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HEALTH EDUCATION - COOL MEDIUM IN A HOT WORLD

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Throughout Latin America, in India and in other parts of the world, too, for all I know, there are prevailing notions about food which classify some as "hot" and others as "cold." Although the foods are not always the same, the consistent part of the idea is that one cannot mix those which are labeled "hot" with those which are labeled as "cold."

In Marshall McLuhan's recent work on media,<sup>1</sup> the concept of "hot" and "cold" are also used. In this stimulating series of essays McLuhan uses the word "cool," as modern slang uses it, to indicate "a kind of commitment and participation in situations that involves all of one's faculties." A hot medium extends one single sense in high definition. Hot media, in McLuhan's terms, do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are low in participation as cool media are high in that variable.

A lecture is hotter than a seminar. A book is hotter than dialogue. The telephone is cool as speech itself is cool. A photograph is hot and a cartoon is cool. Hot forms exclude and the cool one includes. Developing countries are cool and we are hot, for the already-developed situation is, by definition, low in opportunities for participation and rigorous in demands for specialist fragmentation.

Public health as it is practiced today is a hot medium. It is high in definition, high in specialization, high in fragmentation.

Education as it should be practiced anywhere is a cool medium. Its essence is to place upon the energies of the individual himself the right and responsibility to learn how to deal with his own problems in a way which he himself finds productive and useful to him. Education attempts to meet the needs of the learners--not those of the teachers.

As in the world of folk food beliefs, hot and cold do not, alas, mix well. A cool medium upsets a hot world in which it is placed.

Each of us live in both worlds--the hot world of tasks to be done today and the cool world of our vision of tomorrow.

The problem is to bridge the two: How can we render unto Caesar that which are his, and still maintain aspirations and goals of which Caesar has not yet heard or does not yet value.

Some years ago at the International meetings in Philadelphia, a group of our profession's leaders allowed me to sit in on a discussion of a question of great concern--why was it that the U.S. health education picture compared so badly at the national level with that of many other countries.

I know now: they were cool and we are hot. At any rate, we--the present professionals--are hot, or willing to adapt hot means which dilute and pollute the concept of education.

The most exciting and vital contributions to public health are taking place outside of "organized public health" as we have known it. The growing edge is somehow out there somewhere and cuts through organized structures only with great difficulty and great pressure.

As public health seems to get hotter, the choices before us--choices which each of us must make for himself--are clear:

- a) We convert education to a hot process,
- b) We seek to cool off public health,
- c) We declare no contest and leave the field.

If we agree to heat up health education--let us be clear that it is transformed in the process. The hotter it becomes the less we can--as educators--contribute to it. We have gone as far as we can in this process. One single step further and we lose all of our chance of becoming.

When health education, as we know it, was taking root in the '40's and before in the midst of a great world war following a great depression, its aims and its hopes were always coupled with the notion of democratic human relationships and the needs of people.

How different is today? Quite different. Our glossary of the 60's is more sophisticated, ~~best~~ less human. It is more often concerned with the needs of programs than those of people. Our discussions are those which are no longer alive with feelings of personal concern. We look at human waste and tolerate inhumanity with the objectiveness of someone who no longer really seems to understand these phenomena. Our concern with human dignity is more often a concern for our own dignity.

What is it that has happened? Are we too well fed? Are we too well educated? Are we too well dressed? Whatever the reason why is it that we are so ready to quickly pull up the ladder now that we are aboard?

Perhaps these are only my personal dilemmas and not yours. But if they are at all shared they are the significant issue before us as people and as a profession.

It is, I know, to flaunt reality to not realize that each of the approaches open to us as educators must involve certain constraints. Constraints which relate to uncertainties about objectives and purpose, about resources and needs, and about the perceptions of those who direct and control.

But it is no less true that each of us in our work must also invoke certain other constraints which we as professional group--and we as individuals place upon situations in which we find ourselves.

We must accept the first.

We must demand the second. *with*

The educational process cannot exist unless it is allowed to impose its assumptions on that ~~which~~ it deals.

We have given much attention in recent years to the problem of relating theory to practice. This attention was, and is, desirable. But we need just as importantly to relate practice to purpose.

Can a cool profession be a scientific one? ....yes, if we do not permit ourselves to be seduced by the temptation to believe that it is our role to control the matter which is our concern. If we remember that science itself is the process of asking questions. Science is cool, ~~it~~ is dogma that is hot. It is the method of science which is our key and not obsolete collections of data about people and problems who for us never existed.

If there are in fact many faces of health education, let us not forget to also put forward that which looks to purpose. We are a part of a health movement not because we value health itself as a sole criteria--but because we value it for the freedom and release it gives to an individual. If it is treason to stand within a health organization and remind it of its responsibility beyond its door--if it is treason to be the cool voice of total beings within the hot white walls of a sub-culture which has lost its own voice--then make the most of it. Let the healthy hot hands that seek control over men know that there is in fact a cool world of humanity to which health status alone is not sufficient for admission. Health alone is not enough nor is science alone.

We have long held that educational processes in public health supported and extended all work toward the achievement of public health goals.

We have perhaps been guilty of assuming that the practice of supportive and integrative functions required docile and passive roles. Helping, supporting, assisting roles we have--but directed to people, serving the needs of people out there; not as the faithful retainer and hand maiden of a professional colleague--not as fillers of prescriptions for those who have no license to dispense.

Too long have we been willing to hide the light of educational process in the backroom of public health. Too often have we given up our own ability to have a hand in defining our limits of freedom. Too many times have we sacrificed our self esteem by not being willing to risk it. It is a mockery to help that which we do not believe--or support that which we do not feel worth supporting.

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If we do not have the prerequisites that make it possible for us to cool the hot mold of public health, let us get *then*--or let us leave the challenge to someone who is waiting in the wings behind us, as we ourselves once waited.

If public health is too hot to handle us--then let us change it. If it will not be changed, let us move outside it. But let us not lose that commitment which gives us identity. Public health itself depends for its life and its purpose on the strength of its dedication to broaden goals outside itself. The route to that goal is the cool pathway of the educational process.

The SOPHE goals as we have presented them at this annual meeting are cool. The standards for professional preparation are likely to be hot.

The values which bind us are cool. The structure which identifies us is hot.

The ping-pong existence of my migratory labor in health education has given me opportunities to flit alternatively from tower to vineyard. Each time I make the change I have to go through a period of wondering if I am in the same profession. In the hot world of the university, hot content is taught in largely hot ways. And yet we despair that our products are involved in endlessly hot situations.

Roger Harrison of Yale University recently prepared a paper for the Peace Corps<sup>2</sup> in which he discussed the inadequacy of the university model for the training of Peace Corps. As he recognized in his paper, his comments were uncomfortably relevant, as well, to the problems of training professional workers in a university. Although he did not use the words, he could well have couched his comparison in terms of hot and cold. "This university model has evolved," he said, "over centuries of time." It is well designed to produce its intended results. Its goals and methods focus upon the development of the student's intellectual capacity. Students spend more time reading than they do writing; more time talking about ideas than acting upon them; and their professors are much more interested in students' ideas than they are in their feelings.

In this process students are indeed influenced to be more rational, more critical, more detached. They become more verbally fluent and more adept at the manipulation of words, symbols and abstractions. And even though professional programs of preparation recognize the need for other less intellectual more emotionally involving learning settings, the attempts to bring them about are almost always handled as if they were optional sideshows to the events in the main arena. All of us know, as Harrison reminds us, that "those professionals who are concerned with the conduct of these ancillary learning activities are not integrated with the 'real' members of the faculty. They are seen neither as teachers nor as scholars and researchers. Their status is cloudy when it is not simply second class. The classroom remains a stronghold of rationality."

Let us try out for size a few of the items familiar to us which Harrison used to contrast different points of a continuum. First the hot goal of some types of learning--and along side it the cool.

Decision-making: to develop critical judgment: the ability to test assertions, assumptions and opinions against the hard facts and the criteria of logic. To reduce susceptibility to specious argument and to be skeptical of intuition and emotion. To search for the best, most rational, most economical and elegant solution.

Commitment: commitment is to the truth. It requires an ability to stand back from on-going events in order to understand and analyze them, and to maintain objectivity in the face of emotionally involving situations. Difficult situations are handled by explanations, theories, reports.

Problem solving: a problem is solved when the true, correct, reasonable answer has been discovered and verified. Problem solving is a search for knowledge and truth. It is a largely rational process, involving intelligence, creativity, insight and a respect for facts.

Decision-making: to develop ability to come to conclusions and take action on inadequate, unreliable and conflicting information. To be able to trust feelings, attitudes and beliefs as well as facts. To search for the possible course, the viable alternative, the durable though inelegant solution.

Commitment: commitment is to people and to relationships. It requires an ability to become involved: to be able to give and inspire trust and confidence, to care and to take action in accordance with one's concern. Difficult situations are dealt with by staying with them, trying to take constructive action.

Problem solving: a problem is solved when decisions are made and carried out which effectively apply people's energies to overcoming some barrier to a common goal. Problem solving is a social process involving communication, interpersonal influence, concensus and commitment.

It is clear to all of us that the profession's concern with professional preparation is more than the professor's concern. It is more than a list of hot items to be hotly applied. To be sure, the university provides something necessary--if it can provide it better, let us help it to do so. But the profession itself provides the real preparation for which the university is only an entrance door. If we wish cool educators, we need cool environments for them to grow in. This is the job which we have not yet touched. It is more than giving field training to increase our own self esteem or to balance

the ledger in the favors rendered account. It is the hard work which we ourselves must put into the job only so haltingly begun before they join us. The profession must prepare itself.

How important is it to remind ourselves of the nature of education, its values and its assumptions....and the continuing preparation necessary to practice it? It is always important. But there has never been a time when it was as imperative. Ask Professor McConnell of Michigan and he will tell you, as he recently told the readers of Esquire,<sup>3</sup> "I teach a course," Dr. McConnell explains, "called The Psychology of Influence, and I begin it by stating categorically that the time has come when if you give me any normal human being and a couple of weeks--maybe a couple of months, but I don't think so--I can change his behavior from what it is now to whatever you want it to be, if it's physically possible. I can't make him fly by flapping his wings, but I can turn him from a Christian into a Communist and vice versa."

The facts of conditioning are not new. But it may startle you as it does me to learn that there are experimenters who can initiate and control motor action chemically or electrically; they can now switch aggressiveness, pleasure, rage, hunger or sleep on and off, experimentally, and someday will be able to do so therapeutically and, ultimately, socially. The behavior pill may in fact be in our lunch.

This is hot stuff indeed. I used to have a standard piece which began by pointing out how fortunate it was that we could not really control behavior. What do I do with that speech now?

I became even cooler in my approach to public health, and insist even more on purpose and process. In a world in which behavior control becomes each day more technologically possible, it now becomes even more obvious that the major learning task of all of us in Society is to learn to control the controllers. The dignity of the individual and his own decision-making responsibility in a free and open society are minimal safeguards against a hot approach to all problems.

In fairness to our fellow scientists, let it be said that they have given fair warning. My earlier quote of Dr. McConnell was that of his introduction to his class. He ends by saying: "Look, we can do these things. We can control behavior. Now, who's going to decide what's to be done? If you don't get busy and tell me how I'm supposed to do it, I'll make up my own mind for you. And then it's too late."

Education is concerned with power. Not the power of an autocrat or an inquisitor, but the power of free men--free as Dorothy Nyswander has said--to have a sense of becoming. It is satisfaction with the use of power for men--not the desire for power over men. We have to feel that power in ourselves--and act in the knowledge that we hold it.

If we learn to feel it, if we accept it we can use it to push open the doors which so often seem to close on us. Perhaps first we must push open our own Society--our SOPHE. Both whom we honor here today have led the way. In her memorable address of last April, Dorothy B. Nyswander showed how hot we were when she said: "As public health educators we have a professional Society. It is relatively young. And naturally there are many questions for me not yet answered satisfactorily. Where does the Society stand on the goals of an open society? Does a professional society give leadership or are its functions to consolidate and legitimize? How does a professional society evaluate its work? Are its criteria of progress found in a social philosophy or in terms of what it does for its members? To what are we committed through our Society?

A professional society is exclusive. Who and what are being excluded, one wonders. Is the society really interested in the public health educators working outside the health frame of reference? Does it foster diversity and dissent? Must our Society conform to the same rules governing other associations?

Our professional Society will be, of course, what a majority of members want it to be. Only let it be honest and free from hypocrisy. Let it provide a home base and security for all of us through its prestigious influence; but in addition, in crystal-clear diction, let it provide an orientation to a future social milieu concerned with the totality of experiences that affect man's well being, and the public health educator's place in that milieu."<sup>4</sup>

The conflicts of HOT and COLD -- of free and ~~feasted~~ -- of hope and despair -- of pride and prejudice are about us at every level. In our Society, in our preparation, in our work, in our culture. But this is the stuff from which life is made. This is the mix from which new life emerges, this is the testing ground from which the energy to become is manifest. It is there for us to use if only we have the courage and the strength.

There is a time late in the day on those beautiful islands of Hawaii when it is tomorrow everywhere but there. It can be a lonely feeling and a long hour. But one can also imagine that there will be a time when only that hour left to a few people will save that day. Perhaps we are now in that long hour. Perhaps it is up to us to save this day. When tomorrow does come, let us not say of ourselves that it was in our power and we failed. If anything be said of old SOPHE, let it be that she did her damndest to get hell to freeze over.