

COPY

Letter to Mrs. Franklin

The House of Education,
Ambleside.
15.1.1904.

Dear

I think you have already brought before our Committee my strong sense that the P.N.E.U. is rather wasting its opportunities [sic]. It is practically a Society for providing desultory lectures to parents of a more or less instructive and stimulating character.

It might be, and was in my original intention, a college of Parents existing to study and propagate a philosophy of education – I believe that [sic] only sufficient and efficient philosophy of education which exists.

I take all the blame to myself that we have not lived up to our calling, or have only lived up to it fitfully, because it is so distasteful to have to proclaim one's own message as one's own that I have tried to take refuge in the unmeaning phrase – P.N.E.U. [sic] thought – a phrase which properly covers all the diverse [sic] thoughts of all the members and all the lectures. We might still perhaps escape the unpleasantness of a personal name by calling it "Ambleside Teaching"?

To one man is given the idea of a new button, to another that of a new principle, to one woman the perception of a new substance, to another woman – this woman – the perception of

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a beautiful, expansive, efficient and sufficient philosophy of education.

The people who get the message are more than enough honoured by the message but it is necessary that it should bear their name, or some equivalent [sic] name, just so long as until it is fully understood by the world in order to save the idea from corruption and disproportion. We are suffering in this way ourselves. One person seizes upon – "Education is an atmosphere" – and talks about environment as if it were the whole of education and we become Froebelian. Another may present the material doctrine of habit as if that again were the whole of education. Another will present an alien doctrine of ideas as if it were the Herbartian doctrine of interest.

The question will arise – what matter so long as important theories are set before people? I think it matters very much. It is the choice between a living organic whole and a composite whole with no quickening power.

Please do not misunderstand me. I have not made this body of educational thought any more than Columbus made America.

But I think it has been given me to see that education has a triune basis, to recognise that education is the Science of Relations, to perceive certain working theories of the conduct of the will and of the reason, to exact due reverence for the personality of the child – (I mean the reverence of educational practice, not of sentiment) – and some few other matters

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which go to make up a living pulsing body of educational thought which I find to be a wonderful power in the lives of those who apprehend it.

The members of the Union know how they are indebted to those of our number who have embraced this teaching with passion and power and have gone about from Branch to Branch spreading the light.

I am getting old and am in feeble health and am no longer able to go about winning adherents by guile! Therefore [sic] will you think me bold if I say I must have disciples.

The thing we hold amongst us is too great to be lost and I believe, is God-given. There is no other school of educational thought which even professes to have any adequate philosophy of education. Indefiniteness [sic] of aim and faulty methods make shipwreck of education on all hands.

The rest of the letter deals with the
P.N.E.U. Reading Course
