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ESSENTIALS OF OUR EDUCATIONAL THINKING

BY PROFESSOR H.B. THOM,

CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

Opening address, 46th Annual Conference of  
the South African Indian Teachers' Association,  
City Hall, Durban, 5th July 1972, 10 a.m.

Education - many facets. Sometimes  
I surprises - R.D.L.!!

The fact that I have been connected with education ever since I started my independent, active life has been a source of satisfaction and joy to me. And to be here this morning at the opening of the 46th Annual Conference of the South African Indian Teachers' Association adds yet another satisfying experience on the road of my educational activities.

I wish to thank most sincerely the Secretary/Treasurer of the Association, Mr. Nair, for supplying me with literature and documents illustrating the work and history of the Association. In this way he has succeeded in getting me properly posted, which has resulted, on my part, in a better understanding of the Association and its aims, and in a clearer perspective of the significance of the Association for the South African Indian people and, more particularly, Indian youth in this country.

I am delighted that I can take part in the programme of the 46th Conference. I shall regard it as a privilege if I can make some little contribution, however modest, to the work of the Conference.

[Not going to stick my neck out -  
Student's definition!] ←

2/.....

II

In thinking about a theme for my address, I have given consideration to a variety of topics. In the latest issue of SAITA News I read about the addresses and resolutions which form part of the agenda of this Conference. I see inter alia that my friend Dr. G.A. Hosking will speak on the new system of differentiated education, which represents an important new phase in the development of education in South Africa. This is indeed a theme of the greatest significance. I am pleased to know that it will claim the attention of the Conference, and that it will be handled by an expert of the calibre of Dr. Hosking.

In SAITA News I see also that my name has, to some extent at least, been associated with the matter of differentiated education. I quite understood this because, as Chairman of the National Education Council, I have, together with my Council, been charged with the duty of advising the Minister of National Education on matters of educational policy. It is well known that the Council and its Executive Committee had exercised their minds for a long time before they submitted a reasoned advice to the Minister. So it would be natural and reasonable to expect me to speak on this subject. However, I have decided otherwise, and would prefer to leave the details of differentiated education in the able hands of Dr. Hosking. In view of the relevance of this subject to what I am going to say, I have to ask you merely to bear in mind the two main pillars on which a system of differentiated education rests, viz. that it is intended to provide education for young people (a) in accordance with their ability and aptitude, and (b) in accordance with the needs of the country. At the end of my address I would like to come back very briefly to these two points.

Having stated this I can now come to my real theme. After a good deal of reflection I have decided to speak mainly on Essentials of our Educational Thinking. This might present a temptation - or even an invitation - to enter into a philosophical discourse, but I shall guard against being led off too far in this direction. At the same time I realise that this theme covers a very wide field, and therefore I shall narrow down to merely a few essentials. Also: My aim is not necessarily to counsel you, rather to lay before you certain facts and points of view, which you might

find worthy of further consideration. [Oscar Wilde - Advice!]

It is my intention then to state briefly, primarily with reference to Indian education, the following points: the subject/object relationship, the idea of the norm, and finally a positive evaluation of the present position. These are, in my view, the essentials which, in our present situation, must receive priority.

[The first two - relationship & norm - most important: My own experience: school, univ<sup>s</sup>, prof., Rector, chairman]

III

In the matter of the subject/object relationship we are concerned with a relationship, a relationship existing between people, or between people and material things. The fact that we use the term "relationship" implies that we deal with something which is alive and is subject to constant change. It also implies, up to a point at least, the idea of influence being exerted, e.g. by a force influencing lesser forces.

In education the subject/object relationship is primarily a relationship between people, between one person and another. It is of fundamental importance: if it is sound and healthy, education will progress; if it is at fault, education will suffer. From this follows that, in the final analysis, a sound subject/object relationship is a first priority to educationists at all levels, whether in the home, the nursery school, the primary school, the secondary school, the college, or the university.

In education the subject is the teacher, the tutor, the instructor, the demonstrator, the lecturer, the professor. Education proceeds from him or her who teaches. This applies to all forms of influence exerted in the process of education, whether in the narrow sense, as in mere instruction and training, or in the broad sense, as in intellectual development and character building.

The object is the child, the pupil, the student. He is the one who is led, educated or trained; the one who undergoes the influence of the subject; the one whose behaviour is affected, whose mind is shaped, whose intellect is developed, whose character is strengthened.

The relationship between the subject and the object must be a happy one: sympathy, understanding, love on the part of the subject; and eagerness, respect, modesty on the part of the object. With this as a starting point, we know that the relationship will grow and develop and intensify, so that in the long run education will succeed and produce in an ever increasing

degree the positive results which we are all striving for. Conversely, if this happy relationship does not exist, we know that here can be no hope of education succeeding.

The importance of this fact is heavily underlined when we bear in mind that the pupil or student does not always remain merely the object. He in turn becomes the subject, e.g. in his own environment, in relation to his study material, his friends or his actions; and he becomes the subject in a very real way after the completion of his studies, when he starts on a career of his own and influences other people. It is clear that this relationship does not end in the educational institution, but actually permeates our lives and deeply influences society as a whole.

We are, however, dealing with the subject/object relationship in education. It is not too much to say that if this relationship is sound, if it rests on a basis of positive, dynamic communication, we shall have an abundance of rich fruits which will in turn enrich the lives of those directly concerned, and the life of the entire multi-racial society in which we live.

#### IV

We can now consider briefly the idea of the norm.

In the course of many years of educational endeavour hundreds of experts have devoted attention to the aims and objects of education, to its principles and deeper meaning. This has given rise to a great amount of literature and, in fact, to quite a number of philosophies of education. We have the naturalistic philosophy, the idealistic, the pragmatic, and a number of others. Each of these has its own definitions and interpretations. In any philosophy of education it is essential to have complete clarity about its main point of departure. The question is: What does it aim at? And how does it propose to achieve its aims? It is in this connection that the idea of the norm is of fundamental significance.

Let us assume that the subject/object relationship is sound. What then does the subject (the teacher) aim to achieve with reference to the object (the pupil)?

[Few examples]

He may wish to apply in his teaching the analytical approach. He may subscribe to the theory that, in order to understand properly a given piece of work or a problem, one must necessarily analyse it into all

We all have norms  
Norms in many  
fields of everyday  
life - ~~the~~ - ~~the~~ - ~~the~~

its parts, so that, from a knowledge of the parts, an understanding of the whole will be derived. A good deal may, no doubt, be said in favour of this approach, but we shall probably find it lacking in real educational content.

The subject (the teacher) may subscribe to the view that education will achieve the best results when the necessity of proper description of objects or ideas is stressed. The pupil (the object) must be taught to observe accurately, to think clearly and to describe correctly. This approach, so the theory goes, when applied to the fields of material and spiritual things, will best further the ideals of education. We shall agree that also this view has its merits, but I cannot help feeling that it is somewhat one-sided and that it does not provide sufficiently for the shaping of the mind and the building of character in the object.

The teacher (<sup>subject</sup>the ~~object~~) may prefer in his teaching the critical approach. The pupil (the object) must be taught in his studies to view his material in a critical light, to probe deeply with a critical eye, and to establish weaknesses. This will then help to sharpen the mind and to produce an intelligent citizen who will be a real asset to society. We shall agree that also this approach has its merits, but at the same time we shall probably find that it runs the risk of producing young men and women with a rather negative attitude to society.

I maintain that in education it is necessary, above all things, to apply the idea of the norm. We may analyse, we may describe, we may criticise, but this will not suffice. We must also have norms, the norms which we regard as proper and correct for our society. And we must also apply these norms.

This means that in education we cannot be satisfied with analysis, description and criticism; it is our duty also to state how things should be, to stress what is normative and to help young people to distinguish between right and wrong, between good and evil. ~~X~~ The good teacher will sacrifice a good deal of time and energy to do this; and the really great teacher will in himself become norma (i.e. the rule), because his colleagues and those that follow after him will be inclined to rate and test views and actions using him, his views and his actions, as their yardstick. [Prof. G.S. Cille]

With the idea of the norm as a starting point in our educational activity, we shall not be educating our youth in a spiritual vacuum; on the contrary, we shall be educating them in a purposeful, positive way, to become

spiritually and intellectually strong and to stand firm in the service of their people and their country.

Against this background we can now take a brief look at a few aspects of the education of our Indian youth at the present time.

V

It is up to the Indian teacher himself to make sure that he has established a healthy subject/object relationship; and it is up to him also to examine his norms and to make sure that <sup>that</sup> which is really normative will be uppermost in his teaching. This is today a matter of urgency, seeing that Indian education has <sup>assumed considerable</sup> proportions and has become in reality a factor of real significance in the affairs of the Republic.

In making a quick survey of the education of the Indian youth of our country, I have been forcibly struck by a few noteworthy facts. Provision is made for education at <sup>[full range]</sup> primary and secondary school level, and also at college level (teachers' college and technical college) and university level.

It is enlightening and heartening to note the number of young people receiving education in the schools. During the year 1971 the school enrolment was as follows:

	<u>Natal</u>	<u>Transvaal</u>	<u>Cape</u>	<u>Total</u>
Primary Education, Class (1) - St. <u>V</u>	108 155	14 859	626	123 640
Secondary Education, St. <u>VI</u> - St. <u>X</u>	36 847	7 304	114	44 265
	<u>145 002</u>	<u>22 163</u>	<u>740</u>	<u>167 905</u>

An enrolment of this magnitude must, of course, call for an impressive salary bill. We find that the budget for emoluments of teachers for the financial year 1972/73 provides for an expenditure of R16 322 500.

In view of the increase in the school enrolment, it comes as no surprise to find that considerable provision had to be made for new school buildings. Under this heading we note that in the course of the last five years an amount of R12 052 920 has been spent.

Coming closer home to the ranks of SAITA, we see that in the education of Indian school children we have a total employment of 6 140 teachers. This number is made up as follows:

Natal .....	5 289
Transvaal .....	830
Cape .....	21

How many are members of SAITA?

Taking into account these facts I am sure that none of us will doubt the statement I made a moment ago, viz. that Indian education has today become a factor of real significance in the affairs of the Republic.

It is easy to say this, but it is not at all easy to determine in exact terms the influence of Indian education. We know that it means an enormous amount to children, young people and their parents, and also to the country as a whole. But we cannot be satisfied with the knowledge that it means much; we want it to mean as much as possible; we want to develop its potential as much as time and energy and available funds will allow.

In this regard the teaching profession has to shoulder a great responsibility. I would urge all Indian teachers to accept their responsibility with determination and joy. I would appeal to them to discharge their duties in a sympathetic, positive way. We sometimes brood over our problems and grievances - and I know that it is only human to do so. But there is so much good in life; and there are so many fine things in education that each of us can make a really worth-while contribution to the progress and happiness of our society. We have the potential in our hands; it is up to us to show that we can make that contribution.

And now is the time to do just that. I said at the outset that, with the introduction of a new and well thought out system of differentiated education, we are now entering a new phase in the development of education in this country. If boys and girls are to be educated in accordance with their ability and aptitude, and if the needs of the country are to be served in the process, it is imperative that all educators cooperate in this national operation. Indian educators will have to make sure that they have established a healthy subject/object relationship, that they remain faithful to the concept of the norm, and that they develop to the full the potential of our youth which has been entrusted to them.

From what I have learned of SAITA, and from what I have seen at this Conference, I am happy to know that Indian educators have no intention of being merely spectators shouting encouragement or criticism from the sidelines; they prefer to do much more; they prefer to be in the middle

of the field, where they can exert their energy in a really worth-while, positive way.

[James Adams: *Two educations*]

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It is now my pleasant duty to wish you the best of luck; and herewith <sup>to</sup> declare this 46th Annual Conference of SAITA duly opened.

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~~pres. Wyld: "See. prod. vagues"~~  
~~G. W. Trevelyan: "Ed. has prod. a mass"~~  
~~sp. able to read but unable~~  
~~to distinguish what is worth~~  
~~reading"~~

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