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A Report From The Educational Field

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Now under intensive study by educators throughout the country is a revolutionary method of teaching pioneered this year by Professor Alfred E. Neuman of Vauxhall University, North Dakota. In a recent interview Dr. Neuman explained exactly what his procedure had been this Fall Semester in the first trial of his daring new system. "I met with my class for ten minutes the first day and gave them lists of the books that made up the course, most of which could be found either in this or other campus libraries. I then informed them they were to be participants in an experiment to revitalize teaching techniques and to bring them to perfection. I told them, quite simply, that I would stay away from them altogether, that I would see them no more. Indeed, at a very great personal sacrifice to myself, I would keep myself aloof from them until January, when I would give them their examination." Dr. Neuman, watching the faces of the reporters, waived aside any cries of praise even before they could be uttered. But one of the reporters asked him how, even for the sake of elevating teaching, he could so deny himself the personal rewards that come from marking papers and preparing classes. "I will confess," he replied with a wave of a sun-tanned, dedicated arm, "that when this idea first sprang into my mind late one night, that very thought of such enforced idleness at once presented itself. But I had long since learned that teaching is a martyrdom, and indeed by this time I was ready to try anything."

Cover Page Footnote

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A REPORT FROM THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD

By REV. L. HETZLER

“Every man an island”

Now under intensive study by educators throughout the country is a revolutionary method of teaching pioneered this year by Professor Alfred E. Neuman of Vauxhall University, North Dakota. In a recent interview Dr. Neuman explained exactly what his procedure had been this Fall Semester in the first trial of his daring new system. “I met with my class for ten minutes the first day and gave them lists of the books that made up the course, most of which could be found either in this or other campus libraries. I then informed them they were to be participants in an experiment to revitalize teaching techniques and to bring them to perfection. I told them, quite simply, that I would stay away from them altogether, that I would see them no more. Indeed, at a very great personal sacrifice to myself, I would keep myself aloof from them until January, when I would give them their examination.” Dr. Neuman, watching the faces of the reporters, waived aside any cries of praise even before they could be uttered. But one of the reporters asked him how, even for the sake of elevating teaching, he could so deny himself the personal rewards that come from marking papers and preparing classes. “I will confess,” he replied with a wave of a sun-tanned, dedicated arm, “that when this idea first sprang into my mind late one night, that very thought of such enforced idleness at once presented itself. But I had long since learned that teaching is a martyrdom, and indeed by this time I was ready to try anything.”

Reaction from his select group of students has been wildly enthusiastic. Remarked one New York City philosophy major, “I had heard that Vauxhall was a good university and a leader in education, but I never expected anything like this. It’s thrilling to be a part of a teaching process so far in advance

of its time.” Again, Bostonian Ralph Hallam spoke up, “I think that, without a doubt, Professor Neuman is the best teacher I have.” And Sue Huntington added, “I think he’s cute—at least, if I remember him correctly in all the rush and all.” Finally, Boyd Simpson seemed to sum up the students’ sense of unworthiness at having the opportunity of studying under such a great teacher; “I think he’s really brought the ego and the thisness of the world to a real conjunction, even here. In his hands and under his guidance, really we’ve all gone away. It’s the consecration and the dream. We’re most thankful for it all.”

To carry out this experiment in improving teaching techniques that has all educators talking, Dr. Neuman has received from the Hooper Foundation a secretary (who certainly made a deep impression on this reporter) and the sum of \$160,000. And although Professor Neuman longed to supervise personally his experiment, he was afraid that even his mere presence in North Dakota might unduly influence his students; so he and his staff shifted their headquarters far away to an island in the Bahamas.

Hailed as perhaps the greatest teacher of our age, certainly as the Teacher of the Year, Dr. Neuman has been featured in all the leading education journals and has, moreover, made the cover of *Time* magazine. Further, Professor Neuman has also been honored this year by having a high school named after him in his home town. But if the truth were known, this is a late recognition of his dynamic personality, for his childhood friends had never drempt—“not in a year of Sundays!” exclaimed one boyhood companion—that their classmate would ever amount to anything.

Recently reporters were invited to an afternoon cook-out at Professor Neuman’s villa, where he is doing research work on the outer-and inner-self areas of teacher-student relationships. Here the doctor announced that he has already made significant changes in the working out of his new theory of teaching. He would not return to North Dakota this January even to

proctor for the examination. "I feel strongly," he said as he flicked a cigarette in the direction of his swimming pool, "that my presence there would be a betrayal of my system as I have worked it out. Such a racket," he explained, "and outcry would no doubt arise from the excited students in the examination hall that their thoughts would be jarred and little facts would lightly fall awry." Further, Professor Neuman also announced that next year with a new grant of \$250,000, he is going to revamp the whole experiment. "I shall move my headquarters from the Bahamas," he explained first, and then added, "but the changes touch on something far more fundamental than this. It is only during these past five months of reflection that I finally realized how much of a mistake it had been for me to have met with my students at all, even for those ten minutes that first day. Next fall I shall simply mail my instructions from Biarritz, where I and my staff will further our research work."

But Dr. Neuman may have to sacrifice some of his research time to a commitment of speaking engagements, for he is much in demand as a keynoter for educational conferences throughout the nation. And now looms ever greater the question that is haunting campuses from coast to coast as our schools look to the future: where shall Vauxhall University or any other university be able to find professors who would be willing to give themselves so completely, to "go all out," as it were, in their teaching endeavors as Professor Neuman? We can only heartfully hope that educators all over America and abroad too will be quick to abandon selfish, outmoded techniques and join ranks behind this great teaching theorist.