

Do we have a backlash of training and educating totally removed from the schools?

Are Alternatives to Schooling Feasible?

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AS we near the quarter-century anniversary of the end of World War II, many of us still remember so vividly our varied experiences during that conflict that the entire episode seems truly to have occurred "only yesterday." It is suddenly shattering to be confronted by a deluge of cogent articles referring to the generation which fought that war as the "older generation."

Even more overwhelming are the poignant remarks detailing the causes for the "generation gap" and the implications that our "older generation"—i.e., anyone over thirty—has reached such a state of senility that we are no longer capable of recognizing the chaos we have created as our legacy for the young.

The Legacy According to Youth

Among enumerated items of this legacy are wars; privation for some, overwhelming abundance for others; hypocrisy; civil rights that in actuality are neither civil nor rights; distrust and diatribes; The Bomb; and an educational system enrolling larger num-

bers of students than any other in recorded history.

Paradoxically, we have also created an affluence never before dreamed of by the multitudes, a system of technology apparently defying all horizons, computers doing the work of so many human minds in such an infinitesimal amount of time that man can barely conceive of the operations, an ever shortening work week for the laborer and more time to spend before the television than our grandfathers could spend in their efforts to achieve a subsistence level of existence. And to emphasize the paradox even further, we now seem to have the greatest mass rejection of education in the midst of ever-increasing clamor for more years of schooling!

Whether the post-thirty generation is indeed responsible for such great confusion remains a moot question. Cognizant of the roles played by succeeding generations throughout historical millennia, we refute the charges by reiterating that we also inherited chaotic conditions but that we have nevertheless achieved the highest standard of

living, *et cetera*. Having observed the privations of the depression years and the horrors of war, we have seemingly grown callous to suffering and immune to humane considerations. Nevertheless, we have, ironically enough, produced a generation not only genuinely concerned about others but also sensitive to and vociferous about the inconsistencies of their world.

One of the greatest, most strongly attacked of these inconsistencies is the quality of education proffered the younger generation. In the Autumn 1967 issue of *The American Scholar*, W. Eugene Groves writes in "Who's Having the Identity Crisis: Businessmen or Students?":

The educational system is not adapting adequately to rapid social change and basic technological transitions. . . . Education too often is the teaching of subject matter rather than learning subjects that matter. . . . In educational institutions, students do not learn how to learn continually throughout life.

Strong words, these. But by no means an isolated indictment!

Measure of Defense

It has been almost a decade since ASCD provided *Learning More About Learning*,¹ more valuable to me than any other single statement about the problem. The issues scrutinized showed then—and still show—where we were *and where we are*. However, the writers in this publication did not stop at such a point: they indicated a means of salvation. Salvation can be achieved through no magic formula; it results

¹ Alexander Frazier, editor. *Learning More About Learning*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1959.

from honesty and hard work, perhaps suffering, founded in faith and love rather than egoistic cupidity.

For too long we have suffered from such cupidity. Our introspection has served only to provide us with reasons for "leaving undone that which we ought to have done." We have focused attention upon the Gross National Product with all its materialistic implications. And for this "mess of pottage" we have received bricks and mortar, physical comfort, doles and handouts, a weakened fiber now showing its rents in so many places that even the news media cannot seem to cover all the happenings. And now a backlash of training and educating totally removed from the institution designed for that very purpose!

What Are the Alternatives?

Are alternatives to schooling feasible today? Industry complains that incoming employees are not trained to deal with complex equipment; consequently it has two avenues of escape: firing or training. Both avenues are utilized. According to John Tebbel, in "People and Jobs," *Saturday Review*, December 30, 1967, last year ended with 3 million unemployed in this country, yet there was a manpower shortage.

Students revolt. The New Left—not to be confused with the *left* of the "older generation"—becomes a movement which provides an outlet for the expression of ideas, a necessary means of experiencing communication—perhaps I should say *merely experiencing*—a way to seek and find.

And what is being found? Sex—the age-old diversion but no longer an "open secret"; pot parties, trips, and,

concomitantly, realities which are not real—*phantasies*, we say (more so than our own?); Free Speech Movements and Students for Democratic Society; flowers, love, hippies. Underlying it all? A desperate desire to achieve *simpatico* and self-understanding. The “older generation” responds with *semper idem*.

Effects of Television

Adult education flourishes for a variety of reasons, some healthy, some otherwise, I suspect. Many adults, caught in the pinches of economic necessity, are driven into seeking new methods of earning a livelihood. Many others, dissatisfied with their present employment, seek change for the sake of change or for self-betterment. Still others recognize an even more basic need: self-satisfaction. They have not been taught “how to learn continually throughout life.” Then there are those who participate because “there is nothing better to do.” They are bored with *going* and *doing*, but even more bored with *staying* and facing the family, themselves, even television.

Even television? another of the omnipresent alternatives to schooling. An alternative so great that despite my desperate efforts to understand its influence, to achieve empathy with the pre-thirty generation, I must admit failure. As an adjunct to learning, television holds infinite possibilities (only, alas, too little employed today). Yet when I am told, with the candidness and integrity that only youth apparently knows how to use, that within the foreseeable future the living room or den will supplant the schoolroom because the child will acquire his education from a tube instead of teacher,

books, and associates—when I am told this, I cannot comprehend as fully as I desire.

Television, I am told further, has created an “experience-oriented” generation which absorbs its learning through the body, not through the mind. This takes on more intellectual meaning when it is explored through music. Having learned to dance to rhythmical patterns, I was bewildered for a long time by the gyrations to the accompaniment of seemingly discordant sounds from various musical instruments. Then I was told that the dancing results from what is literally *felt*. Having “felt” the music rise from my feet, ooze through all the pores of my body, and reach its throbbing climax in my head, I think I have achieved some degree of understanding of “learning through the body.” Perhaps this is what the “total assimilation” proponents have been trying to tell us for so many years. But the shell of “*status quoism*” remains solid and seemingly impenetrable.

Early Warnings About Experience

One of the all-time greats in the area of philosophy, so far as I am concerned, was John Dewey who proved that the teacher, as Kahlil Gibran put it, can give his followers only “his faith and his lovingness,” for he cannot give his understanding. Dewey told us many decades ago the same ideas that his Greek and Hebrew counterparts spoke a couple of millenia earlier: Provide an experience-oriented curriculum. And during the 1960’s youth tells us the same thing. Now, however, they provide their own addendum: *Or we’ll get it elsewhere.*

Some of John Dewey's detractors, "interpreters," and disciples have tried to alter his philosophy almost, if not entirely, beyond recognition. We are nearing the end of the fifty year gestation period, referred to by Mort. If it is not already too late, perhaps we can reexamine Dewey in light of current commentary and make schooling instead of its alternatives feasible in today's society.

Rays of Hope

In what I choose to term our "Lump and Label" age, what can we discern to provide the hope to go with faith and caritas? Space permits only the naming of a few, yet these appear as bright flashings casting the early morning rose-gold glow of the Rockies at my back door upon the crags and precipices of our educational system.

Educational television, already at use, promises possibilities of associative-feeling-learning. And as this method expands, perhaps rapid advances in the technological aspects of learning will be forced upon us if they do not automatically accrue.

The so-called paperback revolution, regrettably not as widespread as some of us would like to see, has nevertheless made gigantic strides during the past five or so years. If the growth of new distributors is any indication, there is more immediate promise here than with any other recent innovation.

Learning resource centers, under the impetus of Federal grants, are proving that the quest for knowledge among our student population is at an all-time high. This innovation also shows that most students, contrary to the beliefs of many "rule-teaching" instruc-

tors, are responsible citizens who can and do accept self-discipline.

Variable scheduling—whatever the form—promises relief for the bored, exhausted student as he can now develop his greatest interests while acquiring in less lethal doses the basic ideas of other fields requisite for a well-educated individual. At the same time he learns to manage his time as well as his physical resources. And through seminar and individual confrontation he learns how to share his ideas and examine those of others.

Learning concepts and principles provide today's youth with the rudiments of self-understanding and the ability to adjust to rapidly changing ideas and mores while at the same time maintaining their integrity. This type of instruction is reflected in many of our science laboratories and lecture rooms as well as a large number of mathematics classes.

In not so widespread use, although sufficiently so to offer great promise, is the structural approach to language learning. Also the recognition in many classrooms that literature reflects life and not necessarily an arbitrarily prescribed mechanical structure nor even a *moral* offers strong hope for young people grappling with the question: "What is life all about?"

These few relatively recent innovations indicate that a few educators are cognizant of the necessities for change. One wonders what the practitioners will do with the changes, but the important point is that one arc light added to another and another soon illuminate a dark street.

Alternatives? Ours . . . yet! ❧

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