

What Are the Myths of Accountability?

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IN the rather lengthy debates regarding the accountability movement, the basic historical and mythological categories have been largely ignored. This paper is designed to explore the economic, social, political, and mythical structures of the American psyche that have led to the present state of American education. By myth, I do not refer to fairy tales, rather to the underlying structures of the fabric of the American psyche.

Myth one: The accountability movement arises out of the concern of the American people for efficiency. Raymond E. Callahan, in his book, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*,¹ points out that the efficiency movement in education began about 1900. It was a by-product of the efficiency studies in industry begun by Frederick Taylor. In his preface, Callahan writes:

What was unexpected was the extent, not

¹ Raymond E. Callahan. *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Seven "myths" of the accountability movement are stated and examined by this writer.

only of the power of the business-industrial groups, but of the strength of the business ideology in the American culture on the one hand and the extreme weakness and vulnerability of school men, especially school administrators, on the other.²

Myth two: Business is the paragon of efficiency. The American people, despite the reality, still believe in business efficiency. The myth states that all disciplines are rather slovenly, but business is efficient. Somehow, this business efficiency can solve the problems of man. During the Kennedy years, through the efforts of Robert McNamara, the idea of business efficiency was brought to the government. Leon Lessinger, Associate United States Commissioner of Education from 1961-1970, was largely influenced by

² *Ibid.*, Preface.

this movement in the national government.

Myth three: Behavior is more important than underlying motives. As Americans, we have overemphasized behavior without a true regard for underlying motivation. We are a practical-minded nation asking "Does it work?" and not "Why does it work?" Education is the product of a creative mind not simply practical skills.

Myth four: The accountability movement will solve our economic problems. The high cost of education has produced vast questions about the productivity of the schools. The accountability movement is certainly not a cheaper way to educate. In all recent studies, it was found that performance contracting was more costly than the "older" educational models.³

Myth five: The accountability movement will help solve our political crisis. Community control, more educated parents, and the growing alienation of Americans from large institutions have produced a general malaise with our public schools. The rhetoric of the accountability movement is seeking to regain the faith of the American public. While skill learning is important, we cannot forget the development of the whole person. While skill learning will aid in allowing minority groups to participate in the mainstream of American life, a revamping of the process of education is necessary.

Myth six: Technology will solve our educational problems. Technology is the creative product of a highly scientific society. It promises to solve the dilemmas of human society. Yet, technology has failed to produce the desired results.⁴ Moreover, technology is "turning off" a sizable portion of our students. Young people desire significant interaction with other human beings. They do not want to relate to TV screens, tape-recorders, or faceless computers. A person learns when

he sees significance in his learning, not when he is forced to memorize facts. Computers may teach, yet no one may listen. Human beings are capable of ripping buttons off machines and pulling out tubes and plugs. Technology can be chaotic and not creative.

Myth seven: The accountability movement will produce educated men. In a democratic society, the means of education are as important as the ends. We must take care to provide children and young people opportunities for meaningful experiences. Closed systems which provide limited objectives produce closed men. The task of education is to open one's mind to questioning the universe around him, and to provide establishment-made solutions.

The accountability movement in education is a part of a complex pattern of ideas and values that have moulded and shaped the American character. It is a movement which uses the rhetoric of myth and symbolism, yet in reality it is a return to a dictatorial and closed system of education. The purpose of education is to open the mind to a higher consciousness, to a new way of looking at the world. Accountability seeks to bind the human spirit to the system of today. All children must be given the opportunity to learn. Teachers must facilitate learning in their students and they must prepare opportunities for experiences in a logical and orderly manner. Teachers must utilize the newest tools of education, but in a free and creative way. The accountability movement, in my opinion, represents a dangerous alternative to contemporary education. It will lead, if given the opportunity, to the creation of a robot-like individual who can merely repeat and not understand. It will result in a pleasant, beautiful, harmonious, stimulus-response state freed of both pain and pleasure and liberated from both anxiety and creativity. The road to the future lies not in destroying the human mind but in raising the human spirit.

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³ Daniel J. Dieterich. "Performance Contracting: Pot of Gold or Pandora's Box." *Elementary English* 49: 4; April 1971.

⁴ *Ibid.*

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