

"HEY, YOU!"

Hey, You!

Wha'cha want?

You. What are you doing in the hall?

Goin' to the bat'room.

Where's your pass?

I don't got none.

What's your name?

Joe. Joe Doe.

Why haven't you got a pass?

It was a 'mergency. Somebody had da pass.

What's your homeroom number?

Seven twelve.

Look. Get back to your class immediately. I'm sending a note to your homeroom teacher, telling him you were in the hall without a pass.

O.K., teach.

"Teach" encounters "you" in a large city school. Was his name really Joe Doe? Was his homeroom number really seven twelve? Did he really have a "mergency"?

What teacher has time to discover the answers? Thirty-five kids in a class, five classes a day, and these only a minor handful of the thousands that throng the corridors, fill the classrooms, and jam the sidewalks. Who are they? What are they doing? Why? Who knows? Who cares?

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OUR SOCIETY is haunted by a sense of despair arising from the lack of meaningful contact among people. Seventy years have passed since Durkheim, in his study of *Suicide*, used the word "anomic" to designate the rootlessness that characterizes the lives of many people in urbanized, industrialized, and bureaucratized societies.

Our greatest American playwrights, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee, have made this the central theme of their best works. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, fulfilling Durkheim's thesis, concludes a life dedicated to being "well-liked" by suicide; Blanche Dubois, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, dispossessed from her ancestral home and defeated in her efforts to establish meaningful relations with others, chooses the fantasy world of insanity; while the family and friends in *A Delicate Balance*, thrown together

at a time of crisis, are unable to be genuinely concerned with each other's fate. The authors of the novels *Catch-22*, *The Invisible Man*, and *Nobody Knows My Name* reiterate the same thesis. For all the car-clogged highways, the crowded multi-dwellings, and the jammed supermarkets, the people of modern America find life lonely and meaningless.

The Dominance of the Economic Model

America is dominated by its economy, producing more goods for more people at less cost per unit than any other society since man first gathered berries and lived in caves. In this activity the greatest good is efficiency. In the economists' model of the efficient society, humanity is ignored. People are like magnetic counters, attracted and repelled by wages and profits as the market communicates information concerning supply and demand. Love of place or pride in skill are irrelevant. In this world of quantities, human attributes and feelings are more often obstacles than aids.

Impersonal efficiency probably deserves its high place in the economic order. But to give it the same priority in the organization of moral enterprises endangers these institutions. Schools aim to develop good men for the good society. In their realm, efficiency is a minor virtue. Yet even here its influence is difficult to resist. Its pervasiveness is seen even in the writing of a man like James B. Conant, whose credentials as a civic-minded teacher-scholar are beyond reproach.

Conant, in prescribing a program for secondary schools in *The American*

High School Today,¹ puts the elimination of the small high school at the top of his list. The prospect of limited course offerings and only partially qualified teachers is so horrifying that he cannot even notice in passing the vital social role which the small school has played in the life of its community. Conant, concentrating on the efficient deployment of teachers and facilities, forgets that the small school satisfies human needs that the larger one often overlooks.

However, this paper is not addressed to the small school in the rural area, but to the mass school in the metropolis. These schools have never been troubled by the absence of pupils sufficient to justify the employment of specialists. Rather their story is one of trying to accommodate more children in buildings already filled beyond capacity. Today the typical New York City high school has in excess of 4000 pupils, some over 6000; while the typical junior high school has between 1400 and 1800 pupils. In these schools, specialists abound: principals and their assistants, department chairmen, guidance counselors, attendance officers, school-community co-ordinators, developmental reading teachers, remedial reading teachers and a host of specialists in subject matter.

Danger of Depersonalization

In such schools, interpersonal relations become more and more attenuated. The typical classroom teacher has from 150 to 200 different pupils per day. If he teaches music or health edu-

¹James B. Conant. *The American High School Today*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959.

cation, he probably has 600 different pupils per week. Pupils are reshuffled among the teachers each year, perhaps each semester. Who is who is often lost in the process.

The consequence is depersonalization. Marks, test scores and section numbers begin to replace living pupils. Incidents like the following occur: A mother, asked about her daughter, told me that for the first time in seven years of schooling her daughter had failed a subject. She said she had gone to see the guidance counselor about it. "Of course," she added, "the woman had never actually seen my daughter. She had her folder and knew she had failed, but she had never talked with her about it."

Such schools endanger the development of their pupils as persons. Children need institutions in which they can have meaningful relations with adults. They need to be known, to be prodded, praised and punished, laughed at and laughed with, greeted and watched over. Modern psychology has taught us that children can learn to love only by being loved. What makes us think that they can learn other human virtues from impersonal sources? City schools will have to be transformed from places where "Hey, you!" and "O.K., teach!" are typical exchanges into humane communities where people interact with knowledge, respect and affection.

School people have not been unmindful of this problem. Various organizational patterns have been tried. The self-contained classrooms of the elementary schools have always made close relationships between teachers and children possible. The primary failure

in human relations has been the secondary school. Here the greater need for specialists and the greater maturity of the youth have made constant reshuffling both necessary and possible.

To counteract the ensuing impersonalization, educators have established homerooms and core programs. However, few schools have been able to make homerooms anything more than places to listen to announcements, while core programs seem to have defects which have led to gradual elimination.

The Small-School-Within-a-School

A more radical reorganization must be tried. Small units within the setting of the large school must be created, each consisting of a limited group of pupils organized around a core of teachers. Six years ago, in designing an experiment to study the needs of beginning teachers in slum-area schools, four members of the Department of Education of Queens College formed such a unit.²

Three recent graduates of the college were selected to teach in the project. For a three-year period these three young teachers taught eighty-five youngsters four subjects, English, math, science, and social studies (the science teacher also taught math). In addition, they acted as homeroom teachers, remedial teachers, and general advisers to the group. Their daily schedules were entirely devoted to these children. The pupils spent two-thirds of their day with them. The teachers taught as a

² See Gertrude L. Downing et al. *The Preparation of Teachers for Schools in Culturally Deprived Neighborhoods*. (The BRIDGE Project.) Flushing, New York: Queens College of The City University of New York, 1965.

team under a coordinator, meeting regularly to share their knowledge and to study improved methods and materials.

The teachers reported many advantages in this novel organization. They felt their planning was much improved. They were pleased and stimulated to discover that these pupils could retain some learnings over the summer. They reported that the time needed to train pupils in classroom routines was substantially reduced after the first year. They felt that their adaptations to individual differences became better as time passed. In addition, their team responsibilities gave them opportunities to capitalize on the insights of their colleagues and to participate in administrative decisions, such as determining membership of class groups and individual pupil assignments.

To the observer a salient feature of the small-school-within-a-school was the depth of understanding which characterized, not only the relations of teachers to pupils, but also of pupil to pupil and of teacher to teacher. Stresses and strains were not eliminated, but they could not be attributed to the frustrations of impersonality. Anxiety among both groups was considerably decreased. Pupils, who were accustomed to a school which seemed to use every opportunity to expose their ignorance and inadequacy, began to lower their defenses.

In time the teachers were able to demonstrate, through deed and not just by word, that they wanted to help the pupils, not hurt them. The teachers themselves, sustained through difficult times by the coordinator, came to accept each other in spite of failures and weaknesses. The small-school-within-a-

school was a human institution, approving and disapproving, sometimes warm, sometimes harsh, but never impersonal, never remote.

Integrating Human Needs and Specialization

The small-school-within-a-school is a feasible pattern for the large city high school. It organizes teachers of subject matter in a way which encourages them to see children as total personalities. Though it focuses on the moral and emotional aspects of the children's development, it also capitalizes on the special competencies of the teachers. Of course, specialization is broadly defined and applied. Teachers teach the whole gamut of their subject area and the coordinator finds himself acting both as supervisor and guidance counselor. Such breadth is not impossible and it has great meaning for children. In this organization, teachers and coordinator learn to accept their responsibilities, not only as specialists, but more important, as genuine leaders of the young.

Reflection on the problems of the urbanized, industrialized and bureaucratized society of today highlights its need for "bite-size" institutions. The need in the school is even greater than in the society at large, for children need to be known and appreciated if they are to flourish. We must resist the tendency of our over-rationalized society to see the solution to every problem in division and specialization. Children are more than the sum of their parts. If we are to preserve their integrity, then schools must organize in ways that recognize integrity. The small-school-within-a-school is one effort to meet that challenge. ☞

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