

An Open Letter to Radicals, Rad and Radical

I AM aware that many of your discussions center on institutional destruction. You seem to agree that destruction is necessary, but you argue about method. The common focus is destruction rather than change. Time and frustration are discussed. The word "responsive" is used often, and the concept of violence is discussed in reality terms.

As a person most interested in schools, I want to suggest that you save your efforts, your discussion, and your bombs, because the school is moving rapidly toward self-destruction. To hasten the self-destruction process you might, however, actively support a few educational trends and thus help keep the schools on the "right" track.

A few trends that you might want to consider actively supporting are these:

1. *Support Corporation Performance Contracting.* Performance contracting is simply a training model based on the notion that if one can teach a pigeon to play a piano, surely a magnificent corporation can teach dumb kids how to read. A school system heavy on tenured teachers (and most are) will soon realize that it can force a contract with teachers just as well as it can spend money on corporations, and pretesting and post-testing will become the measure of teacher effectiveness.

Corporations will then turn their attention to teacher training and apply the same model. Soon most pigeons will be playing Mozart and most teachers will be reprogrammed to hand out marshmallows with

dignity and grace that defy description. Good readers will become fat and complacent and poor readers will become orators and politicians. The ultimate social gain is obvious.

2. *Support Teacher Negotiations.* It is the split between administrators and teachers that must become wider as inconsequential issues are debated and the power struggle for control over a dying institution saps time and energy.

Kids will soon discover that they have the right to negotiate with teachers; and as kids' welfare issues emerge and teachers become more and more uncomfortable, new teachers' welfare issues will arise. School eventually will hire staff fact-finders and arbitrators to help solve local disputes, and this will work until the fact-finders and arbitrators organize because they have rights and needs too!

The negotiations process must be supported, but teacher strikes must be discouraged because through teacher strikes, kids are given more time to learn things that are important to them.

3. *Support Public Funds for Public Schools Only.* As attempts fail to gain support for nonpublic schools, nonpublic schools will fold. This will reduce the school options available to kids. The added numbers of kids, coupled with the declining ability to finance public schools and the surplus of qualified student trainers, will certainly hasten the demise of the school. The master contract will maintain the status quo.

The inability of school people to cope

Radical Liberals, Moderate Radicals, Extremists

DALE V. ALAM *

with the growing numbers and the student unrest that will develop will have a lasting effect on the school. This effect will help to destroy the institution as we know it.

4. *Support State and National Assessment.* State and national assessment efforts are designed to destroy the basic purposes of school as espoused by teachers for years. Assessment programs clearly define the limits of what is really important in schools. Assessment programs attempt to measure carefully the things that kids don't want or need to know. The data should help produce new models and materials so that schools can do a better job of teaching things that kids don't want or need to know. Data from assessment programs can never show that kids know enough of what they don't want or need to know because of the very nature of the standardization process.

The result will be that low-score schools will emulate the high-score schools in an attempt to raise their scores, which simply can't happen because of the standardization process. The high-score schools obviously are doing it "right" and so will try to do the same thing harder. The best that can be hoped for in this model is that both groups get higher scores, which means that the test people will have to renorm the tests because the bell-shaped curve gets all skewed-up just like the schools are.

5. *Support Accountability.* Accountability is where everyone becomes accountable to someone else. It is really much easier and safer than being accountable to oneself. The

rules are clearly stated and success is clearly measured. Educators will still be arguing the "accountable to whom" question during the wake, but by this time it will be a critical issue because anyone who was accountable to someone will be blaming everyone to whom he was accountable.

Accountability will stifle progress and eventually everyone will know who else to blame.

The accountability concept has both feet in a stimulus-response model of change. It is a way of controlling all of those in your environment who are less than you by making them accountable to you. At the same time, the human not only relinquishes his autonomy by accepting the authority of the person on top of him, but he also fails to grow as a human being by not assuming responsibility for himself. School people seem to prefer to accept reality rather than create it.

Accountability will simply strengthen the monolithic structure of the school, and the democratic pretense so long discussed hopefully will arise after death.

6. *Support Higher Taxes for Schools.* It is apparent that school people cannot rethink the way in which funds are disbursed, which means that more funds than available will always be necessary to break even. As funds fail to be available, so will schools. School spending procedures are so static in the minds of school people that the most

* Dale V. Alam, Associate Professor of Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing

creative ventures involve cutting off at the priority bottom when money isn't available, and adding at the priority bottom when money is available. The priorities remain constant.

The other creative way to avoid reestablishing priorities is to cut all existing elements of the program by 20 percent. Through this method of financing schools, the budget reflects the 20 percent cut across the board and there is 20 percent less of everything from ditto paper to toilet paper. Administrators refer to this as an austerity budget, teachers call it impossible, but to the kids it is just school!

Surely the eulogy will include the assumption that perfection in schools was never reached because there simply was not enough money. It is interesting to speculate that whoever is sitting in the highest seat in the accountability hierarchy at the time of the death of the school will select the eulogy speaker and pay him a thousand dollars plus expenses for his 45-minute effort.

7. *Support Teacher Tenure.* This is really an essential in keeping the self-destruction model on the "right" track. Teacher tenure means that competent teachers cannot teach because incompetent teachers are already doing that. With the oversupply of teachers rapidly approaching in the schools, it means that few openings will be available and, with careful recruiting and selecting, school people can maintain the status quo right up to the death date.

Of course the word "incompetent" is institutionally defined, which means that incompetents will continue to recruit and select incompetents to perform and be rewarded for incompetent behavior. It has even been recorded that competent teachers have been fired by incompetents for exhibiting competent behavior. The young people who want to make a difference are told to find employment elsewhere because the schools are having enough trouble as it is.

Rest in Peace!

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