PASSIVE TEACHING -- ACTIVE LEARNING
A PROPOSAL FOR A
CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

AN ABSTRACT OF

A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

OF DANBURY STATE COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF SCIENCE

by
R. Leslie Harriman
June 1967

The argument.--Educators need to develop methods of curriculum construction and curriculum implementation better related than are present instruments and techniques to the inherent structure of what they teach and the way in which children learn. These new structures and techniques need to emphasize the value of creativity, the conceptual structure of knowledge, and the function of concept formation in the growth of intelligence.

Creative thinking versus critical thinking.--Getting students to think for themselves is almost universally sought by educators. Teaching should be oriented toward its most significant and immediate goal: providing students a fund of concepts which they may use effectively in problem-solving. Life is a problem-solving activity for which students should be prepared by exercise in creative thinking.

Using the intellect to examine real alternatives and to make critical judgments on the basis of known criteria is a part of problem-solving. It is a constant, human activity. However, more crucial to the learner -- and to the eventual human product -- is the use of imagination to examine possibilities, to extract alternatives therefrom, and to devise useful criteria.

Concept formation.--A child learns through physical and social interaction with his environment. Learning involves the gradual structuring of his thought processes; and the results are an acquired fund of data grouped or groupable into organizations called concepts, and a degree of skill in performing

this grouping to a specific end.

The theories of Jean Piaget are examined for their contribution to this thesis. Piaget contends that an individual of any age does have a fund of concepts at his disposal, and that his intellectual growth consists in the gradual restructuring, integration and differentiation of these concepts. Such growth, many authors point out, can not occur effectively in an atmosphere stifling creativity and offering a paucity of ideas, alternatives or points of view.

Curriculum structure.--Students need to grasp the idea that patterns exist, that good methods of inquiry remain good while facts change, that a good method of approaching a discipline works for all disciplines. Just as important as the understanding of the facts is the understanding of the relationships which give the facts meaning and value. Since these relationships lie in the structures of the disciplines themselves, we get at them through the conceptions we have about the disciplines. Our concepts guide our investigation; they also determine the terms of our results. While a body of knowledge is attacked bit by bit, concepts relate the bits to one another and each to the whole. Without such relationship all would be meaningless.

A unit of work in a discipline should begin within the framework of a concept. The first and essential step for the student is to express himself about the concept through a creative reaction to ideational materials related to it. Thereafter, data and example should be observed, leading to a

critical reevaluation by the student of his original expression, and a synthesis of his own ideas with the body of conceptually-oriented material presented for his investigation. Thus each complete lesson follows a sequence: Ideation, Expression, Observation, Criticism, Synthesis.

A sample unit.--A proposed unit for the English curriculum is developed, with a description of a conceptual framework and a discussion of terms. This development is supplemented in an appendix providing suggestions about materials and procedures.