

10-1-1964

Challenging the Curious Mind

Dena Heynen
Fremont Christian Schools, Michigan

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Heynen, D. (1964). Challenging the Curious Mind. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 5 (1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol5/iss1/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

CHALLENGING THE CURIOUS MIND

Dena Heynen

Is the education you are providing for your students real? Is it effective? Is it challenging the curious mind? There is a great concern today about what is happening in our schools and about how the youth of today will face the future of tomorrow.

Why challenge the curious mind?

Our late President, John F. Kennedy, displayed a direct, forceful and candid personality. He presented to the world a picture of his own youthful vitality. At the time of his death "there were many who felt . . . that the torchbearer for a whole generation was gone; that an era was over before its time; that with him died idealism and hope and what was clean and best in all of us. But the hope that President Kennedy kindled is not dead but alive . . . The torch still burns, and because it does, there remains for us the challenge to light up the tomorrows and to brighten the future." (5)

The young people of today must be prepared to meet an unknown world, to solve unforeseeable problems, and to adapt their skills, their intelligence, and their knowledge to new situations which are developing with lightning speed. In other words, it is our task, as educators, to train minds as tools that can be used a lifetime; inquiring minds, curious minds, seeking, constantly refueling their ideas and their information. (7)

The child of today will be called upon to make decisions which reach far beyond his playground and neighborhood. It is, therefore, vital to every American community that each child is equipped with a knowledge of himself and of his world. This only can come as the result of a good education.

In a world of ferment, a world which is shifting and changing its course, often without direction, we need the full use of all the brain power we have. (7) We cannot afford to have any potential talent or ability dulled to apathy by unimaginative thinking—by a lack of training in specific skills—by a failure to see the mind as a tool for finding more information.

We must train these curious minds to keep on thinking. The *minds* must be trained, rather than the memory. The mind must be forged as an efficient working tool, so that education will not be capped by a mortar board or stifled with a diploma.

How the home can challenge

We must begin to challenge the mind while the child is young. The little child is infinitely curious. No matter how young he may be, or how immature, the child does think. Four and five-year olds are ready to explore anything and everything. They stick their noses into closets and boxes. Like Rufus M.,⁽³⁾ they want to know why the bean seed does not bring forth its “expected” fruit in a day or two. No matter how exasperating, this natural curiosity must be fostered. It is a child’s way of seeking information and broadening his horizons.

Psychologists are thoroughly convinced that the early years, months, and days of a child’s life go far to establish the qualities and attitudes which determine not only his human relations, but also his study and work habits.⁽²⁾ The home atmosphere is of overwhelming importance to the mental health of all children. Positive feelings of love and affection must be expressed in the family. Positive feelings of love and affection must be expressed toward peoples of different races, religions, social and economic status, of different ideas, and of other nations.⁽⁶⁾

The child must feel that he is loved and that his parents are proud of him in order to gain a feeling of security and to build a wholesome personality. One component of a wholesome personality is a sense of independence. He must perform the tasks assigned to him; he must learn to assume responsibility at home. He must have opportunities to share pleasurable experiences with friends of both sexes.

The child learns most of his vital lessons from watching his parents in their daily activities. Knowing where father works and what father’s work is, seeing father and mother read, watching mother work and sew—these help the child grow in resourcefulness and in responsibility.

The child must be introduced to a world of books long before he can read. He must have the opportunity to share picture books with his family and friends. He must have books of his own. He soon begins to look at books as enjoyable things. Books, such as encyclopedias, atlases, dictionaries, story books, and educational games are all essential parts of a learning program at home. In the purchasing of these materials, we, as parents, must be selective. We must remember that culture does not come in carefully wrapped packages. An excellent guide prepared for parents by Nancy Larrick is entitled, *A Parent’s Guide to Children’s Reading*.⁽⁷⁾

Family trips to museums, libraries, concerts, art galleries as well as beaches and playgrounds are aids to challenging the curious mind. The extent to which children share in some family decisions, the ways

in which they are disciplined, and the degree to which they are accepted as children will in turn condition their acceptance to the challenge of learning as they enter school life.

A set of diaries kept by a mother of three bright children furnished material for a study of bright children.(2) The diaries were unique because they gave day-by-day records of the early development of three individuals who have since amply demonstrated their superior intellectual endowment by outstanding academic and professional achievements.

How the school can challenge

The schools, also, must take advantage of the tremendous drives possessed by children. The little child who enters school is infinitely curious, but as he grows older he portrays an increasing attitude of indifference to us. Many teachers and educators *have* acted and still, too often, do act upon the following assumptions. We assume that the child goes to school to acquire knowledge and that knowledge is something that has existed for a long time and is handed down on authority; that subject-matter, taken on authority, is educative; that the best way to set out subject-matter is in unassociated patterns or parcels; that these patterns are the same to both learners and teachers; that education is not, in itself, living, it has no social implications; that the teacher can and should furnish the purpose needed for the acquiring of knowledge; that working on tasks devoid of purpose or interest is good discipline; that the answer to the problem is more important than the process; that it is more important to measure what has been learned than it is to learn.(4)

As educators of today, we must be thankful for the new trend which allows us the freedom to enrich our programs with activities that provide purpose and bring meaning to the program of instruction. Education must be a means for the teaching of problem-solving. How do I solve the problems of my personal life? What vocation should I pursue? Then there are problems of finance, of government, of economy, of religion. The list is endless. A person's successes and failures in life will depend upon how effectively he has learned to solve the problems that he faces in life. We cannot merely accept the solutions handed down to us from the past because the child of today lives in an entirely different world. Also, each individual's problems are unique because of his individuality. Thus we cannot solve his problems but should teach him ways to reach his own conclusions.

Much of our challenge, then, as educators, lies in teaching the student to read and to think effectively and critically. We must stimulate him to ask **WHY** and **HOW**. We must encourage healthful discussion. Pupils must be active in the learning situation. Many adequate materials adjusted to the child must be provided. He must be taught to recognize problems and then learn to solve them by stating the problem accurately and concretely, by finding the cause of the difficulty often by a “hunch” or series of “hunches,” by the discovery of facts and an explanation of the bearing of these facts upon the problem to be worked out, by predicting its final outcome and then verifying this prediction.

The teacher is the “source” person providing stimulation which can lead to activity. This activity may result in difficulty and a need for aid. This problem-solving situation can be met by the teacher and, on many occasions, by students in the group. Success will lead to further stimulation and more reading activity. The teacher assists in the development of skills sequentially and psychologically paced to permit success. Focus is placed upon strengths and assets. The interest of the student is utilized to energize instruction.

As educators, the challenge awaits us! We must arouse, stimulate, and incite that curious mind. The child must want to get inside that book because he knows pleasure awaits him there. He must be prepared to solve problems and to meet the criticism of life. He must be fearless in his curiosity.

Bradford's reply to people who hesitated in Holland before risking the great adventure into the unknown in the Plymouth colonies was—There never has been safety. There never has been security. No man has ever known what he would meet around the next corner; if life were predictable, it would cease to be life, and it would be without flavor.

The answer to fear is not to cower and hide; it is not to surrender feebly without contest. The answer is to stand and to face it boldly. Look at it, analyze it, and in the end, act.(7)

With action, confidence grows. I am convinced that one of the reasons why our young people today feel uncertain is that they are not being taught to ask questions, to decide for themselves on a plan of action—and then to act. Frequently the result is that they become victims of unfortunate circumstances.

A truly great teacher is one who is able to arouse curiosity, to stir excitement, to generate ideas, to open wide the windows on new vistas and the doorways on new pathways!

References

1. Carter, Homer L. J., and Dorothy J. McGinnis, *Effective Reading For College Students*. The Dryden Press, New York, 1957.
2. Cutts, Moseley, *Bright Children, A Guide for Parents*. G. P. Putnam and Sons, New York, 1953.
3. Estes, Eleanor, *Rufus M.*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1943.
4. Kelly, Earl C., *Education For What Is Real*. Harper and Row, New York, 1947.
5. Kennedy, Robert, "The Ambitions of Bobby Kennedy," *Look*, August 25, 1964.
6. Kentworthy, Leonard S., *Introducing Children to the World*. Harper and Row, New York, 1956.
7. Larrick, Nancy, *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading*. Doubleday and Company, New York, 1958.
8. Roosevelt, Eleanor, *Tomorrow is Now*. Harper and Row, New York, 1963.

Mrs. Dena Heynen is a fifth grade teacher and librarian in the Fremont Christian Schools. She is a member of the Midwest Christian Teachers' Association and the Western Michigan Christian Teachers' Association.