NRS
SIMON STUDY

FISK UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

CHARLES S. JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

Rote Learning Studies

January 21, 1937

	ERE	V5	ERE	0

Mr. Edwin R. Embree
Julius Rosenwald Fund
4901 Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Embree:

You will recall that the suggestion about the relation of rote learning to certain types of social structure was credited to Dr. Park. He has been giving a great deal of attention to this, in several parts of the world, and recently has been developing some notions ~~there~~ which, in my opinion, are of extremely high value.

It just happens that he is going to be in Chicago on the 26th and 27th, for some conferences with Drs. Redfield, McNair and Axtell. It would be extremely illuminating, I believe, if you could find the time to talk to him for a few minutes. I have found so much stimulation in his observations that I want to share them with you, because of their general bearing on one aspect of the work of the Rural Education Council.

I think he can be reached through Dr. Redfield.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Charles S. Johnson

csj-p

JAN 29 1937

Interesting analysis
In all our Rural Schools
can ... working on lines suggested

NRS
SIMON STUDY

FISK UNIVERSITY
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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

CHARLES S. JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

Rote learning studies

February 25, 1937

	ERE	3/1	ERE	3/1

Mr. Edwin R. Embree
Julius Rosenwald Fund
4901 Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Embree:

I am sending a slightly revised and more readable copy of the note on rote learning and acculturation. It is really the idea basis of a type of experimentation, observation and recording which, I believe, will give the Council a pronounced and explicit lead in the field of American education. I have no argument for it beyond the conviction, growing out of contact with the problem and a present high enthusiasm.

Roughly, the notion (as a possible aim of the Council, and of general Fund interest) involves the participation of such persons as Bond (H. M.), Sanchez, Axtel (on the basis of his Hawaiian experiences), Argrett (one of our very excellent graduate students, and one who has been aided by the Fund's fellowship aid), Park (as a stimulating consultant), Embree (if my information is correct), Donald Pierson (whose South American work, aided by the Fund, is almost uncannily relevant), the combined material resources of the Department, possibly a service fellowship for a Turkish student at the University of Chicago, and, perhaps, one other.*

There is no immediate urgency on this. We have arrangements with the TVA that will, perhaps, hold for some time, and provide one field of operation under the wing of a Government service deliberately set upon certain culture modifications.

Sincerely yours,

C. S. Johnson

MAR. 4 1937

Charles S. Johnson

csj-p

I have just received a letter from Max Yergan in which he mentions a matter discussed with you. That also sounds interesting and pertinent in this context, whatever it is.

NRS

SIMMONS STUDY

FISK UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

CHARLES S. JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

Rote learning studies

	DE	DE	6/21

June 17, 1937

Mr. Edwin R. Embree
Julius Rosenwald Fund
4901 Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

My dear Mr. Embree:

Would it be at all convenient for you, before leaving for the vacation and rest which you have solidly earned over the past months, to deposit with us, for the summer, the first third of the amount set aside for the exploratory work on the study of certain social and cultural factors in present rural education. We are in full swing this summer, and are trying to take advantage of this period to make some headway on our field excursions.

BIC
EDE

Sincerely yours,

Charles S. Johnson

csj-p

(Rote learning)

NRS
NEGRO STUDY

June 21, 1937

Dear Dr. Johnson: In answer to your request in a recent letter to Mr. Embree I am enclosing our check for $500 representing one third of our allocation for special studies in rote learning. As additional funds are needed we should appreciate receiving a certified statement of expenditures made for this study.

Very truly yours,

DE:AM

DOROTHY A. ELVIDGE

Dr. Charles S. Johnson
Fisk University
Nashville, Tennessee

FORM 122

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

NRS
SIMON STUDY

To
Mr. Charles S. Johnson
Fisk University
Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 5838

Date June 21, 1937

First payment on allocation of $1,500 for special studies in rote learning - $500.00

Ck.#17998

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
Southern School Program - Field Experiments	36-13	$500.00	

Prepared by	Checked by	Posted by	
AM			Comptroller

FISK UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

CHARLES S. JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

am—o

June 23, 1937

Miss Dorothy Elvidge
Julius Rosenwald Fund
4901 Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Miss Elvidge:

May I thank you for the check for $500, which is a deposit on the "Rote Learning" Studies work. This has been turned over to the comptroller of the University and a special account (Account E-1428) set up for it. A certified statement of expenditures can be readily made as desired.

Sincerely yours,

Charles S. Johnson

csj-p

Memorandum on Rote Learning Studies

by Parks

In Chicago a few days ago I met George Axtell. I had known him when he was principal of the so-called experimental school in Honolulu. He is now in the Department of Pedagogy at Northwestern University, Evanston. I knew he must have had some experience with rote learning while teaching orientals in Hawaii and suspected he would be keen on the subject. He was. He told me that the whole education policy of the department of Education at Northwestern revolved around the problem of rote learning, and he was much interested in my observation on Negro education in the south. I gathered from what he said that there had been no attempts to study rote learning in its cultural context; no attempt to understand the conditions to which it seems to be the natural and normal response, nor the conditions under which it is superseded by more sophisticated and fundamental educational processes.

The fact seems to be that no studies have thus far been made that are designed to reveal the specific nature and function of learning by rote, in the total educational process.

Rote learning seems to be learning without, or with a minimum of, insight. But we do not know the conditions under which experience is transformed into insight, and we do not know the processes by which individual insights are transformed into communicable ideas. We do not understand the role of communicative question and answer, argument and counter argument, and the whole dialectical process in defining ideas as they arise; in giving logical precision to language and concepts, and

in the development of a logical structure which makes discussion possible. It is mainly by class room discussion, however, that it is possible for either the pupil or teacher to find out what things learned by rote mean. Without discussion words may perform their original function of expressing sentiments but they will not become the symbols of intelligible ideas.

I found it difficult, in my classes, to get students to ask questions. I found it difficult, in fact, to get them to admit they did not understand what they had read in the textbook or had heard in the class room. On the other hand they were eager to get the correct, authoritative answers to questions they were likely to meet on a test or examinations, and they were adepts in formulating vague, suggestive verbal, and often meaningless replies to such formal and general questions as I asked.

This is not, under the conditions which the ordinary class room imposes, conduct that is either unusual or unexpected in students. I encountered the same sort of thing at Harvard years ago, when, as assistant in Philosophy, I had to read papers in the introductory courses. But it seemed to me what I encountered in my classes at Fisk, was an inveterate disposition, a tradition in fact, that it had its sources in the historic condition under which Negro education has grown up in the south. It had its origin partly in the fact that Negro children have been handicapped by the lack of books and a tradition of formal education in the home. The majority of Negroes have started life at a lower cultural level than of the majority of the white people, and in their haste to catch up they have relied too much on textbooks and the formal knowledge of the schools. Negroes have not had the opportunities for education that white people have had, and the task of raising the cultural level of a population of

12,000,000 even under the most favorable circumstances, is stupendous and takes time. The facts are well known,but their significance is not, I am convinced, fully comprehended.

Children can and do pick up an extraordinary amount of knowledge at home, especially where they are exposed to an association with books and of parents who encourage them to ask questions, and pursue the inquiries and experiments that their naive interests and curiosity suggests. It seems as if there was hardly anything that could not be learned in this informal and natural way if the child's spontaneous interests are wisely directed and controlled. But this is not the way of formal education and this is not the method of the schools. On the other hand, formal education invariably presupposes the informal education of the home and on the playground. That suggests the importance of the studies which Jones and Junker have been making of the rural communities and the cultural backgrounds of the rural school.

In so far as formal instruction seeks to supplement or replace the informal education of the home or the local community, success will probably depend on the ability of the teacher to integrate the knowledge which the school seeks to inculcate with the experiences of its pupils and with the tradition of the local community. Often the disparity between the language and tradition of the textbook and the schools, and that of the pupils and the local community is very great. You recall Booker Washington's story: Going into a rural school in Macon County he found the pupils, some of them almost grown men and women, learning to read from a textbook entitled "Little Steps for Little Feet." The trouble was, as he remarked "there were no little feet there."

When the knowledge which the school is seeking to impart is remote from the experience of the pupil the task of translating it into the

language that the pupil understands is a difficult one. You will find few teachers in the south, I suspect, as capable as Miss Argret in translating the formal, and more or less abstruse, language of the textbooks into the idiom and vernacular of the average rural Negro community. Teachers are not prepared, in the ordinary normal school, for such formidable tasks. But it is just where this divorce between the school, on the one hand, and the local community on the other is most obvious that the tendency to relapse into rote learning is, I suspect, most likely to prevail. Just to the extent that the language and form in which ideas are expressed is unintelligible,words tend to assume the character of something mystical and sacred. Under these circumstances education inevitably assumes the character of a ritual. In such case its function is more or less identical with the puberty rites by means of which the children of savages make the transition from the status of a child to that of an adult. Under these circumstances ritual has the more prestige, the more severe the ordeal to which the candidate is subjected.

It is much the same in the schools. Education at Fisk seems to be conceived by the student, if not by the instructor, as a series of preparations for a series of ordeals by which one makes the transition from a status socially inferior to one socially superior. This is perhaps, as it should be, except for the fact that there is always danger that in the process all intellectual curiosity and all the natural incentives to seek and pursue knowledge will be systematically rooted out.

Few people pursue knowledge any more it seems, and if they do there is nothing very exciting about the pursuit. This seems, however, more or less inevitable where rote learning prevails, and Fisk impresses me as the peak of an educational structure erected on a system of rote

learning. The trouble with Fisk begins, I suspect, in the "common school."

I am not now raising the inquiry how far rote learning prevails elsewhere. The fact that Axtel seems to regard it as the fundamental problem of education everywhere leads me to believe that rote learning is not confined to Negro schools. On the other hand, so far as the historic conditions under which Negro education came into existence, have made rote learning in Negro schools more or less inevitable, it would seem that it is in these schools rote learning might most effectively be studied. Here, as elsewhere, the things we may learn from a study of the black and the brown should help a lot with the white.

In reflecting upon the subject of rote learning my attention has been directed to Folk schools like the Jewish Chedar, or the Moslem schools, where education consists almost wholly in learning verses from the Koran, as when I was a boy we used to learn verses from the Bible. It seems that wherever formal education has replaced natural and informal education it has first of all adopted the methods of rote learning. In these folk schools pupils have been taught to chant the texts they learned. That was the way I learned the alphabet and it is a very good way to learn an alphabet or anything else where verbal memory is the important factor. One can, as a matter of fact, learn most anything -- rules of grammar, historical facts, the names of the presidents or Roman emperors, verses from the Bible or the Koran -- by rote. One can even learn the rules and formulae for solving mathematical problems; the manipulations of fractions and the demonstrations of geometry in this same mechanical way, without reflection and without insight. But this sort of knowledge is relatively of little value in a changing dynamic world, where encyclopaedias and reference books supplement and supersede memory, and the important thing is the

ability to think and apply general principles to particular cases. In the routine of simpler and more stable societies this necessity did not exist, certainly not to the extent that does in the modern society.

I remember, thirty years ago, visiting a high school at High Point, North Carolina, where I had occasion to listen to a recitation in geometry. Neither pupils or instructor had any notion whatever what it was all about. Certainly neither pupil or teacher had the slightest idea of the application of the proposition that they were demonstrating had any relation to the art of the land surveyor; or to navigation or even in the erection of a house. The whole exercise was so utterly unintelligible and so obviously a matter of educational ritual and ceremony that I did not dare ask a question lest I embarass the teacher in the presence of his pupils.

As long as education is conceived by the teacher and the student as a preparation for a recitation or an examination, and recitations and examinations are regarded as ordeals by which one acquires merit of distinction, such methods are likely to persist. In that case the notion that education, - a liberal education at least, - is an attempt to satisfy the natural curiosity of the student to explore and [illegible] to understand the world about him, completely disappears.

One thing that makes the conditions of the class room seem artificial, as compared with conditions outside it, is the fact that ih the class room it is the teacher, while outside it is the pupil, that asks the questions.

But even at that the questions of the teacher are not those of one who wants to understand the pupil. A question in such case, is not an attempt to get the pupil's peculiar slant or notion about the matter in hand.

Few grown ups know how to engage children or other inferiors in conversation on such a friendly and man to man basis as this implies. In any case the atmosphere of the class room is not one which encourages understanding. The class room, it too often happens that the teacher and students are pitted against one another or, where that is not the case, pupils are competing with one another for the recognition and commendation of the teacher. The organization of the class room furthermore is designed to maintain tension and discipline. The teacher is in command. The duty of the student is to obey. It is this circumstance that gives to those interludes when the teacher indulges in a personal anecdote, or replies to some irrelevant question, the character of a blessed moment, long to be remembered.

One must distinguish between 1) learning by experience and the acquisition of habit and routine by a process of "conditioning," 2) learning by rote, i.e., formal education, and 3) the assimilation of a tradition or the elements of culture, using that term in the sense in which it is ordinarily used by anthropologists.

One can not say that any cultural trait is assimilated until it is fully comprehended and understood. It is not assimilated, in short, until it has become so thoroughly part and parcel of the tradition as to be second nature. Education conceived in this way includes the whole cultural process. It is not therefore complete until things "learned" are sufficiently incorporated in habit and common sense as to form the basis for thought and action in all the ordinary affairs of life. Things learned or studied are integral parts of the individual's mind. The mind of a man is, in short, all the instincts, attitudes, experiences and memories that enter as elements and factors into his individual thought and action.

The individual can not, at once, understand the significance and meaning of all that he "learns." He discovers what present experience means by incorporating it with earlier experiences. This invariably involves a lot of experimentation, reflection, rumination in the course of which he is likely to have moments of illumination, in the light of which familiar and known things and events appear suddenly in a new and quite different light.

When on the other hand learning involves neither rumination, reflection or experimentation, there will be no moments of illumination and insight. When there is no attempt to integrate the things learned in the school room with experience and problems of actual life, learning tends to become mere pedantry which exhibits itself in lack of sound judgment and of the kind of practical understanding we ordinarily call common sense. Sometimes this takes the form of a shallow verbosity and a general disposition among the intelligensia who had achieved a college training, to play with ideas as if they were mental toys. This, however, is a fault that is proverbially attributed to academic training wherever it exists.

Rote learning is likely to occur in schools where the standards are "high" or where the tradition, language and learning of the school is so different in content and character from the ordinary experience of the student that he is unable to interpret what he learns in school in terms of the experience of the community in whose tradition he grew up.

It happens, also, where the only source of knowledge for both the teacher and the pupil is the textbook. Manifestly the teacher who has had few opportunities for general reading and is therefore wholly dependent upon the textbook for his or her knowledge of the subject taught is going to find

it difficult to translate the content of the text into terms that are wholly intelligible to his or her pupil. On the other hand it is only as the pupil is able to ask questions and the teacher to answer them -- questions I mean that traverse an area of experience familiar to the pupil but not covered in the text -- that the pupil is able to assimilate what he learns.

Negro rural schools, like our city schools for immigrants, are handicapped by the fact that parents and children live in different worlds. To most immigrant parents the atmosphere that surrounds the life of their children in the schools is impenetrable mystery. The result is that a child who has the privilege of growing up in a home where parents who participate in the education of their children has a very great advantage. But the children of immigrants who live in cities pick up in the vivid life of the city streets, an immense amount, much of which is permanently valuable, much of it positively detrimental for their future careers.

One of the consequences of the effort of the child to live in two and perhaps three wholly dissociated worlds 1) the world of the family circle; 2) the world of the playground and the associates he makes there; and 3) the world of the school room and formal knowledge, is that many students become disillusioned and cynical in regard to schools and formal education. The result of their efforts to meet the artificial requirements of the school, to get through and out in the easiest and quickest way, is frequently to make even those who have good natural abilities appear stupid in the class room. Frequently these natural abilities of students who appeared dull in the class room assert themselves later, outside of the schools in real life. On the other hand, under the same condition, the industrious and "good" students frequently learn to be pedants whose

natural destiny is to become teachers or "professors" and so enter upon a career where it becomes a duty and a vocation to inflict their pedantries upon future generations of pupils as well as the general public. It used to be the case that the only reason a student studied Latin, for example, was so he could teach other persons Latin. This is part of the rote learning complex.

I have been thus far discussing rote learning, mainly from the point of view of my observations at Fisk. These observations have led me to believe that the conditions I found there were mainly due to the character of Negro education elsewhere. It is, as I have said, a system that has grown up under conditions that were inherent in the racial and economic situation in the south; conditions that cannot very easily or very quickly be altered.

You are, I know, interested at present in rural education, and in the education of a people whose condition corresponds, in general, not to that of the northern farmer, but to the European peasant.

In this connection I am reminded of a remark made to me by Redfield when I saw him in Chicago a few days ago. He said young Embree had just returned from Japan and that he had turned up during his studies in a peasant village, at least one, very interesting fact. At the present time, it seems many, most, perhaps all Japanese peasants have become literate. But this literacy has apparently made no appreciable difference in the general routine of life in the peasant community. Literacy in their case seems to be a pure luxury. The government might just as well, perhaps, have presented each head of a family with a diamond ring. He would have been proud of it. It would have been a distinction, but it would

not make any great difference in his life. I am reminded of what Dr. John Hall once said about Negro education. He was among the first Negroes to get a college education. "Why," he said, "at that time we thought of education as a purely personal distinction. It was something you were expected to wear like a decoration. We had no notion that education had any practical value. That was a later discovery."

This seems to be the case of the Japanese peasant, but with this difference, Dr. Hall found later what he could do with an education. In the case of the Japanese peasant, on the other hand, unless the traditional scheme of his economic and cultural life should change, he may continue to find little if any use for the education he now possesses.

The man who goes to the city and aspires to live in the modern world must have an education. He must, at least know how to read. Life in a city is not conceivable without a daily newspaper. But in the village a newspaper is not a necessity.

In studying the foreign language press some years ago, I was impressed with the fact that very few of the peasants who read a paper in the United States had been accustomed to read a paper at home. They were literate, but they did not read. Literacy does not seem to be an essential part of a peasant culture. It raises the question whether under the conditions which prevail today on the plantations in the south literacy will not continue to be, in the future, as it has in the past, regarded as a luxury.

It undoubtedly marks an epoch in the history of any people when it begins to lose interest in fairy and folk tales and learns instead to read the news. That seems to be a change that is going on in China today, at least in port cities like Shanghai.

Interest in the news is the mark of an urban civilization. In the modern world, and particularly in America, every one seems to be either in the city or on his way to it. Every one seeks at least to live in an urban atmosphere. In European countries, on the other hand, except in Denmark, peasant peoples are apparently little troubled by the influence of the press, of the machine age, or indeed, of the modern world. Perhaps we shall have to wait for the introduction of the cotton picker to change the system of rural education in the south. Perhaps the growth of the tenant farmer class will finally create there and elsewhere in America a permanent class with the traditions and outlook of a European peasantry. America, as compared with the rest of the world, seems to be settling down. Immigration has ceased, the population is approaching a condition that may be regarded as stable.

We have, however, the automobile, the cinema and the radio to reckon with. They may do what the rural school has not thus far failed to do, namely destroy the moral and intellectual isolation in which the Negro on the plantation, the 'Cajans' in the swamps of Louisiana, and the Appalachian mountaineers have continued, until very recently, to live.

In view of all these considerations and some others, I suggest we might try, at Mound Bayou in the Delta, for example, or on the territory of the Tennessee Valley Authority - where it might be weldomed, - a somewhat novel experiment. We might set up or take over a public school in which we would set up a form of education in which all the emphasis was upon a method and procedure just the opposite of those now prevailing in rural Negro schools. We might establish a school in which the community rather than pupils enrolled would have first consideration. In this school pupils and teacher might conceive themselves engaged in a joint

enterprise the purpose of which was to interest the community as a whole in a communal program, public health, for example. In such a school, teacher and pupils would be engaged in getting acquainted first with the local needs and second with sources of disease and the methods of public health in combatting them. The local health board and civil authorities would presumably wish to assist such a project. Part of the task of the school might be prepare a primer dealing on the subject of public health in which the nature of the prevailing and preventable diseases and the necessary measures of prevention were described in the language of the local community. In preparation for such a primer it would be desirable that the teacher or an assistant make a study of local medical practices and particularly the traditional folk beliefs and usages.

In collecting this information the pupils would assist the teacher and her assistant and this should serve to advertise the project in the community, and enlist the interest and aid of its more alert and influential members.

In collecting information, in writing and in the preparation of a primer, the technical training of pupils in the essentials, - reading, writing and arithmetic - would be regarded as incidental to the main task of the school, public health education, and, in general, to any other public service which the school had undertaken.

In connection with this program it would be advisable to publish from time to time, once a week perhaps, a news bulletin, written in the simplest possible language and reporting progress.

In this chronicle the names of all the personalities involved, their contributions to the program; the difficulties and adventures connected with the enterprise in getting and recording information; the

problems which arise in achieving a working relation between the school and the community should be reported, particularly in the matter of publishing the local news and using the news bulletin as a kind of supplementary reader in the schools and the community.

I have some notion of what can be done with such a local newspaper in a rural school, because I know what happened some thirty years ago when Tuskegee published such a paper for the Negro farmers of Macon County. The results were surprising and on the whole quite happy. I have often wished the paper might have been continued. It was merely part of Dr. Washington's program to secure the financial support of the Negro farmer in extending the terms and improving the buildings of the Negro rural schools. After the schools had been built, however, and the school terms extended the paper went out of existence. The importance of the experiment, - as indicating how and to what extent local news can be employed to stimulate the interest of pupils and parents in the work of the school, - was never fully understood or appreciated.

In a school that intended to educate the community first and the pupils and teacher second, it would be possible, and perhaps necessary, to base instruction largely on news, "local" and "foreign" but not exactly in the sense of the daily paper.

By news I mean most anything which is not yet history. To be more precise I mean by news (1) an event which has, or seems to have, some importance for the community concerned; (2) an event the significance of which is still under discussion. As soon as news is interpreted and generally understood it ceases to be news. It becomes history. So far as the curriculum of our school is based on news it will be necessary at

the very outset, to find out what news is, and particularly what is news in the community in which the school was planning to operate.

One purpose of such a school as here proposed would be to widen the area of orientation of the community, that is, the area over which events are news, this is identical with the area over which [illegible] the import and importance of such news as is published is sufficiently understood to be a subject of general conversation.

The physical boundaries of the world in which a peasant population lives, is as we know, very narrow. Polish peasants, (see Thomas and Znaniecke "The Polish Peasant") have a specific name for this world. They call it the Okilicka "the region around about." The school should seek to widen the dimensions of the Okilicka not merely for the pupils in the school but for the community as a whole. This might be done in part by the use of the radio, by week-end excursions by auto, bus or train, and by weekly meetings for discussion of events of the larger world outside.

It should be the purpose of the school not only to widen, for the local community, the area over which events are news, but it should attempt also to make news. A health campaign such as I have suggested might make news for some considerable time. A health campaign might be followed by a program dealing with some other aspect of community life in which everyone, pupils and parents, should if possible participate.

One way possible of making news is by means of the cinema. A few years ago a representative of the YMCA made a great stir in China by presenting to popular audiences all over the Empire, illustrations of some of the marvels of western science. This was news for the masses of the Chinese people who cannot read, although most of the scientific

tricks performed at these lectures were probably familiar to Chinese who had the advantage of a western education.

There are now available, educational films, one of which I saw a few years ago, which are of a character as to be news to almost any audience. The film I saw was a picture of the death struggle between two microbes, one the guardian of the blood stream and the other that of an invading disease germ. The whole drama took place within the limits of a blood corpuscle - a clear crystaline pool as it appeared - of an infected rat. The picture was not interesting merely, it was terrifying and instructive. Pictures like these are news.

With regard to the YMCA lectures, intended to awaken Chinese interest in western culture, I ought to add that while the Chinese were interested in these scientific marvels they interpreted them as magic pure and simple, and the lecturer who presented them gained the reputation of a great magician, like Houdini. This was, of course, not just what the lectures were intended to do. The fact, however, illustrates that news, and particularly anything foreign to the common experience and understanding of the community in which it circulates, must be assimilated to the prevailing cultural tradition in order to be understood.

News, unlike history as taught in the class room, must be interpreted rather than remembered and repeated merely. Otherwise it is not [illegible] news.

One of the interesting and important by-products of an experiment such as I am proposing, would be the light it would throw upon the process of acculturation, if I may use that term in this context. It would be interesting to find out, at any rate, how the community, - children

and adults alike - do interpret the news, and particularly the news presented to them through the camera.

If what the community got from the film interested them it would be because they were able to interpret it in terms of their own experience. Their interpretations, as gradually elaborated in the course of discussion, should therefore reveal what this experience is. It should reveal, better than anything else can, the cultural background of the community, what, in short, is the character of that body of tradition with which members of the community do their thinking.

It should throw light upon rote learning, too, because it is just those things we "learn", but cannot assimilate, that are responsible for many, if not most, of the present difficulties in Negro schools and in formal education everywhere.

-- Robert E. Park
Fisk University