

SPEAK

2019

ISSUE ONE



CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

01.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

02.

THE UNSPOKEN PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

04.

THE NETWORK WE'RE NOT USING RIGHT

06.

IPAD VERSUS LAPTOP

08.

CREATIVE WRITING AND IT'S IMPORTANCE

10.

LETTER ONE

Last year, Speak's first issue was released to incredibly positive feedback. Joseph Sothcott created two issues of the magazine, which succeeded in being what he described in his opening letter, 'a place where students can discuss and debate important concerns, as well as have some fun.'

Keeping this in mind, I believe the reader should spare me some sympathy due to the task now at hand, that is, following an exceptional first outing. Prospective leaders may fear the possibility of gaining charge of a failing organization, nobody particularly envies the captain of a sinking ship, and yet, by contrast, I am personally daunted by the previous successes of this particular group. Please don't get me wrong, I am overjoyed to have been given a chance to personally helm Speak throughout its second year. I simply hope that the third, fourth and potential fifth installments of this magazine, now in my care, can fill the proverbial boots of their predecessors.

The magazine's goal this year is a natural extension of Speak 2018's original concept. We aim to provide a continual platform upon which the student's voice is given top priority, with the particular value placed upon displaying the unique and unheard perspectives of the student body. It is my personal wish that Speak's articles will display the eloquent and opinionated faculties of the Saint Peter's man, as well as these writer's own creativity and personal flair.

One of the brilliant things about this magazine is that while contribution is entirely optional, passionate students still offer material for publishing. The articles you read have therefore been freely written because of a

student's wish to share opinions and information they might have. Students are free to choose what it is they write about, and this self-governance, as well as creating independently motivated people, helps those that are truly passionate about writing to improve their skills. Last year, this magazine provided me with a reason to write about personal interests that I would not have had without its conception. The continuation of this magazine is important to me, as I expect it to inspire future Saint Peter's men to explore writing, outside of the classroom. In my opinion, there is a serious lack of opportunities and encouragement, worldwide, for intermediate and high school students to write anything but essays. I am proud to attend a school and lead a magazine, that tries to remedy this problem.

This issue covers its bases on content. Advice to students about device selection, an intellectual discussion about the purpose of education, and the first in a potential series of intercepted letters are all present in 2019's first issue. Thank you for your patience in reading my opening letter, I promise the contributions from my peers will not be nearly as dull as I have been. Please enjoy the third ever edition of Speak magazine,

-Jack McConnell
Editor

THE UNSPOKEN PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Last year our government spent 17.8% of its total expenditure on education which amounts to a Gargantuan \$14.1 Billion (nzd) Now we may ask why on earth would our government devote so much of its resources to education? Are we to believe our government is nobly promoting free thinking and enlightenment. Is the end goal really the creation of people with independence and intelligence?

Perhaps the best place to start is to imagine what New Zealand would look like without public education. An utter shortage of competence within all aspects of the New Zealand workforce, ultimately culminating in an economic crisis and possibly social chaos. Thus we may conjecture that the primary purpose of public education is social stability rather than education for its own sake. The need for social stability, however, contradicts the very purpose of education. Herein it is necessary to make a distinction between two different sorts of education, firstly the more basic education which should successfully integrate an individual into society and provide that individual with the means of acquiring a stable job. The second form of education contradicts the first in that liberates the individual from the pressures of conformity, in this regard, it is the nobler of the two. It is this latter form which I shall address in the rest of the article, for it should be the aspiration of any student who has effort enough to read 'Speak'.

Resistance to conformity is important in all aspects of life, in the realm of science only individuals who question the prevailing paradigm and dogma make groundbreaking discoveries. Such individuals despite their genius are rebuked and ridiculed by those who celebrate the status-quo, by those who have lost their curiosity. The evidence for this is vast; the dismissal of the Copernican revolution, removing the earth from the center of the universe, the inquisition of Galileo for heresy, or even the rejection of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. This can be applied to all aspects of academia. Yet non-conformity has deeper ramifications, most psychologists from Karl Jung to Abraham Maslow, acknowledge the psychological necessity for individuation. The development of one's self outside of the social collective, free from the expectations and demands of other people. To avoid confusion the aim is not to reject society, nor to become anti-social, No, the aim is to be ruled by the laws of one's own character rather than by the rules of society.

Now you may ask, What does this have to do with Schools? Public schools from their first conception in Prussia were designed originally to indoctrinate youth in the protestant faith, later on, they were repurposed for social control and the encouragement of military service to the state. The USA seeing how effective Prussian public schooling was at inculturation, adopted a similar sys-

system, shortly followed thereafter by the rest of the world. Thus a better understanding of schooling is perhaps best summarised by (the controversial) H.L. Mencken: "The most erroneous assumption is to the effect that the aim of public education is to fill the young of the species with knowledge and awaken their intelligence...Nothing could be further from the truth. The aim of public education is not to spread enlightenment at all; it is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to put down dissent and originality." I have no doubt that it is to this purpose which the New Zealand Government spend its millions, the creation of mindlessly obedient citizens, who will work ceaselessly and unquestioningly to generate wealth and GDP.

The mechanism through which schooling achieves such uniformity of conformity and inculturation has been called the factory model. Each student is a product carried along on a conveyor belt, modified and molded, cogs and chains are added, bad products are discarded, the end result? Beautiful machinery, a standardized citizenry. In the factory model, everything is standardized, the search for truth is relegated inferior to the respect for authority, curriculums are narrow and do not reward exploration and there is no time for curiosity, with such remarks as "you'll learn about that in year thirteen (or at university)". Consequently, any real education must take place outside of the classroom, curiosity is the luxury only for the autodidact (self-educated person). The challenge is such: "Ninety-nine [students] out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but the result of substantial education which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individ-

ual" -William Torrey Harris (philosopher of education)

That is, everything I have just told you about schooling would be true were it not for one thing... Teachers. A good teacher is the only means of bridging the gap between the institution and the individual. An institution is in-personal, indifferent, to it you are a number, a statistic with a pass or fail next to it. To the teacher however you a human being with personality and potential. A mutual relationship opens the door for rare moments where the teacher may inspire and re-invigorate passion, this is where education again raises its voice in rebellion. To provide but one example a conversation with my history teacher was the catalyst for a lifelong appreciation of art history. Thus I maintain St Peters success is due to its teachers, due to those moments where the voice of the human supervenes that of the institution.

To conclude on a note from John Taylor Gatto and his book 'Dumbing Us Down' "Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist; it should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle the big challenges; it should allow you to find values which will be your road map through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves whatever you are doing...it should teach you what is important: how to live and how to die."

-Reuben Miller

THE NETWORK WE'RE NOT USING RIGHT

The Democratisation of ideas has been potentially the most profound effect of Facebook over the last three years. It is also facebook's worst effect. It's an absolutely taboo suggestion that it's bad for everyone's opinion to valued equally, but the progress of platforms that seem to serve that egalitarian purpose has caused many negative outcomes to stem from that egalitarian pursuit. Perhaps most significantly this equalization has devalued the adjudication of the expert. Allow me to clarify, my general thesis is that as social media developed a broad network of sources (as is the nature of the internet and its great strength) it decided to rank these sources, not by expertise or qualification, but instead by the far more democratic, potentially ill-informed popularity of the masses. Posts gain exposure and authority via the great proletarian ballot of likes (facebook and instagram), upvotes (reddit), or retweets (twitter), usually in favor of expert endorsement. And while this system may be fair it is not good (that is, for the overall benefit of the population).

I'll cover now, why I think this system is in place; the natural preference for a quantitative organization over a qualitative and I'll then explain why a broad political disillusionment with authority figures has occurred as a result, and the other issues I see arising from the status quo.

It should instantly understand why it's easier

for an online system to judge something by a quantified metric rather than by qualitative value. The ability to do so is the great separator between computers and human beings, and our understanding of abstractions contrasted with a computer's lack thereof is an omnipresent part of programming. It is why the 'turing test' exists (created by the 'father of theoretical computer science' and posting a computer cannot convince a human that it itself is human) and is why google's supposed search for 'relevance and usefulness' is actually the results of a complex algorithm that takes into account (according to google) '200+ factors'. It is a close approximation of relevance and usefulness and is a task that must be undertaken by a program, however, we should be mindful that it is not the real thing.

Websites can check all the boxes and yet remain completely irrelevant and un-useful. This problem is mirrored and yet accentuated by social media. At this point, we must make a quite large assumption. If on google we search for relevance and usefulness, what do I search, or use social media for? My suggestion would be that the majority use it as a means to observe current events in the lives of their friends, and worldwide. I take no issue with this usage.

However, there is an undeniable population who uses social media for a different

purpose. Not the entire population but certainly a significant percentage of it. This purpose is to evaluate opinions and facts, to find arguments for and against a topic, or to search for supporters and antagonists to a cause. It is this purpose that I believe poses a huge threat to the world of particularly modern political debate. Firstly, social media has far less than 200 (plus) factors at their disposal. There are perhaps four; time posted, keyword prominence, number of comments/retweets/etc and likes/dislikes (with the latter being by far the most dominant). This is detrimental to the accuracy of a search. However, this is not the largest issue with this usage of social media. The largest issue is that while an individual may search for opinions, facts, arguments, supporters, antagonists, etc, the social media platform is searching for simply the most current or popular post. Not the most well informed, not the most 'relevant' or 'useful'. Simply the post that has encouraged the largest reaction.

This is populism in action online. Take, for example, tweeter turned president Donald Trump. He gained preeminence in the political circuit originally not in spite of his inflammatory statements but because of them. By standing out by making extraordinary claims, a side effect of the system that can contribute to misinformation has been made into a tool for the ill-intentioned politician.

The backlash to this spreading unreliability has ironically furthered the issue. Instead of focusing on ensuring that sources are well grounded, people have instead been granted liberty in many cases to accuse another of spreading misinformation when an opinion must be discredited. Once again the most prominent example is President Trump, both the prime benefactor of and largest accuser and user of term 'fake news.' This is a great tragedy for the system of social media because what could easily be

a system that instantly connect one with an expert on a topic, is instead a system that discredits or devalues that expert and bombards the user with mountains of facile arguments that intend to win arguments by being the first side to crush the reader.

Social media is a free market place of ideas, and that is rightfully so. But this system should not be extended to acquiring information about a topic. This must remain a firm meritocracy if we wish for the value of knowledge to retain its current importance within our society, or to at least retain some semblance of its former self.

The harms of a world where something is factual if a large enough group believe it should be self-evident. It would be, first of all, the death of 'the minority' conceptually, as beliefs that isolate these groups would naturally develop and gain validity under a popular system. This is already witnessed to a huge extent online when networks of people with niche beliefs are exposed to each other and incited into more harmful or aggressive expressions of these particular beliefs. Furthermore, there'd be a long-term general decrease in the number of people pursuing specialist education in areas such as the humanities, given their opinions and understandings would be largely ignored and overruled by the conference of the proletariat online. Again, knowledge itself would be devalued.

It's only a matter of time before social media sites online finally go information bankrupt. If they do, they will have exhausted all their purpose. And in an age where networking is needed to keep an increasingly agitated community united, this is an incredible loss and a huge argument for a review of how we approach our online interactions, for those in charge.

-Jack McConnell

IPAD VERSUS LAPTOP

The decision of whether to switch over from your beloved iPads to the, stronger and more versatile laptop is highly relevant to the year 10s of our school. This question cannot be given a straightforward, yes/no, answer. There are several different factors that you may want to consider when making your decision.

Firstly, you may need to decide on your subjects before making your decision. For example; if you were planning to take a subject such as design, dvc or computer science (or any other subject that you believe may require, or benefit you having a laptop) in any of your senior years, I can confidently recommend to you buying a laptop. While I won't go into which brands and models to purchase in this article, I will warn you to do vigorous research into both. Having an underpowered or short-lasting laptop will have a counteractive effect on the learning and enjoyment you get out of school. Furthermore, if you are unsure about whether your future subjects require you to, or benefit you from having a laptop, you can easily ask the respective teachers of each subject. Also, your current teacher may be able to help you out.

If that factor didn't apply to you, I will give you some more points to ponder. The main point being, gaming. If you, like many, love to do a bit of gaming, with your mates, in your spare time, you may want to consider upgrading your iPad to a powerful gaming laptop. In saying that, it would save you quite a bit of cash by sticking with your con-

sole or desktop (or buying one) for gaming and buying a, less expensive, notebook laptop and using it, solely, for schoolwork. The question here is whether you are prepared and/or are able to spend at least over one thousand dollars on a laptop when you could have a console for \$300 or a desktop for \$1000; with the same, if not better performance.

To make your decision, you need to weigh up all the benefits of owning a laptop would give you and see if it's worth the price.

-Connor Parsons



CREATIVE WRITING AND IT'S IMPORTANCE

Let's not pretend that reading and writing are both tasks we undertake with no aversion. It is standard, at least to my knowledge, to view both as a chore that must be undertaken to either yield knowledge from a page or display your knowledge to others. Readers view a great body of text with apprehension, the focus required over an extended period of time seemingly unfathomable. Writers view a blank page that is to be filled, with the same animosity, and for the same reasons. This instinctual reaction to literature is widespread, and while we view reading and writing as something that people need to learn to do, there are few attempts to combat the idea that undergoing these tasks is torturous. This is criminal.

I commented in my opening letter that there is a serious lack of opportunities and encouragement for teenagers to write anything but essays. I'd like to take this opportunity to defend the practice of writing, in particular, 'creative' writing, and explain how it's importance is currently neglected around the world.

An essential part of creative writing's twilight I think, is the preeminent importance of curriculum-based learning in high schools. Justin Parmenter, a teacher of language arts at Waddell Language Academy in Charlotte suggested as much in Teachers and Writers Magazine. Curriculum learning seems to him, to squeeze much of the 'activities that cultivate essential real-world skills such as collaboration and creativity' out of classes. A potential symptom of a mail-to-order mentality wherein high school is a place to prepare for university, the world has come to favor standardized testing. Overseas this manifests in a menagerie of acronyms; act, sat, clt, etc, (etc), but for me personally and many of my peers, Cambridge is the dominant examination. These examinations make sense, they are the 'quality control' at the end of a production line, but they leave many teachers with the, unfortunately, challenges of time, or more accurately, a lack thereof.

A Cambridge syllabus is dense. An unfortunate abundance of topics can be brushed upon during a three-hour exam, and all must be covered by the teacher in order to prepare students comprehensively. The limited time within a school day, time which an english teacher must share with math, science and history teacher (for example), does not help this situation. And when one subject demands in-depth knowledge of two plays, ten poems, a novel, and a partridge in a pear tree, creative writing has literally no place within a class timetable filled with content acquisition. The unlucky teacher must pass an essay structure to their students, a formula which 'the markers' favor, and must then with as little time wasted as possible begin plowing through content. Not only are further forays into writing technique supererogatory, but they also risk setting a class behind schedule with no opportunity to catch up.

The classroom environment is not hospitable to creative writing. A penchant for poetry does not translate well to a multichoice physics paper (as I have discovered). Yet there are fundamental educational and emotional benefits to writing, outside the sterile exam hall. Gail Tompkins, a hugely influential literacy professor identifies seven:

- to entertain
- to foster artistic expression
- to explore the functions and values of writing
- to stimulate imagination
- to clarify thinking
- to search for identity
- to learn to read and write

The immediate problem with these benefits will no doubt be evident. With the potential exception of the seventh reason, they are unquantifiable. We cannot use the seven advocates to judge our students. Judging some as having an imagination 17% more stimulated than their peers, will not soon be a reality. We also cannot use the seven

advocates to judge our schools. Judging a school population as having an identity 67% more identified than it's neighbor, is not a task of which we are currently capable.

One cannot, however, say Tompkin's reasons are not valuable traits to encourage in the youth of today, nor can one suggest that teaching creative writing is pointless due to its inherently qualitative nature. Rather, a qualitative process may not just be holistically good, but may prepare students for university and careers better than standardized testing. One complaint with standardized testing is, as put by Parmenter 'many of our English students spend way too much time reading random passages which are completely detached from their lives and answering multiple choice questions in an attempt to improve test results,' the key element of this complaint being that the memorization of texts and facts contains no relevance for students later in life. The same is not true of proficiency in writing. High schoolers entering a tertiary institute are often confronted with a platform that celebrates creativity, eloquence, and individuation to a far greater extent than they've previously experienced (in particular within BA degrees and the like). This is a gift but will come as more of a shock to an unprepared student. As a person planning on studying subjects like english and creative writing, which in addition to exams will require the completion of course-work and (in the case of the University of Victoria's Writing program) a portfolio of creative writing, I would be verifiably out of my depth without this preparation. It is a myth that all you need is good grades to be primed for university, good grades will only prime you for admission. Qualitative learning objectives might, therefore, be the antidote to the stress of an education-in-transit.

We can identify these values and we can identify the causes of their neglect, but we may still be unable to find a solution. It is naive to campaign for the abolishment of a curriculum, ignorant to suggest that exams, grades and the diligence or intelligence that to some degree goes alongside them, is of no value. Furthermore, these systems have allowed education to reach the masses more effectively, and an absolutely qualitative education would undoubtedly undermine the universality of our current systems. It is logical that in an educational system such as the one proposed, the quality of teacher would have a magnified effect on the quality of education. This has concerning implications considering schools that struggle to afford good teachers cannot compete with schools that

have money to burn. Quality education could once again belong only to those who can afford it, given there is already a deficit of teachers and assumedly, therefore, a deficit of quality ones.

To avoid these severe detriments the easiest solution is to encourage students to write outside their schooling hours. It is time we had a world where creative writing is as readily listed as cricket as a co-curricular activity. What this requires is simply more opportunities for students to display and develop their skills, and an increased advertisement of the opportunities already open to students. Saint Peter's provides these opportunities in part, after all, this is one of the essential functions of Speak Magazine. But there are external opportunities too that students must be encouraged to take part in. Victoria University holds an annual National Schools Poetry Award which last year gained 175 entries. This is a fairly large number, but a small percentage of all year twelve and thirteen students in New Zealand, who the competition was open to. Here are a few other examples of opportunities tailor-made for students that I'd suggest interested readers research:

- Waikato University's Sargeson Prize: a short story competition offering a student category (entries close on the 30th of June).
- Victoria University's National School's Poetry Award: a poetry competition for students (entries close on the 8th of July).
- Starling Literary Journal: one of many literary journals in New Zealand, Starling, in particular, is targeted at presenting the work of young writers (next submission period closes on the 20th of October).

These are only a handful of the current locations students can test their skills and develop their writing, but they are a brilliant place to start. Ideally, the ease with which students can find the resources needed to enter competitions such as these will only grow as a demand for greater literary opportunities increases. And in a world moving closer every day to the absolute standardization of testing, perhaps a qualitative literary flare is the perfect demonstrator of academic distinction.

-Jack McConnell

LETTER ONE

I will see her none, my only glimpses of her being rough, granulated pictures posted sporadically to Facebook. I save these immediately to my hard-drive, to spend the next five minutes deciphering their pixels, attempting to discern features by colored squares.

I wonder, has she grown? Is her hair longer, perhaps shorter? Is she wearing those overalls, which I sent last Christmas? Once, I received some call, she having taken her father's phone, and succeeded in accidentally dialing my number. I was surprised to learn that, even after all these years, he has kept my number. I heard only her gasp, then the sound of the phone meeting carpet, my 'Hello' then addressed to the ground.

I wonder, does she know my name? If she were to spy my photograph, tucked inside her father's wallet, would she recognize this smiling, rugged face? I wonder, when the other children were told of the bees, and the birds, and those other saccharine metaphors by which adults keep truth from children, did she have reason to pause?

I resent him, though I know my anger is ineffectual, and inappropriate. He stole our daughter, carrying her from the house, swaddled in her blankets. I noticed only in the morning, when the cat came crying, upset that her breakfast had been forgotten. I spent two futile, fruitless hours

searching the house, then the park where sometimes we'd walk, then the school we'd planned for her to attend, then the carnival we had always promised, yet never remembered, to visit.

The next morning, I received the first of my Facebook updates. There, sitting upon her suitcase, with oversized sunglasses, and her father's sweater: my daughter.

-Anonymous

