

Editorial

Educational Pathology and Treatment

In an earlier editorial I suggested in passing that there is a book to be written for education which is comparable to the great medical textbook *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*, by William Osler. That book was the founding document in the modern practice of medicine in that, for the first time, and in one compass, the entire range of clinical entities then known to the medical profession were reviewed from the vantage point of diagnosis and treatment.

Over the course of the last 25 or 30 years education, like medicine, has been developing its own picture of the range of educational difficulties and problems, in short, of educational pathology, which block optimal or even normal learning. The deepest assumption of the educational practice of the last quarter century in North America, in Britain, and in countries using the English language as a primary vehicle, as well as in the Scandinavian countries, is that Rousseau was essentially right. Learning is natural, but many barriers to learning – physical, mental, motivational, institutional, sociological, gender related, financial, curricular, cultural, and so on – exist in any given case.

The role of the teacher then becomes the role of one who would enable natural learning to take place by removing the barriers to learning. This is similar to the role of the physician who would remove the barriers to healing. The physician can never cause healing, which is natural. But she or he can promote it. So it is with learning, and the role of the teacher.

The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Educational Thought* are all grist for the mill of a possible book on the pathology of education and its diagnosis and treatment. Perhaps most obviously, the article by Marc M. Wasserstein-Warnet treats the notion of educational problems directly, suggesting that many

problems lend themselves to the identification of the crucial factors causing a an educational "blockage." These, in their turn, may be treated by identifying the direction of the attention of the learner and her or his re-orientation so that the blockage disappears.

At the other end of the spectrum, Raymond L. Calabrese and Angela Calabrese Barton argue that a university without academic integrity is like a human body with an uncontrollable cancer. In the end cell after cell or in the case of the university, individual after individual will be affected adversely. This is because integrity relates, according to them, to wholeness. In particular, if academic integrity is compromised then the university has a harder and harder time achieving its mission and may ultimately fail across the board. Surely if it is true for a university it is also true for a school system or a school that the institution must have integrity of the kind which supports scholarship, free thought, open discussion, high standards, yet with understanding of the needs of the individual. Thus another kind of educational pathology which would have to be recognized, if this line of thinking is right, is the pathology of educational integrity.

Are there educational problems or complexes of problems which a large-scale disaster poses to the opportunities for learning? For example, what if a school system is flooded out, as happened in the wake of the Red River floods a year or so ago? Zevenbergen, Sigler, Durre, and Howse look at what happened to classroom curricula and activities subsequent to that flooding disaster. This led among other things to schools being closed in the wake of the flood for five weeks prior to the usual end of the academic year. Considerable disruption occurred across the curricular spectrum and adjustments were usually spontaneous and unplanned. But here is a kind of educational difficulty which has a global aspect and to which the educational response must also be global – perhaps, as the authors suggest, in the form of a curricular contingency plan.

Finally, P. Taylor Webb considers the uses of language in reflective teaching. Poor pedagogy, and so barriers to learning perhaps of a *pedagogicogenic* kind (again parallel to the doctor-caused disorders, or *iatrogenic* disorders in medicine) can result.

The only treatment for this sort of pedagogicogenic disorder is if the teacher gains insight into her or his own bad practices which are causing the pupils or students problems in learning. Webb develops an approach to reflective practice and self-understanding in his article which is inspired by the thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

These examples of the pathology of learning and the diagnoses and treatments which are found in this issue are but the tip of an iceberg. The condition for the first book to be written on the broadly conceived pathology of learning, the *Principles and Practice of Education*, is immense erudition and a great deal of time and labour. Is there anybody out there who wants to join me?

Ian Winchester
University of Calgary
Editor

