

Book Review

Louis Armand Reid.

WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING AND EDUCATION.

London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986.

154 pp. 7.95 English Pounds.

When one has known and respected the writings of an author for very many years, it is with some trepidation that one approaches a new book written by him at the age of some ninety years. In the case of Louis Armand Reid, who retired from the London Institute of Education in 1962, any fears that time may have impaired his abilities as a thinker or writer are soon seen to be unfounded. Readers familiar with his half-dozen or so major books and his numerous journal articles going back over sixty years will not find a great deal here which is absolutely new. Rather, they will find a gathering together of a number of ideas which have been developing during his long life, many of which have been published in less refined forms before. They have now been clarified and elaborated to fit them into the theme of this book to make it a unified plea for a re-examination and re-orientation of the aims of education, particularly those of characteristically American origin. Readers who have become used to Reid's clear, direct style, often penetratingly critical of his peers, sometimes intolerant of official governmental practice but always courteous and urbane, will find it here again. They will also look for, and find, some of those little scholarly asides which so lighten his texts, as, for example, when he quotes James Ward's using of the word "psychosis" and writes "As a gloss on this I may add that the word 'psychosis' was regularly used in the first two or three decades of the century, to mean, concretely, a total state of the psychophysical organism..." It had "nothing to do with the limited meaning imposed on it later by psychiatrists."

The basis of Reid's thesis is the view that the human mind always acts as a whole and that even, for example, when dealing with remote, impersonal and abstract topics there will always be some affective and conative elements involved, as well as cold cognition. He regards as dangerous the habit which psychologists, for convenience of discussion, have, of separating cognition from the rest. This is because the division has contributed to the

increasingly prevalent practice in education, of stressing, almost exclusively, the development of cognitive understanding; with objective, verifiable knowledge about ourselves and our environment, to the virtual exclusion of more subjective, more private, personal and so less verifiable experiences. These may be "what one feels, or feels about private sensations, emotions, imaginings, hopes, fears, loves, hates... and a mass of urgings or frustrations, pleasures and pains... all mixed together in an amorphous mass of inner experiences for which we have no names." This exclusion from the curriculum of the life of feelings, emotions and striving, in favour of vehicles of "neutral" knowledge, is seen as detrimental to the personal development of children in that they have little contact with what have become "fringe" subjects. These are, notably, the arts and, in the broadest sense, aesthetics, moral, and religious studies. This lack may, for example, leave young people very vulnerable to the bombardment of mass culture, such as where "...popular magazines for adolescent girls... bind cosmetics, fashion, pop-music and romance into one dreamy gestalt."

While fully accepting the primacy in school of developing cognitive knowledge, it has been Reid's central concern for half a century to advocate direct experience of the arts and the study of human relations as means of fostering unique forms of knowing and understanding which supplement and enhance the knowledge and understanding in the objective curricular areas of science, geography, mathematics, and so on, even though these are constrained by their own particular independent natures. In fields like that of human values, critical understanding can only come from the intimate union of intellectual reason with feeling. Not surprisingly, with these beliefs, Reid abhors any behaviouristic, instrumentalist, manipulative view of education which he calls "anti-human". He derides the "systems" approach and such jargon words as "input", "output", "process", "system design", "operational definitions", and so on.

For these and other reasons, some readers will be made very angry. I suspect more will rejoice, for there are many people in education who are getting tired of the claims of the dogmatic social alchemists with their teaching machines, electronic devices, lateral thinking, formative and evaluative testing, token economics, modelling, information processing, etc. Reid wonders whether they may not turn gold into lead. But the main question remains as to whether the book will be read and by whom. "It is addressed not only to professional educators and to professional philosophers who may be interested, but to anyone who thinks and cares about education." There is no doubt about the middle group: almost all professional philosophers like Hirst and Peters will read it because of Reid's reputation. One would hope that educational administrators, curriculum builders, politicians and other social planners would expose themselves to the ideas here for there are few contemporary problems, from "back to basics"

to the minimum, number of faculties which still warrant an institution's calling itself a university, which may not be seen differently and often more clearly in the light of the humane values expressed by Reid. I wish I had more confidence that this group will make the effort needed to follow the sometimes complex reasoning. Of the third, undefined group, there are many teachers who will enjoy and be refreshed by reading about these old but perennially fresh problems. Some will be supported in their efforts, some frustrated because the canvas is so large and the time scale extensive so that they will not find immediate answers to their pressing day to day classroom problems. However, any who read and meditate on what Reid has written cannot fail to be stimulated.

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