



The Way I See It

DONALD O. STONE AND J. P. LUTZ

Kids Want to Be Productive, But We Have to Teach Them How

Since 1974, the Florida legislature has required each school district in the state to conduct a follow-up study of former students to determine how these graduates felt about their high school experiences. The responses for the 1981 graduates in Lee County, an urban district of 31,000 pupils in southwest Florida, are a reflection of the whole state. Those responses echo what previous high school graduates have been saying for the last seven years.

Our graduates report that their most beneficial school experiences were connected with course work; the least beneficial were extracurricular activities, including sports. They said they learned most when teachers maintained order in the classroom, provided well-planned learning objectives, set high standards, and provided a sequence of steps to ensure student success at a rapid rate. Some educators may be disappointed to learn that reducing class size was regarded as the *least* important of 13 suggested ways to improve instruction. Among the top five were: improve discipline, offer more required courses and more meaningful (job-oriented) electives, provide more counseling services, and create more opportunities to know teachers better.

Each year our graduates have expressed concern about curriculum design and the school environment. They do not see the school as an institution in need of dismantling or complete redesign. What they seek is a more nurturing atmosphere in which they can develop marketable skills and master the technical processes of getting, holding, and maintaining jobs.

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Nor do these graduates question the role of the school in preparing them for responsible adult roles. What they question is the effectiveness of the school in educating students. High on the list of priorities that graduates believe can make the schools more productive is, first, a more explicit and more directive curriculum, and, second, strictly enforced rules for appropriate conduct. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret these directives as a desire to constrain freedom or to establish a harsh or punitive school setting. We think, rather, that students are appealing for assistance in concentrating their personal resources on selecting winning numbers in a career lottery.

In our society, where the media can make all forms of human endeavor, including the illicit, appear romantic and fulfilling, how does one choose what to be as an adult? Can each of us be at the same time a successful attorney, an expert scuba diver, a model parent, a racing car driver, and a connoisseur of Flemish art? If we all possess the potential to capably work in many fields, how do we focus on those for which we are best suited, that our talents most nearly match? Adolescents themselves know that their age is one of uncertainty, self-doubt, and random exploration. No wonder they're saying, "Give us some direction!" □



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