

Education for Democracy: 1976 and Beyond

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LIKE our political institutions, education is hopefully moving toward a broader democracy in which each person is free to develop his interests and abilities. The movement is apparent in the way teachers relate to groups of students; presumably there are less suppression and control for their own sake. Herein rests the enigma with which teachers are now faced: maintaining order consistent with democratic values. It appears that teachers want their classrooms to reflect the greater democratic political system within which they function, the inconsistency being their use of autocratic methods of control within a democratic society. Repression, isolation, humiliation, corporal punishment, etc., seem inconsistent in a society of equals. Only in an autocratic system can corporal punishment and other autocratic practices exist wherein one human being demonstrates his superiority over lesser human beings in order to maintain his status (Dreikurs, 1971).

If American schooling is to approximate an educational system consistent with democratic values in which all persons involved promote the mutual welfare as equals, then basic practices which defeat democracy and which are productive of ambiguity and hostility on the part of persons undergoing the schooling process must be eradicated.

By this time readers may be assuming

that the writer is a self-appointed "deschooling romantic." Be this as it may, the writer is convinced that some practices, particularly in the teacher-pupil relationship, have changed little since our early history, which was replete with autocratic European tradition. We have been busy democratizing our social relations in regard to race, sex, and age. Ironically, the very institution which Horace Mann intended would assist the democratic probability has the longest journey to traverse to become more democratic.

Antithesis of Democracy

The practice of enclosing children within four walls and by group instruction teaching them the three R's to promote a democracy of literate citizens needs examination today as we approach greater equality among persons in the classroom and in the larger society. The large-group control to facilitate learning may have produced literacy (this assumption in itself is questionable), but certainly it was the antithesis of democracy.

To make schools more commodious, we have improved buildings, furniture, and

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books, all as a direct result of our technological progress. Billions have been spent to make schools happy places where children could be trained for actively constructive democratic citizenship. Sadly, the children became adults who were not the actively constructive persons we wanted, but rather appeared to be passively constructive citizens who merely "hoped for the best" without becoming involved. Even more sadly, some children became actively destructive types who sought to destroy the entire system and its leaders. Perhaps most lamentable of all were the citizens who dropped out entirely to look critically and scathingly at the system from the vantage point of a subculture.

Obviously, to educate an actively constructive person, we must learn new methods of dealing with human beings in the schooling process. Clearly what are needed are democratizing, humanizing experiences to replace harsh, autocratic, group-oriented methods productive of anomie, estrangement, and alienation, if the process of schooling is to meet the needs of the democracy our forefathers envisioned in 1776.

Seemingly, for the past two centuries large-group instruction has been consistent with the ideas of elitist education. Even Henry Barnard and Horace Mann, intent upon establishing the "common school," thus perpetuating the cause of education for the masses, embraced methods that were spawned in an autocratic past to perpetuate despotic forms of government. It is the educator's challenge today to identify vestiges of despotism in education and to make the process of schooling a more faithful harbinger of the equality of human beings during the 2000's.

Educators and our society in general must realize that if it is difficult for a person to teach one other person, it is next to impossible for a person to teach groups of people (Rogers, 1969). The model of one knowing person poised before a group of

unknowing persons must be eradicated, or at least seriously questioned. Expediences such as individualization deal with symptoms, not causes. It appears that individualization, particularly by programs and technological devices, removes children from group instruction only to isolate them from meaningful interaction with significant persons in the classroom (Flanders, 1970). Plagued with the harshness and impersonal treatment of group instruction and the isolation of individualization, democracy in the classroom appears to be a double loser. The harsh control of group instruction and the more benevolent control inherent in individualization are equally devastating to persons striving to become self-actualized in a democracy.

Open and Therapeutic

It would appear that the expediency and efficiency of our culture have infiltrated areas of human relations, and the school in particular. Building human relationships defies the expediency and efficiency of our technology. Bureaucratic organization is productive of anomie and estrangement within the school where human beings find their "places" and function as automatons. Building a neat hierarchy of groups of persons—whether by age, grade, or ability level—functions to perpetuate a system of schooling, to ignore human relations, and to disable attempts to humanize and democratize (Taba, 1962).

Perhaps we have not yet envisioned the school of the 2000's which will be a beautifully open and therapeutic community of all persons interested in the facilitation of the potential of each person. It will be humanized, in that each person will no longer be subjected to the domination and alienation of large-group experiences, nor will people be estranged by an impersonalized system of individualization which degenerates to isolation.

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I am optimistic that our political democracy will lead us ultimately to democratization of all our institutions, including schools. All members of the educational establishment will adopt attitudes of openness toward persons in the greater educated community who can relate to children. Schools will thus become places where everyone interested in the welfare of anyone else will be welcome to contribute. The *open educational community* of the future will facilitate the infinite potential of every citizen.

Our democracy will not be complete or safe until education is democratized and humanized. Perhaps the prospect of peaceful coexistence abroad will give us time to get our "house in order." The world understands democracy politically, but it is beginning to question the depth to which it infiltrates our institutions. We must agree with our critics abroad who see our government as being no better than the extent to which it produces fully functioning, contributive, and active citizens.

Bricks, mortar, hardware, and technology alone will produce greater anomie; human being involvement in an atmosphere that is beautifully open, warm, and empathic will develop the idiosyncratic resources of each citizen. Hopefully the future of mankind will be marked by efforts to release human abilities regardless of provincial, ethnocentric, or idiographic circumstances.

The *open educational community* of the future appears to be less a prospect to be debated than an imperative to direct our planning in the area of educational reconstruction.

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