Children have a real desire for knowledge—for all sorts of knowledge. They want to know how to get along with people, they want to grow morally and spiritually, they want practical knowledge about vocations. And, yes, they want to learn the “fundamentals.” But they ask us to help them understand the relation between academic studies—or the “solids” as they sometimes refer to textbook subjects—and life itself. This is a challenge we cannot afford to ignore. If we do, we kill our own hopes of making school a living experience and the hopes of the youngsters that through education they can grow as happy, adjusted people, adequately prepared to meet the problems of today and tomorrow. We may not see eye to eye with young people when they suggest how this relationship is to be developed, but their recommendations deserve our serious consideration.

There are a few things that I feel I have not gotten from school which I should like to have. I don’t see why we have not been taught subjects in a manner that we can see their use to us in adult life. A teacher can teach English literature and I can learn it, but I would like to know how I can use it in adult life.

I like to think it pleases my parents when I can come home and venture an opinion—an opinion that, while it may be a little unsound or baffling to them, is still a definite opinion backed by what I really believe in and based upon what I have learned at school.

Now they know I can, and do, think. Hasn’t it been worth the cost of my education? Isn’t learning to be a good American more than worth the cost of the education? I think so and I’m sure my parents think so. I only hope that I can earn my education by putting it to the best use I possibly can for my family, for my community, and for my country.

To Study, to Reason, to Understand Ourselves

A good school should teach students how to study so that they may get the most out of the time spent studying, and so they will know how to gain new knowledge when out of school.

Teachers may be able to pound a certain amount of knowledge into the heads of their students, but after these young people graduate, what then? There won’t be any teacher; they are out on their own, and if they have been accustomed to having a teacher see to it that they work, they are likely to be lost. A student should learn to be independent so that knowledge can be gained without too much aid from others.

The most important phase of my education has been that mixture of courses which has taught me to reason. Knowledge is useless without the ability to reason and I feel that the good founda-
tion of knowledge I have received is well supplemented by good reasoning powers. I have learned to read, speak, and write correctly and intelligently and my interest in mathematics and science has resulted in a good scientific background.

I think I have obtained the rudiments of an education, that is to say, a fair basic foundation from which I can grasp for more learning and knowledge and use this erudition to help me construct my life with confidence and intelligence. Through school, I have developed a love and desire for learning; beginning to satisfy this desire has stimulated me toward more extensive study. A course teaching religion in a way that it could be used, understood clearly, and thought about every single day should be taught in school to encourage spiritual development.

I think it would be to great advantage, in my case in particular, if the high schools could teach one to understand himself, learning to think and reason logically, realizing his abilities, and choosing a philosophy of life.

Cooperation, Planning, and Outlook on Life

When a child enters school at the age of 5 and before he is taught anything, he begins to learn to get along with the people around him. This training continues, or should continue, until the child is out of school. If, when a person grows older, he is unable to cooperate with his fellow-workers and understand their feelings he will be unable to succeed—no matter what his job.

The school should help the student to plan for himself, to organize efficiently all of his affairs, not only in school, but outside of school as well. If the student does not learn this, how can he possibly hope to cope with the problems that come up later in life?

A short while ago it was thought that all the education necessary was reading, writing, and arithmetic. If this is all that is taught, how can the student know what he would like to become, or at least what he thinks he would like to become? When he thinks he has found the right career, he should be given the opportunity to learn and prepare as much as possible for this job. In other words, the schools should offer an extensive vocational course.

Of course there are innumerable other things which other people wish to get from school, but as far as I'm concerned these three—cooperation, efficient planning, and an outlook on what you would later like to do—should be the main objectives of any school.

Back to the "Fundamentals"

As one searches his soul for a glimpse, an indication, of the future, with graduation moving steadily nearer, he hopes to feel self-sufficient and strong, with a good, sturdy education backing him up. I'm afraid I lack this feeling.

Although my grades have been good, my knowledge of past civilizations is a sieve and consequently modern developments can't be viewed with perspective. My mind has never been stretched to its fullest capacity, and I can only blame the schools for this. One who hasn't been taught to think when beginning to form mental habits has difficulty in using his mind wholly when it becomes necessary.

It seems to me that to insure well-
educated or responsible citizens, the schools must either go back to the method used in teaching our fathers—that of drilling and bombarding the student with information until he has it firmly fixed in mind in spite of himself—or teach the student in grammar school to accept the responsibility of training his own mind.

I don’t mean to infer by all this that I should feel more at home in an asylum. It’s not that my mental development is inferior, but that my mind could track so much better than it does if I had been trained under different circumstances.

On the other hand, when I think what sort of a beast I would have been had I not had this schooling of which I have been so contemptuous, it becomes a different matter entirely. In that light, my knowledge of languages, of histories, of science, takes on new proportions. I have mastered the intricacies of A, B, and C. I can, on occasion, emit a fairly respectable merci, Monsieur, and c’est la guerre. I can rattle off various amo, amas, amat’s, and I would even venture to state that H₂O is water—usually.

Book knowledge alone could never sufficiently educate a youth to become a capable leader. However, I believe that a partial “back to the fundamentals” campaign would be in order now. Early in this war, it became apparent that few of the boys called into service had a good knowledge of English and mathematics.

In spite of the need for skill in these basic subjects, however, the emphasis continues to be placed on extra-curricular activities. The latter most assuredly have a prominent place in modern education and students should certainly include some interests outside of school.

A Broader Definition of “Fundamentals”

In discussing the things that I have not learned in school, I would like to be general and speak of the needs of the younger generation as a whole. There are certain fundamentals necessary for everyone. First, a love for fellow men. Although I am more tolerant than others my age, it is because I have traveled much. Being tolerant of others is one of the most necessary things in this world. A war is now going on because two races think they are superior to the rest. I think a love for others can be taught and must be. I have found that Negroes and dark-skinned people often make the best friends because they are not often befriended and will do much to keep a white person’s friendliness.

Another fundamental necessary to everyone is a spiritual knowledge. I mean that everyone must try to build himself up like a fortress inside to meet the trials of life with calm. One needs something to fall back on in time of trouble or despair.

Students Ask for Specifics

Etiquette. In one of my classes the teacher gave us a duty of teaching of manners and how to carry oneself. I will never forget what she said about manners to eat at the table. That is needed by all. (Eighth Grade)

Work Experience. We want a world in which a man may work because work is safe and healthful. The youth needs work. During the past half century boys and girls have almost lost this privilege. The war has brought it back because labor is needed. Only through useful
work does a boy become a man and a
girl become a woman. (Eleventh
Grade)

*Visual Aids.* I would like to go to a
school where history could be taught
through a movie. (Eighth Grade)

*Commercial Work.* In order that a
student will be able to get a job and be
on his own after finishing school, there
should be commercial courses offered
in our high school. This would give the
student the opportunity to decide what
he wants to be his life's work by the
time he enters college.

By offering these courses in high
school, there would be less poverty-
stricken people. Many pupils who are
not financially able to attend college
would have the advantage of taking
such courses in high school. Then they
would have the opportunity of securing
different jobs which otherwise they would not
have been able to get. (High School)

*Community Contacts.* A step for-
ward in making our clubs of greater
importance to young high school stu-
dents would be to give them an oppor-
tunity to meet the people in our city
who have achieved success along the
line which the club is studying. Con-
versely, it would give the successful
people a chance to see what young
people are interested in and are doing.
(Eleventh Grade)

*Self-Direction.* Pupils should be given
an opportunity to discuss and to think
through the problems of education, and
of school life. (High School)

*Better Scheduling of Time.* If I had
more time I could get my arithmetic
right. (Sixth Grade)

I liked the teacher. She let us take as
long as we needed for lessons. (Sixth
Grade)

Longer periods make it better for the
student because the teacher can explain
things to you and help you with your
lessons. (Eighth Grade)

Students should be allowed adequate
time to complete any project. For ex-
ample, a girl preparing and serving a
meal in home economics could do bet-
ter work in a two-hour period than in a
one-hour period. (Ninth Grade)

*Study Habits and Skills.* I think the
reason I didn't receive better grades
wasn't that I didn't spend enough time
studying; but that I didn't know how
to study. Most students have the same
trouble about studying as I have had.
I suggest a class be formed to teach the
students how to study. (Eleventh
Grade)

*Equality.* These schools have discrimi-
nation and they would be better if they
practiced what they preached. I think
that the teachers should let the whites,
blacks, reds, browns, or yellows do the
same things and together, because after
all God made the white and the colored
people, too. (A child in a school where
thirty-seven language groups are repre-
sented.)

The teachers should be mixed because
the Negro teachers know as much as
the white, or more. (A Negro child in
a “mixed” school.)

*Youth Wants Sex Education*

One thing that I feel has been neg-
lected is sexual education. Too many
people of high school age are still in
the dark on this subject. If parents aren't
going to tell us, the schools should.

School living has helped me to read,
think, and reason carefully. It has
helped me to work accurately. School
living has prepared me for military life. It has taught me the rules of discipline. It has given me physical coordination. It has taught me to think fast in time of danger.

What do I need that I have not yet received? To come right out with it, I think I should receive a little about sex education. The reason I think we need this in high school is because we do not get enough or any from our parents. If they did teach sex education in high school there would not be any misunderstandings. Most of us get our information from the older folks (boys) and some of it is not true. Some people have the feeling that sex education is dirty. Well, if we could show that it is not, there would not be any misunderstandings.

Many colleges have realized the dire need for sex instruction, but the real place for handling this is in youth’s earlier life. It has perplexed me to think learned men and women have not seen this neglect.

The schools should give public health courses which involve sex problems and relations between boys and girls. The young people of today are more ready to attack such problems than our parents were at our age. We are moving faster in a world of war which seemed to have hardened us for lots of things.

Such courses should be mixed with boys and girls. I don’t know when or how to handle such classes so I will leave the problem to someone who knows something about it.

Vocational Guidance

There is one thing in which I feel my education was lacking. This is career guidance. Schools should explain the opportunities offered by each field and difficulties to be overcome to successfully enter any chosen vocation.

Also aptitude tests should be given with the results explained to the student and his chances in the different fields brought out. Too much is at stake in the education of American youth to let them choose their vocations and plan their courses of study in a hit-and-miss manner.

I think that we should have a variety of courses from which to choose. Not just literature and the like but subjects that will help you in your future career. I realize that these subjects are beneficial and I think we should have them, but some other courses along with them. Why not have typing and shorthand? There is such a demand for stenographers, why not start while in school?

The greatest things I feel I need for best adult development are: application of the subjects taught to vocations, experienced guidance to select a vocation, and last, but by no means least, a better knowledge of sex and health problems.

So many instructors invariably teach a subject very well to the students, and usually the students learn them. But what I am getting at is this: actually applying a subject learned to various vocations has never been given much attention.

If a teacher would aid me in my choice of vocation, by telling me what I am good in and what I am bad in, then I could have some idea of what real profession would be best for further study.

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