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# WE SUGGEST

*Eleanor Buelke*

Postman, Neil, and Weingartner, Charles  
*Teaching as a Subversive Activity*  
New York: Delacorte Press, 1969. Pp. xv + 219.

Dear Teacher: Are you a good "crap detector?" Do you suffer from "future shock?" Are you caught in the "rear view mirror syndrome?" Do you teach by "teacher-proof" programs and methodologies? Are you a "Lamplighter," a "Gardener," a "Personnel Manager," a "Muscle Builder," or a "Bucket Filler?" Are you and your students "meaning makers?" Are you willing to become engaged in a subversive activity?

In their book, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, Postman and Weingartner state that society today is faced with an increasing number of threatening problems, as yet unsolved. They are suggesting that the chance for solution, toward the end result, the survival of man, lies within the American public school system, providing its leaders and teachers act in positive, subversive ways to secure the "new education." The authors have attempted, here, to propose survival strategies relevant to current reality, usable in today's schools, by today's teachers.

The purpose of the "new Education" would be to produce young people who can deal effectively with change, its frustrations and challenges. It would aim toward growth in students of a perspective which would allow them to be a part of their own culture, and yet to recognize its reality. One's attitude toward language, the knowledge that this symbolic system molds, constrains, and manipulates one's perceptions, is crucial to the whole thesis of this book.

Agreeing with what is indicated by conclusions in much of the psycholinguistic research today, the writers point out that perception is apt to be a function of the linguistic categories available to the perceiver. They would like to see the study of language, of all "language activity," as they term it, taught in the relationship of language to reality. Some awarenesses they would like to see developed are: that meaning is "in" people, not "in" words; that words are symbols of things, not the actual things they refer to; that words vary in degrees of abstraction, according to correspondence to a referent; that directions of word meaning shift between *intensional* (subjective, personal, connotative) and *extensional* (objective, social, denotative) meanings; and, that language can produce a "photographic effect,"

tending to fix bits of information, resulting in prejudice and stereotyping. "Because the process of knowing is inseparable from "Languageing," in the new education, language, (i.e., all forms of symbolic codification) is regarded as a mediator of all human perception and is used as a unifying and continuing focus of all student inquiry."

New media of our time are considered to be new languages. Being literate in the new media is to understand how they work and what they do, to our world, and to us. Being illiterate in their processes and forms is to court manipulation by persons who control them. Inquiry, flexibility, activity, liberality, tolerance, creativity, and, above all, relevance and meaning-making, must be the tools of those learning how to learn. If, indeed, teachers and students are to live at all, they must develop and use concepts most appropriate to the world in which they must live.

Dear Teacher: Will you be a donor to "dreams deferred?"

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
*Or does it explode?*<sup>1</sup>

Are you a teacher of "tangibles" only?

To him who needs the tangible, give all  
His hands can hold, of course,  
But if one dreams of Pegasus  
Shall we betray him with a wooden horse?<sup>2</sup>

Or, with positive subversion, will you so teach that the epitaph for the race of man will never say he "dropped upon his shadow without a sound," but that, in spite of "twisted face," he made for shore with his "pocket full of seeds?"<sup>3</sup>

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1. Langston Hughes, "Harlem."

2. B. G. Bullington, "Plea for the 130-150 I.Q.'s."

3. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Epitaph for the Race of Man."