

- The purpose and value of the study of humanities and how the subject should be taught.

THE HUMANITIES: PLUS CREATIVE TEACHING

Webster defines the humanities as the branches of learning concerned with human thought and relations; especially literature and philosophy and, often, the fine arts and history.

The National Foundation of the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 (NFAHA), Section 12, defines the arts and humanities as all those subjects in the elementary and secondary school program which involve the student in the consideration of aesthetics, social and ethical values.

Harold Taylor, chairman for the University of Kentucky Symposium on the Humanities and the Schools, held in Lexington in 1965, states: "The humanities are not culture-containers or value-containers or courses in the higher things. . . . When we speak of the humanities we are speaking of

an area of concern which makes all social, moral and cultural questions a matter for new and continuing enquiry.

A recent seminar designed to develop a better understanding of the interrelationships between the arts and the humanities, sponsored by the Illinois State Office of Education, defined the humanities to include history, literature, art, and music.

There are many definitions of the humanities, and there are just as many definitions of the objectives of a humanities program. The seminar concluded that the purpose of the humanities is to increase the students' general knowledge and appreciation rather than to teach a definite skill.

Some of the instructional objectives in regard to the humanities and the arts are:

To introduce all students to the study of man — his nature, the full development of his faculties, the realization of his aspirations, and the securing of his well being.

To help the student come to know himself, to understand what has shaped his beliefs, attitudes, and fortunes and to develop a critical sense which will allow him as an individual to select and preserve the best in human societies.

To lead the student to understand how the arts interpret and communicated man's view of himself and of his world.

To develop the student's capacity for esthetic judgment.

Unquestionably, a humanities program has value. The humanities course is a basic and necessary program added to the curriculum.

That there are difficulties in presenting a humanities program is obvious, and perhaps the greatest difficulty lies with the students' primary source, the teacher. It would require a sensitive teacher, deeply rooted in all

of the humanities, or highly developed and *cooperative* teaching *team*, to correlate and weave such a course into the curriculum effectively.

Another difficulty in presenting a humanities course is that we are sometimes tempted to broaden our subject areas to such an extent that nothing has value. Here *broadening* subject areas really means *stretching* subject areas so thin that only a potpourri of highlights of the related arts may be taught at the sacrifice of the real content of each one.

A humanities course cannot and should not be expected to replace any course. Individual disciplines should continue to be taught by creative teachers, primarily concerned with one discipline but having a deep well of knowledge from which to draw information concerning all disciplines.

For example, when the music classes are learning about the modes, or are singing plainsong, or discussing the history of notation, why not point out the artistry of illustrated manuscripts evident in examples of early notation as typical of the art

of the medieval period? Pictures of exteriors and interiors of cathedrals could foster speculation and discussion, not only concerning art of the period but also possibly, the reason for the austere and absolute music of the time.

Another approach to the humanities — based program could be the composer approach, for example, a study of Mozart. Mozart's creative achievements transcend all time barriers. He brought to the classic era what Michelangelo, Raphael, and Da Vinci gave to the renaissance; and he was also an inspiration to the romanticists who followed. Reportedly, Tchaikowsky stated that because of Mozart he devoted his life to music. Today, the sonatas of Mozart have given food for thought to contemporary composers. Or, sociologically speaking once again, one might point out that it was Mozart who was the first composer to revolt against the system of patronage prevalent in his time.

In our present era, an isolated study of rhythm might prove interesting. This presentation might be made in

reverse order, starting with listening in contemporary idioms, both popular and neoclassic.

Listening lessons should be included with any study. But listening should be active and purposeful listening, cultivating *listeners* to, and not passive *hearers* of music.

"The first essential of good teaching," according to Gilbert Highet in *The Art of Teaching*, "is that the teacher must know the subject." By knowing the subject, we must be aware of the relationship of the subject to other disciplines, to events and to people. Every teacher should be teaching our "humanities" to the past and to the present.

A humanities program is not primarily intended to teach skills — and this is as it should be — but without performance and skills there would be no humanities.

Let us advocate a required course in the humanities for all students — and all teachers. But a humanities course in addition to, not instead of, the individual disciplines. — *Ila B. Lowery in the DKG Bulletin, Volume XXXIII-2.*