



Students consider problems of pollution in their community.

Very interestingly, once youngsters led the way in asserting their right to dress in a variety of fashions, adults caught onto a good thing. Now, the serious complaints about dress come primarily from the formerly all-powerful fashion designers who find that customers want to set their own fashion styles! A refreshing change—and we have the kids to thank for it in large measure.

Another major movement has been the establishment of “black history” and/or “black studies” courses (primarily in racially mixed communities). It is very clear that little attention was given to installation of ethnic studies programs or to revision of the WASP-sided view of U.S. history generally purveyed by schools when educators and the adult lay community were the sole decision makers.

Some adults have been prime movers in communications with and responding to the young. Dick Weber and Pat Bidol of Detroit have pioneered a unit of study and action on racism for high school students. It is an outstanding first effort.² The unit should be used in all-white communities as much as, if not more than, in racially mixed communities.

A number of communities now have a statement of student rights (or rights and responsibilities) which extends the concepts

² Pat Bidol and Richard Weber. “Developing New Perspectives on Race.” Detroit: New Detroit Incorporated, 1970. (211 West Fort Street, Detroit, Michigan 48226.)

of the U.S. Bill of Rights to include those persons less than 18 years of age. The NASSP has seen fit to publish an illuminating document along these lines entitled *The Reasonable Exercise of Authority*.³ Don't be misled by the stuffy title or the fact that it was written by the NASSP General Legal Counsel. It is worth reading if you are interested in student rights and, if generally followed, would produce helpful changes in school operation nationally.

There is a small increase in relevancy in topics studied in many schools. Black studies and ethnic studies are now found in the public schools of most larger cities and many suburban communities. A prime example of such programs is found in the Multi-Culture Institute of San Francisco (a private nonprofit school, partially supported by a Ford Foundation grant). The four racial/ethnic groups represented are Black, Chinese, Mexican American, and Jewish. Children spend a half-day with their own ethnic or racial group studying the culture of that group and the other half-day in mixed groups learning with and about each other. Some communities have initiated “alternative schools” for students who are turned off by traditional fare. Although these are often privately sponsored, some are publicly supported, such as Berkeley's storefront school operated by Herbert Kohl.

Another healthful sign is that the general involvement of students in basic decision making for schools is escalating. Many colleges and universities now include students on governance bodies. High school students have already actively agitated for change through noninstitutionalized channels (walk-outs, demonstrations). The result is that many administrators now either make student councils operate with some real power and responsibility or otherwise set up new processes for meaningful student involvement.

Some of these newer practices are more sophisticated means of manipulating students or are simply intended to “keep the lid

³ Robert L. Ackerly. *The Reasonable Exercise of Authority*. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1969.

on," but many are genuine changes in outlook among administrators and teaching staff concerning the right of students to participate in school-life decision making. For example, I was selected for my present position through a process which included three interviewing teams: parents, staff, and students in grades 6, 7, 8. The students asked the toughest and some of the most relevant questions!

There are other promising practices, in some schools, which focus on ecology, drug abuse, involvement of students in curriculum development, sex education, overpopulation, more relevant curriculum and teaching methods, and prevention of delinquency and crime. These are well reported in other publications, such as *Innovations in Secondary Education*,⁴ as well as in many periodicals and pamphlets published by ASCD, NASSP, DESP, the NEA itself, and others.

What More Can Schools Do?

My hunch is that school people can be more effective in helping resolve the problems of youth (and ultimately of the larger society) by working *with* them and by making some basic changes in our own attitudes, along these lines:

1. *Recognizing that students are citizens.*

Let's not confuse age of voting or the age of majority for specified legal purposes with being a citizen. Americans are citizens at birth—all of them. The consequences of this belief should include a basic premise that students already have all the rights that older people do and that the burden of proof is on us if we take away any of those rights because the students are "too immature." Do we actually "give" students rights or "allow" them? It may be that those rights have been theirs all along in the same sense that women were "allowed" to vote or teachers were "permitted" to organize and negotiate on their own behalf.

⁴ Glenys Unruh and William Alexander. *Innovations in Secondary Education*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970.



In some schools, students interview candidates for principal.

There is a general tendency to believe that *we* do not have enough rights to go with our responsibilities and *they* (administrators, teachers, students, parents, minorities, unions . . . take your choice) do not show enough responsibility to deserve the rights they have and/or want. I do not want to get hung up on the rights/responsibilities argument, but it seems to me that a *natural* consequence of exercising rights is assuming the responsibilities that go with them. You cannot avoid them even if you try.

2. *Realizing that the community in its entirety is the chief educative agency.*

The *community*, as a whole, shapes beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and behavior, and the schools are one aspect of that community. The *immediate* community (neighborhood, small town, areas of a large city) is most influential for most purposes, but the larger community (area of state, whole state, region, country, continent) is also significant. Parents and other community members are affected by schools and vice versa. The major consequences of this belief would lead to involvement of community with staff and students in decision making, in using the community and its problems as a source of curriculum content. The community becomes the location for learning centers, and community is also a major source of people for helping in the instructional process.

"Students are citizens. . . . They already have all the rights that older people do, and the burden of proof is on us if we take away any of those rights because students are 'immature.' "

3. Encouraging adults and youth to identify and act on values and goals.

Every age group in this country willingly admits to confusion about life-values and goals. How many among us can confidently say, "I know what I value in life, what my goals are, and how I plan to achieve them"? We have not learned to do this very well with ourselves as adults. Consequently, very little has been done to help students examine various value systems, identify their own values, and set up goals and action plans based upon them. This can be done, and very successfully, as evidenced by the work of Sid Simon and others.⁵ The consequence of this feeling could be to have activities in which students not only learn what their values and goals are but how to match their behavior and their espoused beliefs.

The national dichotomy between Americans' professed beliefs and their deeds, first reported by Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma* in the 1940's, is still very much in evidence today. This dichotomy could be reduced by values-learning programs. Such a resolution could, as a major side benefit, provide more reason for adults and youth to trust and believe in each other.

4. Eliminating labels and stereotyping.

Our society is badly hung up on labels, stereotyping, classifying, and sorting of all things, both living and nonliving. Part of this tendency is a misapplication of models derived from the fields of science and technology. The kind of sorting and classifying which scientists carried on in the 19th and early 20th century and the advent of assembly-line production thinking have carried over into schools with a vengeance. Sorting

⁵ See particularly: Sidney Simon, Louis Rath, and Merrill Harmin. *Values and Teaching*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969.

and labeling of students by use of marks, standardized tests, and grouping practices are just a few examples of activities, based on pseudoscientific findings, which do damage to teaching and learning.

5. Learning to derive pleasure from differences in values, goals, and life-styles.

A more careful examination of research findings would show each student (and each staff member and parent for that matter) to be in a class of *one*, by himself or herself, in matters which are most significant to schooling. As *U.S. News & World Report* concluded in an article on "The Unhappy Americans," what may be emerging is a "new pluralism" in our society. If so, we may yet have ". . . the possibility of salvaging from today's ferment a spirit of change and the acceptance of diversity, not uniformity, as the reality of existence."⁶

Another way of expressing that idea which appeals to me appeared in a *Saturday Review* essay on Horace Kallen's new book.⁷ "He [Kallen] sees democratic society as an orchestration of liberty . . . a covenant of coexistence 'of the different.' . . . We are, or should be, a union of the diverse. . . . society and its agencies are derivative from the power and free assent of its members."⁸

Consequences of this belief will be hard to live with in public schools, for they will significantly alter almost all aspects of school operation. We would be recognizing that being different is the nature of human life. We would also nurture it, cultivate it, prize it—even love those differences. Wouldn't that be great?! □

⁶ *U.S. News & World Report* 70 (16): 90-96; April 19, 1971.

⁷ Horace M. Kallen. *What I Believe and Why—Maybe: Essays for the Modern World*. Edited by A. J. Marrow. New York: Horizon Press Inc., 1971.

⁸ *Saturday Review* 54 (31): 19-20; July 31, 1971.

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