

## THE TWIN TOWERS OF A MEANINGLESS EDUCATION

It is a frequent lament among stuffy conservatives that education is not what it used to be. “In my day,” we often hear, “we had to learn a poem every day, we learnt the times tables, the capitals of the world; we learnt the periodic table in chemistry, formulae in physics, conjugations in Latin and were considered backward if we didn’t know the dates of every battle or the name of every king since 1066.”

What the same stuffy conservative might also mention is that he also learnt



*Theresa trying not to learn by rote.*



*“What’s this Joyce?” says Mr. Xavier. “When I was your age everyone knew how to divide a polynomial using synthetic division.”*

how to use the information stored in his memory as building blocks for the process of reasoning and that, by reasoning, he arrived at a higher understanding of the world which, in turn furnished him with more building blocks to ascend higher still. He probably also learnt how express his reasoning and conclusions so that he might enlighten others too.

The stuffy conservative is right to say that education isn’t what it used to be, because a terrible catastrophe has occurred. Almost everywhere in the world, more and more youngsters are graduating from higher educational institutions with exam results that are ‘better’ than ever before, but with qualifications that are increasingly meaningless.

The underlying blame for this increasingly meaningless education might be laid at the feet of a backward culture, self-interested politicians, or more sinister, dark forces which would have us degener-

ate into the godless economic animals of Karl Marx’s perverted imagination.

In practice, there appears to be two different disorders that are at the route of meaningless education. The first is rote learning to the exclusion of critical thinking or reasoning; the other is the ‘active learning’ which excludes rote learning, also to the exclusion critical thinking or reasoning.

Exclusive rote learning is more prevalent in the institutions of the east (India is a notable example). ‘Active learning’ is a modern western phenomenon.

To explain these two models an analogy (a tool alien to both methods) is perhaps best. Excessive rote learning is like giving a child all the components of a car engine without telling him what an engine is, how it works, and how to put the components together. Only a very few children have the natural ability (or external help) to work things out for themselves and



*“I say Jerold,” said Daniel, “why don’t we tell Father that we got zero out of ten because we were attending the ‘Socio-political Impact of the Tyrannical Impositions of Mathematics on Free Thinking Seminar?’ He might think we are clever.”*



*Miss Margaret Clark of Montana U.S.A. teaches Geography to Standard 5. Before she volunteered to teach at Veritas Academy, Miss Clark worked as an archaeologist. Her boss was kind enough to let her have a leave of absence for a year. May God bless him.*

when they do, they are generally brilliant because they have at their fingertips a vast array of knowledge and they will have discovered how to use it. Most children, however, forget what they have learnt—if they ever memorised it in the first place.

‘Active learning’ is like teaching a child all about one single component of a car engine by means of scientific experimentation, role-play, class discussion and assessment of its impact on health, society and the environment, and then letting him decide himself whether he wants build a car engine at all (for which, incidentally, he has no other components) .

The first produces zombies, the second produces self-righteous specialists with no notion that a higher form of knowledge exists besides their own. The products of the first are good for cheap labour, the products of the second are good for tech-

nological innovation and generating demand for things when there isn’t any. Both are good consumers and both are necessary for keeping the treadmill of a capitalist system turning, but neither are equipped with the tools they need for the very purpose of their existence: the knowledge, love and service of God.

At Veritas Academy we are trying to create stuffy conservatives who know things—both supernatural and natural—and can think about them. It is a difficult task because some the children have already suffered the effects of excessive rote learning and we are handicapped by a system of state exams that requires the temporary retention of many unconnected facts. One day, however, when the twin towers of meaningless education fall, we might all return to the sanity of the perennial *trivium* of old; and with our building



*Miss Bridgette Bell of Cincinnati U.S.A. teaching English to Standard 9 boys. Miss Bell has given six months to the Mission for which we are very grateful.*

blocks of knowledge—some from heaven, some from earth—we will build a house built on rock which will stand against wind and rain forever! (Mt 7 v.24-5) Ω