

Alternative to Violence?

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MUCH of the recent unrest and dissension on our college campuses has begun to appear in the secondary schools of the nation. It becomes imperative therefore that administrators and teachers view their attitudes and positions with concerned awareness. In some cases, the fervor has already reached the elementary school, though not yet to such a great extent.

What are the reasons for these outbreaks? Are there any measures which can be taken to abate them? What is the responsibility of the school administrators and teachers?

Robinson (1970) says that it is an understatement to affirm that students in our schools and colleges are dissatisfied with the quality of interaction available to them with their instructors and administrators. Likewise, the educational establishment is extremely dissatisfied with the students' mode of expression.

Taylor (1969) states that the thinking of the administrators is 5-10 years *behind* the thinking of the students. The students feel that schoolmen are not really informed on the issues facing our society; they are not aware of changes that are taking place, or that have already occurred. Some administrators even consider the discontented attitudes of students a personal threat! Students are only slightly regarded (if at all) in positions of decision making affecting the life of

the school. Also, the teachers and school leaders show little evidence of really trying to understand the protest.

Moreover, many school people have actually ignored the fermentation of society. Young people consider themselves the connection between society and the school, and they are questioning why the centers of learning do not even seem to be concerned with the vital social problems of our nation and the world. The schools, many of them believe, are simply not relevant.

Another major trouble spot is the Vietnam War. Our youth are hopelessly disillusioned by this disaster and feel that it is immoral for them to have to fight the wars of older people. This despair is mirrored in a study by Gergen and Gergen, in 1970, of the Vietnam War's impact on higher education, a study related by Marylou and John Kincaid (1971). Some of the results of that study were:

1. One-third of the students feel the war has caused them to put less emphasis on higher education.
2. Almost 30 percent of the students feel the war has caused them to lose respect for the administration of the school.
3. One out of five students has considered leaving the country because of the war.

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Reporting on a study by Mullaney in 1970, the Kincaids point out that, according to a Harris poll, 58 percent of the students believe that the United States has become a highly repressive society. If conditions were right, or warranted it, 79 percent of those responding would march in demonstrations; 49 percent would defy school authorities; 40 percent would participate in civil disobedience; 36 percent would be willing to go to jail; and 30 percent would be willing to violate the law.

Need for Honesty

Still another point of contention is the lack of forthrightness and honesty on the part of our instructional institutions in not teaching the whole truth about the early history of the United States. In our efforts to present only the "good side," we have been perpetrators of delusion.

Munnely (1971) discusses how violence or dissension of any sort (as it pertains to the early shaping of the heritage of the United States) has been omitted entirely from the school curriculum, thus depriving our children of a true understanding of the democratic tradition, which is built on individuals and groups and resulting conflicts and settlements. That it might cause anxiety or worry was suggested as a reason for overlooking the discord in the early beginnings of our country.

Munnely also tells us that our heritage was formed by bitter conflict. He holds that we cannot really teach children to understand the democratic process and background unless we take the risk of teaching about the conflict itself. Such an approach gives us a rich chance to use the skills of comparison, analysis, critical thinking, and inquiry.

Violence does, indeed, play a leading role in the lives of our children. The television set enraptures them for more hours a day than they spend in school. Incidents

of violence or discord, or incidents through which violence occurs, dominate the main part of the time they spend in viewing, according to Endsley and Osborn (1970).

Children are not, perhaps, as unfamiliar with violence or discord as we might think. In their homes they have relatives going to war, coming home from war, going on strike, or arguing around the dinner table over certain volatile issues. They themselves may have only recently differed with parents on the heated issue of when to go to bed.

How we have treated minority groups in our society *and* our schools has not gone without notice by our younger generation. A black teacher (Carter, 1970) in an Omaha, Nebraska, school sadly discovered that textbooks in the school presented only skeletal suggestions of famous black people, even failing to mention many of those, and every other black person mentioned in the book was picking cotton. When her children asked for an explanation, she told them that the white man had purposely left out most of the black man's contributions to the history of the United States, and had minimized those he decided to recognize. She did not stop there. She went on to explain that our country is based on freedom, and thus we have the right to fight against any injustices. Now, if this is true for whites, it is also true for blacks, or we are not a true democracy. It is also true for members of any other minority group in our country. Have we forgotten this?

According to Taylor, the students of our nation have gained a sophistication which it is imperative that we recognize. This sophistication is due to two main factors: (a) the mass media, an influence already mentioned in this paper, and (b) a new but well-established youth culture, in which the young people identify themselves more as persons of real worth. What does this say for our homes and our schools?

Administrators and teachers in public schools are now "on the point." We have not been successful in teaching our children to

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think for themselves, but they have learned in spite of us. If we thought we *were* teaching them to think for themselves, we might now say they are complying. One of our stated goals for many years has been to develop "independent thinkers." Students are thinking; they are articulate; they are critical; they have something to criticize. One of our present goals is to teach by using the inquiry method; our students are questioning. We talk of teaching toward individual differences; if we do not consider diverse points of view, we ignore individual differences. We must decide the position we will take as administrators and teachers—one of continued hypocrisy or one of honesty and realism.

What Schools Can Do

In order for our schools to become more relevant and to meet the needs of today's students, the following list of suggestions is made. These suggestions may be carried out in the form of workshops, seminars, small work-study groups, buzz sessions, classes in the school, and day-to-day conversations, involving students with administrators and teachers in every area.

1. Be informed as to the vital social issues of our day, staying mindful of the diverse feelings about race, the Vietnam War, environmental problems of pollution and overpopulation, and the total ecological picture.
2. Show concern for students and be willing to listen to their problems, which may mirror their needs.
3. Study and seek together the causes and solutions of their problems.
4. Include students in teacher-administration plans for the life of the school, considering the plans which *do* make a difference to students.
5. Choose textbooks together which present a truthful account of our country's past history, and also the issues of today offered in periodicals.
6. Be acquainted with informative and helpful literature.
7. Know legal trends concerning the rights

of students and know about effective student justice. Involve community leaders.

8. Understand the role of the curriculum.
9. Study together what constitutes a bona fide demand.
10. Study together with knowledgeable people (perhaps from the community) the psychology of violence—its causes and effects.
11. Study the causes and results of utter despair, which affects many people of our nation.
12. Study the histories of various minority groups in our nation, how they came here and how they live today.
13. Involve parents wherever possible, learn their ideas about what they would like to see going on in the school. This may help in the area of accountability. It may also help clear up misunderstandings.
14. Be aware of emergency procedures in coping with disturbances, demonstrations, and disorders.

The final point is not meant as a "scare tactic," but a preparatory measure. Actually, it is wise to consider this entire list of suggestions as preventive measures. This author hopes it does more than that; it should serve to bring students and administration closer together.

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