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## Round Robin

Dorothy E. Smith

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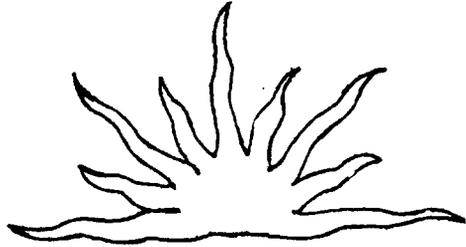
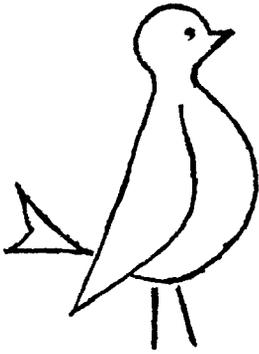


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## ROUND ROBIN

*Dorothy E. Smith, Editor*

Dear Editor:

There is much good sense in Hazel Askin's article in the Spring issue of *Reading Horizons*, "Is It New?" It is a healthy deflation of ostensibly "new" ideas or methods with which people may be so carried away as to lose all feeling for perspective. And it is surely unrealistic to presume that there can be only "one right way of teaching reading to everyone." A remark seems called for, however, concerning the opening sentence, which is in no way necessary to the article as a whole:

"Education by hard, cold definition is a drawing or leading out . . . from the Latin verb *educo*."

It is amazing how widely this bit of armchair philology has been circulated and uncritically accepted, and continues to be year after year. Again and again in educational "literature" one finds the claim that our word *education* comes from "Latin *educo*, to draw out, implying the cultivation and systematic development of the natural powers."<sup>1</sup>

In line with this explanation a newspaper article on Abraham Lincoln, considered as a self-educated man, tells us that "education means, in its original sense, merely the drawing out of latent abilities"<sup>2</sup> This derivation of the word has been insisted upon as an argument in favor of certain methods, or a certain "philosophy," of teaching. University presidents have asserted that "to educate is to

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1. N. Allworth Beach, *The American Citizen*, May 1940, p. 44.

2. Willis Thornton, newspaper syndicated article, "Lincoln's Road to Education," published February 12, 1939.

educate; to make something out of a man rather than to put something into him.”<sup>3</sup>

Year after year, on the strength of this alleged etymology, it has been urged that the efforts of a teacher should be devoted to “bringing out” the latent powers of children and youth, rather than injecting knowledge into them, because, forsooth, “education” signifies “drawing out.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet any good amateur Latinist ought to know that our word *education* was not derived in quite that way. It does not represent a figurative application of Caesar’s military verb *educō*, “to lead out (troops),” nor can we be sure that it ever meant “drawing out” at all. *Educatio* came not from *EDUCō*, *EDUCere*, but from *Educo*, *eduCARE*; the two words stood far apart in meaning. This verb from which *education* really developed meant simply “to nourish,” “to bring up,” “to cause to grow.” The Latins used it to mean “bringing up” or “rearing” in the widest sense, and applied it to the raising of poultry and domestic animals as well as children. It could also refer to the training of animals to obey commands. Certainly it never suggested to them any theory about drawing out the latent capacities of a pupil in school.

The French word *éducation* has kept practically the Latin meaning; that is why our word “education” will hardly do as a translation for it. *Bien éduqué* does not mean “well educated” (*bien instruit*), but what we should call “well bred” or “well brought up;” it represents not mere schooling but the finer, deeper, more intrinsic quality that we call “good breeding.” It has often been said in France that “instruction is the business of the school, while *éducation* is the business of the home.”

No doubt it is desirable to “draw out” the latent abilities of the young, but certainly this is not the *whole* process of teaching. The true signification of Latin *educatio*—“bringing up”—suggests a more plausible analogy. The essential idea of “nurture” is the supplying of food, material which the body receives from without, which it digests and assimilates, and which enables it to support life and growth. Surely it is clear that a good teacher does not merely “draw out” his pupils, but gives them the mental nourishment they require. He knows

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3. President Arthur Twining Hadley of Yale, *Harper's* 146:16, 1923. Quoted, with evident approval, by Joseph G. Masters, *Journal of the National Education Association*, December 1924, p. 319.

4. For instance, *Books Abroad*, University of Oklahoma Press, Spring 1939, p. 176.

that the development which takes place within is constantly dependent upon the nutriment which is absorbed from without. That is how we have come to possess the very words with which we talk—and think—about “education.” They are part of the social heritage that the teacher tries to transmit as best he can.

Of all the words that have peculiar potency in educational discussions, surely none is more conspicuous than the word *education* itself. Often it seems to be pronounced or written with a sort of reverence, as if it expressed something sacred. It appears to rank decidedly higher in the professional vocabulary than “training,” “instruction,” or “indoctrination,” terms that are even used to disparage methods not deemed worthy of the honorable name of “education.” It might really be a good thing for teachers once in a while to devote a little non-wishful thinking to the fundamental or “proper” meaning of this much-used word.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Louis Foley, “Word-Education and the word, *Education*,” *School and Society*, August 23, 1941, p. 113.