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We Suggest

Eleanor Buelke

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Dubos, René

A God Within

New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972. Pp. ix + 325.

This recently published book, by a world-famous scientist and former Pulitzer prize-winner, is a powerful statement of ways in which positive values in man's nature and the external world may be cultivated and made relevant to the spirit of the places and times in which he lives. As such a statement, it seems to have a particular message for those who are working, through education, to help others improve the quality of human life.

Any teachers who have remained in the profession for very long, observing the attitudes and activities of their pupils in response to surroundings and events, must have realized the exceedingly elusive and complex aspects of life which are uniquely human. Such uniqueness cannot be reduced to anatomical structures or physiological mechanisms, nor even to automated responses to rewards and punishments for "correct" behaviors. Dubos says:

Although the biological machine can be analyzed piece by piece, humanness cannot be understood by reducing man to something less than human and ignoring the complexities which make for the unique richness of his life.

Making a similar point, in relationship to the task of the school, another writer describes the "good" curriculum as follows:

Thus the good curriculum . . . focuses on the explication of the human spirit rather than on the human fact . . . What one means, really, is that the facts of man in his world, the facts of the human condition, the facts of selfhood are not ignored or misused, but rather that they are exploited, if you will, to the end of presenting, explaining, symbolizing the feeling of the human spirit.¹

Professional preoccupation with research of human development and behavior may have caused many teachers to view man as a passive product of inherited and environmental factors, and to forget that persons can exercise at least some measure of conscious, free choice of response to environmental stimuli. In so doing, men can engage in the creative process of making their own worlds in which to discover, eventually, their own selves and private realities. Could it be

an essential part of the teacher's responsibility to acknowledge more fully the "god within" each person as the source of creativity, the root of forces in hidden aspects of man's nature that enable him to perform "memorable deeds" and to persist in risking much to improve the world?

In this book the author offers explanations accounting for the unique creative expressions of persons, places, and periods. He offers hope for a rational society where the ways of life of its members may conform to their individual needs and aspirations, rather than to the efficiency of technological operations. If his thesis were acknowledged by educators, it might stir them to courage and action to provide pupils with many options from which to "create out of their potentialities the kinds of lives they desire and the achievements by which they would like to be remembered."

Under pressure from many sides, it is easy for those closest to children in their daily school life to succumb to passive acceptance of solutions to their problems by science and technology, or through teaching techniques manufactured for the masses. Teachers are constantly besieged by exponents of the equipment explosion and purveyors of packet programs. Often it is difficult to resist these neatly packaged, prepared, and pre-focused precise answers to learning problems. Propaganda, pandering the guise of truth, is frequently hard to detect, or to withstand, even by those who agree that a dynamic learning environment is emergent and cannot be entirely planned. What may be particularly incompatible with the real needs of the human mind and spirit is the channeling-in of trivia and false feeling without opportunities for examination, comparison, or evaluation. Of greater value than low-level reproduction of prearranged answers and goals are the higher-level reconstructions of individual ideas within a social setting and milieu of trusting human relationships.

As suggested in the following poem, to teach for, and with, greatness of spirit requires that the "god within" the teacher touch and respond to the "god within" the learner:

What trembled from your mind to
ours
Was live with love, like new leaves
trembling on

¹ Leland B. Jacobs, "The Potential of the Humanities and the Challenge to the Schools," *The Humanities and the Curriculum*. Washington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1967, p. 75.

A bough where fledglings gape for
 food, are fed,
And open wide for more.
Others taught books, chapters,
 sentences.
You hoed deep till earth gave out
 its breath
Of life, and put your seed there.²

² Chard Powers Smith, from a poem, "For Mark Van Doren, on His Seventieth Birthday," in "The Lastingness," *World*, (February 13, 1973), 2:63.