The Educated Mind* because I have learned much from Kieran Egan's provocative and discerning works on education: his epistemological thoughts on what we teach and why. As a teacher and parent I was inspired by *Primary Understanding*, which led to an interest in, and enjoyment of, *Romantic Understanding*. In *The Educated Mind* the salient features of Egan's work, his freshness, humour, imagination, and perception become subordinate to the selling of his scheme. It is like a novel

that is written to sell an idea, not a creative work that expresses the way things are from the author's unique point of view. A more suitable title could have been Recapitulation; more for the fact that the bulk of the book reiterates ideas he has previously developed rather than a further development of the theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.

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