

Widening Educational Horizons

The following article, "How Old is Young," has been written for Widening Educational Horizons, by Dr. MacKinnon, Principal of Prince of Wales College, for Education Week which will be observed throughout this week.

HOW OLD IS "YOUNG"?

Frank MacKinnon

Thinking about education should lead us to consider the young people for whom education is planned. After all education is not a convenience, it is supposed to do something to people — prepare them for life, teach them to think, and help them develop some skills. You can't understand it or judge its efficiency by merely examining a set of subjects, a theory, or a system. You must know the people primarily concerned — the pupils.

The study of pupils is a big subject and this short article for "Education Week" can deal with only one phase of it. In passing, however, one might state that we tend too much toward a standardized conception of students — to think of them as all alike — to forget that they include the able, the mediocre, and the dull; the energetic and the lazy; the strong and the weak; the honest and the dishonest; the talkers and the silent; the introverts and the extroverts, and all with varying amounts of experience, manners, and morality and in different stages of maturity. In school they're just like their fathers and mothers at income tax time — you set the requirements and a deadline and some are early, many wait until the last minute, some are late, a few cheat a bit, and most try to get by with the least possible expenditure.

The point of this article, however, is to ask the reader when he thinks a young person is ready for adult life, what age is the most productive in the human being, and whether or not modern education enables young people to start life early enough.

The point is illustrated by recalling that there once was a day when it was common for young people to finish school at fourteen, to graduate from college in their teens and to be married at twenty. Many "made their mark" long before they were thirty; most great inventors, explorers, poets, painters, and musicians were very young men. It was possible for William Pitt to become Prime Minister at twenty-four, and the Marquis of Lorne to be Governor-General of Canada at thirty-three, and Mr. MacKenzie to be Deputy Minister of Labour at twenty-six. The winners of responsible government, the Fathers of Confederation, and the founding fathers of the United States were almost all young men. Indeed it was Sir William Osler, a shrewd judge of people as well as a great doctor, who said that the other half of the advances of the world came from men under forty and a large proportion of the world's evils from men over sixty. And Sir William was sixty when he said it.

Today, however, it is almost impossible for a young person to embark on a professional career before he is twenty-five. High school graduates today are eighteen; four years of college takes them to twenty-two; law, theology, engineering, and the other require a further three years at least, and post-graduate work may take another year or two. Doctors are now almost thirty before they obtain the customary diploma for practice. Then one must get established. The result is that thirty or thereabouts is the marriage age for professional men and they are almost middle aged when their children are growing up, and the size of their families is thereby limited.

There seems to be something wrong somewhere. We are pushing the childhood years into the teens and every other stage ahead a decade. If we keep on at this rate the old slogan will be changed to "life begins at seventy" and pupils will be using the old age pension to pay their tuition fees.

What needs to be realized is that young people are far more mature than their elders are inclined to admit. The folly of talking "baby talk" to children is obvious. Visiting officials and dignitaries who address high school pupils usually talk down to the pupils in the most juvenile of terms and that is why so few people can carry a school audience. The same tendency has to be watched in many teachers who are inclined to assume that their pupils are helpless babes who have to be led by the hand into the mysteries of knowledge. And one of the commonest criticisms of many modern textbooks is that they are written in over-simplified terms which neither stimulate nor interest the pupils.

Nature has no such ideas. Girls mature from twelve up and boys from fourteen up. Have you ever done business with an alert teenager of sixteen? If he has any experience he is well able to use all his faculties and a large measure of common sense. By the time

he is eighteen or twenty he is as keen and alert as he will ever be in later life and quite able to hold his own with any adult. The body and brain are at their best at eighteen; the senses are keen; judgment and reflexes are quick; initiative and enthusiasm are at their peak.

The difficulty is that knowledge and experience are far behind physical development. According to our social and educational system these young people are only high school students. They are just starting language; they have had only a bare introduction to history; and, at the age when the human animal loves to "tinker" with machines and solve problems, they are only getting started in science and mathematics. Worse still is the fact that too many subjects taught at this age involve a great deal of routine (language vocabulary, test rules, for instance) while the young person is past the age for routine and is really ready for the more advanced stage of using his judgment. This is what makes school so uninteresting to so many.

Take a practical example. Try starting piano lessons at eighteen and see how hard it is to get the mind and fingers adjusted to the routine ten years too late. The same applies to languages. Teach a small child a language from the ages of six to ten and he'll have simple facts, as eminent neurologists have been trying to tell educators for years, is that the areas of the brain which deal with communication (of which language is part) begin to harden after twelve years of age, and we are therefore ten years too late in teaching languages.

One would be rash to suggest any infallible remedy for this situation. Certainly the school curriculum needs changing and indeed many serious students of education are predicting that it will have to change drastically in the near future if education is to keep up with the many demands which modern society is making on young people. We were perhaps a bit too hasty in throwing out many sound practices in favour of attractive but unworkable pedagogy which weakened the curriculum, and the long years of schooling was the result.

It is not unreasonable to expect that many of the current "subjects" will give way to more basic work in the early grades or be relegated to supplementary reading where they can be absorbed without waste of time. If two or three subjects are done more thoroughly in the first year of school, the others will follow much easier. Reading, for example, is, on the whole, very slow. Put more time on it earlier and it will enable the pupil to absorb things quicker later on.

Again, a little less teaching and more learning is essential. The earlier a child is taught not to depend on the teacher for everything but to get things for himself the more he'll learn in the long run. The easiest and the worst form of teaching is to hand everything out, the hardest yet the best form of teaching is to guide pupils into getting knowledge for themselves.

Two objections to such change are usually raised. Children, some say, are not mature enough. But doesn't maturity in the teenage years come with knowledge and experience, and wouldn't more knowledge and experience in the earlier years result in earlier maturity? Whatever the answer is, I would like to see a few good teachers and experienced parents sit down with a neurologist or two and some pediatricians and discuss the point. They would produce more practical ideas than all the curriculum "experts" combined.

Again, some might object on the ground that little pupils must be interested and motivated and they must not be frustrated by too much early work. This is true; but can it be overdone and spoiled everything? Doesn't interest come with some competence and a degree of experience and isn't there a danger of mistaking interest for competence? As for frustration, it can result from work without interest; but it also follows early interest and lack of competence. And how many children maintain a sustained interest in anything very long unless they quickly get into the midst of it? The answers to these questions reveal the greatest weakness of some forms of modern pedagogy. Again here is a good subject for experienced teachers and parents to discuss.

All this is a difficult and controversial subject. But it is an immensely practical one — and well worth thinking about. The

point is that we are tending to prolong childhood and adolescence in our educational system by adding courses and years of instruction instead of strengthening existing facilities. The curriculum and the theory tend to overshadow teaching and, as a result, young people are still in school when they should be married. Education should be earlier and better rather than longer.

No one can improve on Stephen Leacock's way of expressing it: "How strange it is, our little procession of life! The child says, 'When I am a big boy.' But what is that? The big boy says, 'When I grow up.' And then, grown up, he says, 'When I get married.' But to be married, what is that after all? The thought changes to 'When I'm able to retire.' And then, when retirement comes, he looks back over the landscape traversed: a cold wind seems to sweep over it, somehow he has missed it all, and it is gone. Life, we learn too late, is in the living, in the tissue of every day and hour. So it should be with education."

But so it is not; a false view discolours it all. For the vastly greater part of it the student's one aim is to get done with it. There comes a glad time in his life when he has "finished" mathematics, a philosophy, an exhilarating hour when he realizes that he is finished with "compulsory English." Then at last his four years are out, his sentence expired, and he steps out of college a free man, without a stain on his character — and not much on his mind. Later on, he looks back wistfully and realizes how different it might have been.

Four Years In Coma But Still May Recover

ASHAWAY, R.I. (AP) — The mother patted her daughter on both cheeks and said: "Peggy McKenzie, speak to the gentleman."

Pretty, 16-year-old Peggy opened her eyes, turned her head and uttered an indistinguishable sound. Her mother asked her to smile. Peggy's lips parted. She seemed to be trying to smile.

"I know she can hear me," said Mrs. James McKenzie, "but I don't know if she understands what I am saying."

Peggy completes four years of life in a coma Saturday. She has been in a sleep-like trance since she fell from her bicycle and struck her head on the cement pavement.

GROWING NORMALLY

At first she lay rigid and required 24-hour attention because of brain spasms. Now, the family can take her for a ride or let her sit outside in a lawn chair.

Mrs. McKenzie attributes her daughter's improvement to the treatments of an osteopath. Since the treatments were begun, Peggy's brain spasms have become less frequent.

She is fed milk, eggs and baby foods like meat, fruit and vegetables. Sometimes she is fed through the mouth, sometimes by tube. It depends on her current condition.

Her doctor, who wishes to remain anonymous, hopes Peggy will be a normal girl again.

"She is growing like a normal person," he said. "Now we are only waiting for her to talk."

River of Lava Touches Village

By ROY ESSOYAN

PAHOA, Hawaii (AP)—Flaming streams of lava, spouting from new fissures in the earth, rolled through the northern edge of abandoned Kapoho village Friday and on toward the sea a mile away.

Embers of five houses lay like bleached bones against the black sea of flowing lava when I flew over the village Friday morning.

Two hundred yards away the main section of town stood untouched on higher ground. It looked as though most of the empty village of 75 homes, rebuilt after it was razed by earthquakes in 1924, might survive this new terror.

A second river of lava poured out of two newly opened half-mile-long fissures in this old volcanic area near the eastern tip of the island of Hawaii.



Charlottetown Officer Graduates

Flying Officer A. F. MacDonald is shown being presented with his Navigators wings by Group Captain W. H. Swetman, Distinguished Service Order, Distinguished Flying Cross, Canadian Forces Decoration, at a graduation ceremony that was held at R. C. A. F. Station Winnipeg on Feb. 18. Flying Officer MacDonald is the son of Mrs. W. MacDonald of 12 Pleasant St., Charlottetown, P.E.I.

NOW JAMAICAN OIL Metals Mining Corporation Ltd. of Kingston, Jamaica (AP)—Canada, has announced. The Corporation has sole prospecting rights to Jamaica and territorial oil around the island. Geologists feel oil-bearing formations (tapped in Cuba are part of those running down to the vast pools of oil around Trinidad and oil-rich waters around the island. Geologists feel oil-bearing formations (tapped in Cuba are part of those running down to the vast pools of oil around Trinidad and oil-rich waters around the island. Geologists feel oil-bearing formations (tapped in Cuba are part of those running down to the vast pools of oil around Trinidad and oil-rich waters around the island.

R.C.A.F. Studies Possible Use Of 2-Color Parachute

OTTAWA (CP)—The RCAF is studying possible use of a two-color parachute to make it easier to find lost airmen. The best colors are considered orange and white.

There are some objections to use of two-color 'chutes. Colored panels in the canopy, for instance, might actually act as camouflage.

Then, too, dyes can create static electricity so that a 'chute might fail to open when the airman bails out. Dyes also can result in deterioration of the fabric.

A plane on a long trip might be passing over areas where there is snow or bare ground. The crew would have to carry two 'chutes, a two-colored one for snow areas, the normal white one so they can be spotted more easily on bare ground.

When a United States Air Force bomber went down in northern Saskatchewan recently, one man was found because he had a two-color 'chute. White ones, however, are still standard in the USAF.

Two other men were not spotted although they had two-color 'chutes. They were found because they were carrying vest-pocket radios which sent out distress signals.

N. B. Woman Seriously Burned

SAINT JOHN (CP)—An 82-year-old woman was rushed to hospital with severe burns Friday night after her clothes caught fire while standing near a stove.

Miss Agnes Fogarty was described as in critical condition by hospital authorities.

Five-year-old Roslyn Hanley noticed smoke pouring under the door of Miss Fogarty's ground floor apartment. Her father, James Hanley, found the elderly woman standing like a flaming torch just inside the door.

The RCAF is inclined to believe at the moment that the best solution for finding downed airmen lies in the tiny portable radio transmitter.

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Rather have standard steering... or the extra ease of Power Steering?

How easy and sure can steering be? Try this new Chevrolet and see. Chevrolet uses a ball bearing system to cut friction to a minimum — and to get fast response from a twist of the wrist.

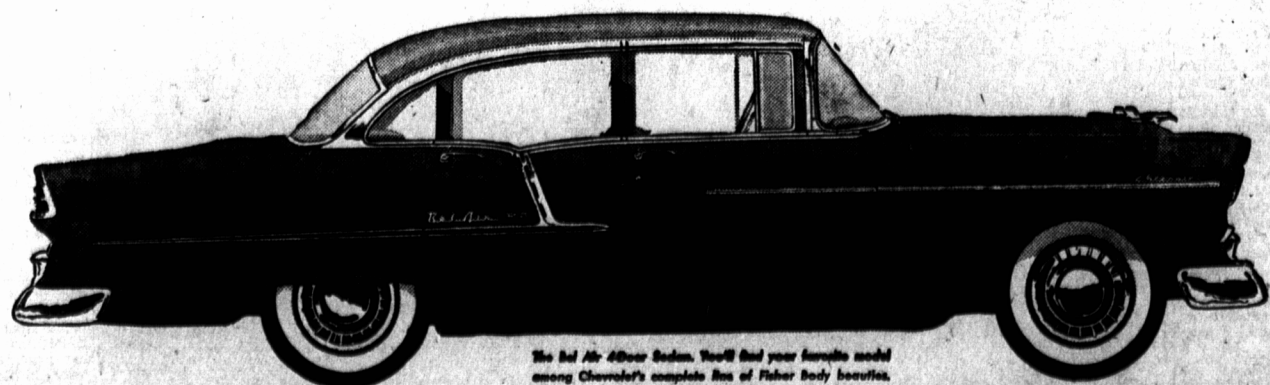
For parking and slow-speed turning, there's nothing quite so easy as Power Steering, of course. Good news: Chevrolet's new linkage-type Power Steering* carries a reduced price!

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