

Aims 1994

The Aims of Education II:  
Follow the Yellow Brick Road  
By Professor W.G. Womack

Preface: Last year, we started a tradition at Chapman that an Aims of Education Address will be presented each year during new student orientation week by a member of the faculty. I invited Bill Womack, professor of communications and chair of the Communications Department, to present his views in the second annual address on August 24, 1994. Given your special interest in higher education, I thought you might enjoy reading Professor Womack's perspective of education as a lifelong process of growing self-awareness. I invite you to share your comments with professor Womack or with me.

-James L. Doti, president of Chapman University

The Theme...

Dr. Doti has given me the theme: The Aims of Education. I pondered this topic by asking myself as a professor, "What have I been aiming at for the past 32 year teaching at Chapman University." Better yet, "What have I hit, if anything?" I was tempted to be ponderous with this topic. Then I came to my senses. Truth is usually best expressed simply, not ponderously. Over the years, I have discovered wisdom in places I've least expected to find it. So, simply stated, I believe the central aim of education is to help us discover our personal potential fully in our future.

Now, what do I mean by education?

The Paradox

The word education comes from the Latin *educare*, meaning to "bring out" or "lead forth." It is not the aim of the educator to stuff "something" – like cotton, hay, and rags – into the learner's mind. We can only lead something out of the learner. I realize this "leading out" has been my aim all these years as an educator. I haven't always "hit" the target – that is, to stimulate self-awareness. But I've come to accept a basic paradox: the learner already possesses what is needed to become educated.

Our Journey

Our education is a very personal lifelong trip, and such a journey cannot be based completely on secondhand information. There has to be a personal, unique confrontation with life if we are to discover and realize our potential. I can accept the word of professors on trust when they offer me vital information about the effects of tobacco on my body, or the sweep of a historical event, or a scientific principle. But when it comes to questions about personal meaning, motivation, or dreams, secondhand information will not do.

The Aims of Education

So, how do I make my education "first hand?" I believe there are universal aims on our personal education trip, which help us confront life and find meaning.

**One:** We have to find and test our dream of who we want to be.

**Two:** We must find courage; courage to challenge unknown – to risk.

**Three:** We must develop a life of the mind – become critical thinkers, creative imagineers.

**Four:** We must discover heart – find commitment beyond self.

**Five:** Zest! Fun must be one of our goals. We most assuredly need to enjoy life in the community of people we trust, laugh with and learn from.

### Redefining the Yellow Brick Road

Now I must confess something to you. As I was formulating these basic aims of education, a song kept repeating in my mind – over and over – *Follow the Yellow Brick Road*. It was *The Wizard of Oz* singing and dancing in my memory.

Remember the simple message of the film?

(Clips from the film, *The Wizard of Oz*, are shown.)

The central aim of education, as I defined it earlier, is at the core of this familiar story. “The Yellow Brick Road” is really the highway of learning; learning who we are and what we can do! Yet, our personal yellow brick road is never easy. It’s dangerous at times – patrolled by the witches riding brooms of sarcasm ready to derail our dreams. But if we risk, work, challenge the false wizards, use our brains, we move into the eye of the tornado, defend against the witches, and dare to be ourselves! We work, learn, persevere.

Most important, we, like the characters of Oz, must learn that we already have the wisdom we need. Frank Baum’s characters in the *Wizard of Oz* already possess mind, heart, courage, and a dream. So do you!

### Chapman University Fosters Potential

How do I know this? Come with me to the real Oz: Chapman University. I’ll share some views of real Dorothy’s tin men, scarecrows, lions, and a munchkin or two.

*John* found his dream as a film and television producer.

*Melinda* found a life of the mind, attaining a Ph.D. degree and launching a college teaching career.

*Beverly* and *Dennis* found courage. They have chosen to sell everything – home, businesses and come to Chapman University to learn to better serve others.

*Nader* found heart in a commitment to the principle of leadership in social issues.

*Jason* overcame the “witch” of drug and alcohol addiction.

Munchkins all! We play and dance here. We date and many of us find lasting love and commitment along the “yellow brick road” called education.

So, the simple myth of the *Wizard of Oz* points the way to the miraculous in us! The aims of education are clear: You are what it’s all about! Listen to Carl Jung on the importance of myth in our lives!

*"I asked myself, 'What is the myth you are living?' and found that I did not know. So...I took it upon myself to get to know 'my' myth, and I regarded this as the task of tasks...I simply had to know what unconscious or preconscious myth was forming me."*

- C.G. Jung, (*The Portable Jung*)

Like Jung, we have to find the myth that is central to our lives.

A simple Road Map: The aims of education.

So, follow your dream; find your myth.

Embrace and discipline your mind.

Build a new community of friends.

Challenge the false wizards.

Test your courage – risk!

Listen to Virginia Sater who writes:

"To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self. To place your ideas, your dreams before the crowd is to risk their loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return...

To try is to risk failure.

But, risk must be taken, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, and is nothing.

He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot feel, change, grow, love..... live."

Trust the part of you that already knows.

Seize your future! *Follow the Yellow Brick Road . . .*