

We'd Like To Comment On Our Own Education.

Teacher and students here combine their comments in a thoughtful—and piquant—evaluation of their own education.

THE PENDULUM of education swings and swings and comes to rest never. Five years ago the study of foreign languages brought the weight almost to stagnation; right now those who would shrink the world, or those who would speak Russian, Chinese and Japanese have given the balance a violent push. Sputnik gave the pendulum a jerk that has swayed it violently for months—gyrating between the elite and the mass; between social adjustment and intellectual development; and between science and humanities. Which shall it be? Is there anyone besides the public who really knows? We in the schools find ourselves in the pit of uncertainty. Should the emphasis be on the French lesson or on the family? On science or on sane driving? On maternity or mathematics?

To see the truth one must turn to others for data. Then to what more frank contingent than present and past students can one go to get an unbiased analysis of a school's program and teaching? But be prepared to be brave, for these critics pull no punches. The encouraging assurance, however, is that one must go for the truth to those who have some in-

tellectual development. They will speak frankly concerning you, your teaching, other teachers, and others' teaching. Do not look for flattery; more likely they will give you the raw facts.

First, to understand a little better the educational background of the people who wrote this summary, we must look at the organization and curriculum of our school. For many years we have had a three division system for graduation: college preparatory (principally math, natural sciences, social sciences, language, and English); commercial (accounting, English, bookkeeping, secretarial courses); and general (only requirements are three years of English and one year of American history). The past two years, satellites and educational condemnation have sent us out into space education by adding a fourth track for the high academic potential people (HAP). These students we like to call our achievers since they were not chosen on IQ alone, but on achievement, interest, and teacher recommendation.

Accelerated Grouping

Our HAP classes are in math and English. We have accelerated grouping

in every subject. One boy enrolled in such classes during his senior year gives this estimate of our setup:

I think that my education, with notable exceptions, was organized along lines of intellectual development. Perhaps a few examples would help to clarify this point. In my freshman year, I had a class in beginning science. The teacher's methods of stimulating the all-male class were push-ups, back-alley sex, and the stories out of the "men's magazine." My sophomore biology class was one in which the teacher read the questions and answers the day before a test, and generally spoon-fed her students. At the same time, however, I was being asked to do research and present my ideas on such things as politics, government, American democracy, and the classics of American literature. The real intellectual pushes began in my junior year. My math teacher told us to go it alone and see how far we could get on our own steam. My history instructor asked her people to participate in discussions and research projects. In that class there were not the traditional "In what year was the War of 1812 fought?" questions. Instead the test questions would read, "Discuss some of the underlying causes of the War of 1812."

Our senior year mathematics teacher referred to trigonometry as a "snap course" and invited his students to enjoy mathematics through personal achievement.

In short my education at the high school level was an experience in using my intellect. Just like the physical muscles, exercise brought development. I was encouraged historically to find out why, not when; mathematically, why, not simply how; scientifically, how to reason, not to accept. I consider those why's and how's intellectual development. My fellow students were directed away from the class-taught social adjustment and toward development of their intellects. We never missed the classes in Bachelor Living and Dating I.

FRANCES F. FERIS is chairman, English Department, Natrona County High School, Casper, Wyoming.

We keep away from the "frills"; we weave no baskets nor do we learn to drop hankies gracefully. Our clubs are extensions of the curriculum—English, Latin, future professions of all sorts. This same boy, who now attends Notre Dame, gives this advice, "If I were in charge of the situation, I would completely purge the high schools of all sororities, fraternities and purely social clubs. (We have.) The schools of the nation should have a more important function than sponsoring parties and projects for the people who attend for social benefits."

One of our merit scholars has written this analysis of her education in our school:

In my own education in high school, no critic could be more unjust than the one who contends that intellectual development was sacrificed for social benefits. I know that probably a great part of the change in me during my high school years was due simply to the fact that I was growing up, but still I know that much of what I have accomplished and what I shall accomplish is the direct result of being in my particular high school, working under my speech coach, the annual sponsor, notably, and of various other teachers, most of whom I believe to be above average ability. In sophomore English, we wrote themes and research papers on a more advanced level than I have ever been called upon to write in college. We were expected to do more library research, to read a better level of periodicals, and to be more sure of our English usage all through high school than is expected of many college freshmen and sophomores. I am acquainted with a great deal of the best contemporary writing, because I was required to read it or to hear it read. Our high school offered, and, if we were headed for college, we were expected to take, courses in biology, chemistry, physics, advanced algebra, solid geometry, and trigonometry.

Most of the clubs sponsored by the school

were those in the intellectual field—National Forensic, National Honor, Latin, Future Teachers, Science, even chess; and there were generally scholastic requirements for membership. Never does a year pass that several of our seniors are not announced as having won some of the top scholarships of the nation; e.g., Harvard freshman scholarships, the Mills freshman scholarships, National Merit scholarships, General Motors awards, Ohio Oil, Elks, and others.

So far the estimates have come from people who were honestly complimentary. On the other hand, we have our critics and the criticism is mostly centered on mediocrity: bringing the best down to the average; finding hopelessness in a below-average class; discovering boredom by the accelerated caught in a below-average class. Pertinently writes one critic, a girl now in a mid-western university:

The average student is separated from the below-average. But even placing the pupils in three categories instead of two does not seem to solve the problem. Admittedly, they are categorized according to intellectual abilities. But the stigma of the "intellectual" is still placed on the highest group and nothing is done to relieve the stigma on the below-average student. The attitudes of the students themselves dictate that there is some shame in being either intelligent or below-average.

In this same vein writes a boy in Cal Tech:

To most students education consists of a textbook which is just as absolute as the black and white with which it is printed. When doubt and curiosity do manifest themselves, they cannot be well exploited because of the pressing necessity to cover outlined material with everyone. The answer to the problem? Obviously we cannot shorten our courses to make room for the *why*.

Perhaps the most depressing thing that

can be said is that the deeply motivated student, one that really has it "in him" will rise far above the average, both in mastery of materials presented and in the development of reasoning powers to put the information into use. More credit to these students, but it is a deplorable condition to make good students rise above our academic environment, rather than be stimulated by it.

Attitudes and Progress

After all is said and written, this high school of ours attempts to provide for intellectual advancement: classes for accelerated pupils for both juniors and seniors; segregation into homogeneous groups even in the sophomore year. At least 25 percent make use of such stimulation. We know that we have some positive results, for many of our people hold fellowships and scholarships throughout the United States; we are proud of the fact that many of our former graduates are working for advanced degrees in many universities and colleges. Seriously, however, we have a fight to attain intellectual development. There are forces and pressures against which we need to muster a continual attack.

First, we have to contend with a flood of pupils who are in attendance presumably to keep warm. They are here to make their dates, to cause a commotion which will direct attention to themselves. There is a constant fight to keep their shirts buttoned over their hairy bosoms, to keep their trousers above their iliums, to sign their absence excuses, and to keep their impertinence under control.

A second obstacle is that there is a black mark placed against the intellectually curious. One girl writes:

In my experience, I have found that the individual who came up with a new idea, who was able to think beyond his classmates, and sometimes beyond his teachers,

was stifled, hushed, and placed in the back of the room. . . . The emphasis in the American way of life is to get along with one's fellowmen. This is a lofty aim socially; but educationally, it only brings scorn upon the person who is not a "regular guy," who is not a member of the football team, who is not head cheerleader. Too often members of the athletic squads are held in higher esteem than the honor roll students. The leaders of the school are not the intellectuals capable of guided leadership; oftentimes it is the subnormally intelligent who have the virtue of "getting along with everyone" and being a pal to each and all. Too many of the potentially intellectual fear the sobriquet of "Brain."

There is yet another pressure fighting against anything intellectual. After all, these people are going through the period of adolescence. There is a natural desire to be popular—a desire perhaps too often fostered by the parents. Girls have to appear beautiful but dumb; the boys must be brawny but complacent about studies. In an English class not long ago a boy told us that one of his HAP girl friends made a practice of asking foolish questions about physics just to appear ignorant. Her motive—to keep boy friends. Football boys who receive academic honor pins enjoy the derision of their friends.

Finally, we should mention another powerful force which hinders learning. That is sheer laziness on the part of many, many pupils. Again this attitude has been fostered in the home, since parents want their children to be happy, to have everything they want. Many teachers fall into line with weak assignments and unearned grades; they fear to do otherwise. Children of this day tyrannize over too many people—use of the family car, allowances, wild game hunting in the West, formals and evening jackets, excuses to get back into school. When the

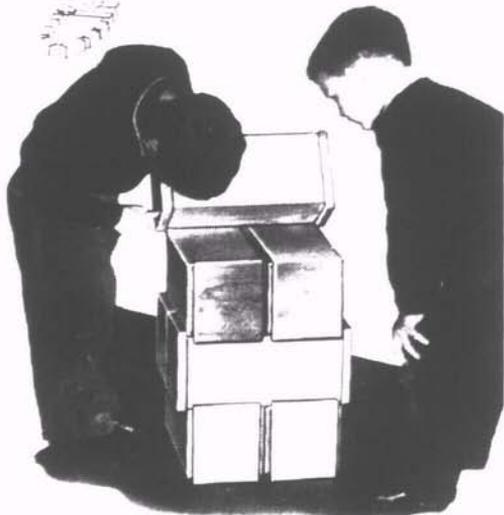
administration attempts to discipline children the pupils are rebellious, feeling imposed upon. Parents are too prone to blame the school for everything the child does wrong. Teachers are supposed to be baby sitters and social adjusters as well. One student stated the job this way, "Personally, I have nothing against social adjustment; but the adjustment of the individual to society is the business of the home, of the family. Particularly in this age we must use our schools to train the personnel we need."

In spite of all the hurdles—biological, parental, and social—the schools are making headway. In the past year the intellectual horses are feeling their oats; more and more our youngsters are being motivated by the idea of working for scholarships and for academic recognition; our student body president is less ashamed now of being a debater than he was two years ago; there are fewer lazy people infiltrating into our below-average classes; suspension of the ducktails and the leather-jacket series is meaning just that—clearing out and getting jobs; fewer windows are being broken in the homes of the administrators; more people are getting up the temerity to appear on the stage for honor pins at the end of grade periods.

There is hope ahead when we consider that one of our graduates who is to enter the teaching profession has the behind-thought and the forethought to make the following evaluation of the training which she received in our high school:

As a college senior planning to embark upon my own teaching career next February, I find myself becoming increasingly thankful that instigation of intellectual development was of primary importance to several of my high school instructors. To these middle-aged men and women—graduates of

(Continued on page 182)



when Joe teaches Tommy—you know they both learn

Let one child show another how to use these fascinating, *easy* interlocking blocks.

See them build, all by themselves—stores, trains, towers that STAY UP. Each block fits over the next, holds it. (The roof doesn't slide, the bridge doesn't slip.)

The blocks build quickly—give children the rich variety of play they need. Cooperative, independent play!

**Your Mor-Pla Blox
Are Guaranteed**

You get quality as dependable as the Mor-Pla interlock—beautiful Ponderosa pine—all glued construction. Basic #4 Unit (builds everything shown): twelve 6x6x12" hollow blocks, four 36" boards

\$30

f.o.b. Birmingham, Michigan

ORDER DIRECT

mor-pla jumbo-blox

Dept. L-12

R. H. Stone Products

Box 414, Detroit 31, Michigan

(Continued from page 164)

10. NIETZSCHE, FRIEDRICH. *Ecce Homo*. (The A. M. Ludovici translation.)

11. ROCK, B. R. *Children's Achievement: Today and Yesterday*. Austin: The Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, 1952.

12. RUSSELL, JOHN D., and CHARLES H. JUDD. *The American Educational System*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940. p. 50.

13. SMITH, MORTIMER. "How To Teach The California Child: Notes from The Never Never Land." *The Atlantic Monthly* 202:32-36, September 1958.

14. TIEGS, ERNEST W. "A Comparison of Pupil Achievement in The Basic Skills Before and After 1945." *Growing Points in Educational Research*. Washington, D. C.: The American Educational Research Association, NEA, 1949.

15. WRIGHTSTONE, J. WAYNE. *Class Organization for Instruction*. Washington, D. C.: The Department of Classroom Teachers and the American Educational Research Association, NEA, 1957. p. 4.

(Continued from page 168)

Liberal arts inclined teachers' colleges and universities into which modern theories of "life adjustment" type education had not yet invaded—I owe not only my thirst for knowledge but also my desire to be a teacher. . . . It has been my high school instructors who have shown me that I can be of most benefit to my students, my profession, and my country, not as a psychiatric adviser, but as an instructor whose enthusiasm for learning is contagious. And it is in these dedicated people that my own hopes for the future of American education lie, for I shudder to think of the inevitable degeneration of the minds of millions of American school children who are doomed to be subjected to the teaching methods which my generation has been instructed are the proper ones.

Upon this hopeful note we come to the end of our comments on our education. Ours, we think, is a good school providing adequate education for all who wish to benefit from it. We go even further in providing enrichment for the future leaders in every profession.

Copyright © 1958 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.