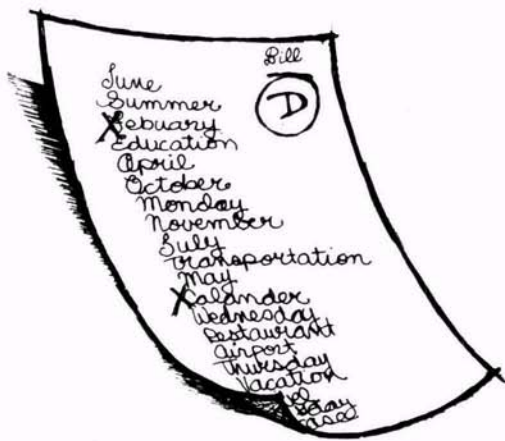


● Editorial

ROBERT R. LEEPER

HUMANIZING THE SCHOOL



OUR theme this year is "Humanizing the School." This choice of emphasis grows out of our concern for an apparent increase in depersonalization of the school as its size and service role expand.

Perhaps people in education generally regard the school as very humane. Certainly the school is a very human institution. It is invaded each day by very *human* human beings from the moment the staff arrives for its preschool workshops, institutes, seminars, or planning sessions. Later on, when the pupils come surging in through the doors, all of the promise and the problems, the hopes, the fears, the perils and the potentials of humanity are eminently present. Why, then, do we need to devote a year of issues to a study of "Humanizing the School"?

The Free Spirit

Documentation of a pressing need to consider this topic can be found in the records of the school itself. Why do so many young people drop out of school? Why do so many young people find difficulty in gaining college entrance? Why are so many young people unable to find employment that will give them a living wage and incentive to continue toward a life work in a field of useful and rewarding endeavor?

As we consider these questions, let us hear from the children and young people who are experiencing schooling today:

Bill, a fourth grader, looked glum. "How are things going at school?"

"Not good," he said. "I'm failing, and can't pass to the fifth grade. I made a D in Spelling today—missed two words."

"Missed two words," I exclaimed. "How could you make a D when you missed only two words? How many words did you have on the test?"

Bill was quick to answer. "We had twenty words and at our school you *do* make a D when you miss two words."

Inquiry showed that Bill was correct regarding the grading practices at his school. "Strict grading" was enforced by the school in an attempt to "hold the line in excellence" and "to elevate academic standards."

Was Bill inspired or stimulated to better effort by the school's emphasis on his failure with the two words rather than his accomplishment in spelling eighteen words correctly? Bill was feeling discouraged and defeated and upset toward school in general. One wonders whether a positive and humane approach, emphasizing his mastery of nine-tenths of the words, might have encouraged Bill to try again, thereby helping him to raise his own standards, and better to gauge his own efforts.

Consider the words of a high school student:

At our school, if you have a good average you have to take five subjects. Next year I'm taking French III, Geometry, English IV, World History and Typing II.

I was selected as a cheer leader and the counselor told me to drop Physical Education. That meant I had to take another subject. Most of us go to summer school and take Chemistry or History, because they're easier in the summer term. There are no projects or extra reading then. You just pass the examination. With five subjects in the winter, there's not time for extra work and class activities. You have to make high grades. So when you take the courses in the summer there's not much choice in the regular term.

I really don't want Typing II. I can already type, but there's nothing else for me to take. All the other half-credits are subjects for boys.

Is this an unusual situation? A superior pupil required to take whatever is available in the curriculum in order to have the required *five* subjects, regardless of her motivation, interests, needs, aptitudes, vocational or academic goals. Pressure for grades and the required number of credits may cause students to take courses when they are easier, thus missing the broader, more meaningful content of the subject.

Evidence of need to explore the topic of humaneness also can be seen both in the professional and the popular press. Editorials and feature stories are asking many questions about the schools and the instructional program—and about the effects of these on today's children and young people.

For example, reports of the recent White House Conference on Education indicate that the nation's schools, at least in the view of some of the speakers and participants, "were examined and found wanting in funds, in imagination and in willingness to change. . . ."¹

"Calling for schooling that would lead to 'new leaps' in creativity, President Johnson urged that the aim of education should be to 'energize the free spirit rather than to crush and dampen it.'"² We suggest that as we look at ways

¹ *The Washington Post*, July 22, 1965 p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

for "Humanizing the School," our goal may be the further enhancing of the free spirit of pupils and of those who work with them.

Issues for 1965-66

Our 1965-66 issues will emphasize in various ways the importance of making the years of schooling more humane and enriching for every child or young person.

The October issue is directed to the topic, "Curriculum vs. the Individual." Articles here examine how the influences and pressures related to the instructional program today may affect adversely the individual pupil, teacher, administrator, parent. We recognize that the school at all levels must become more complex as it meets a wider range of needs and as it helps in fulfilling more of the potentialities of pupils growing up in today's world. Our question is how we can help the individual live more fully and richly in the midst of a program that has such complexities.

"The Young Child—Today's Pawn?" will be the topic in November. This issue will attempt to assess the considerable attention now being centered upon the education of the young child and the pressures for innovations in nursery, kindergarten and primary school education.

The December issue will look at the "Junior High School: Transition in Chaos?" Contributors to this issue will examine the status of the junior high school as an arrangement for assisting development of adolescents and for facilitating the transition from elementary to high school.

In January the topic will be "Senior High School: To What Ends?" This issue will try to analyze some of the forces affecting the humaneness and the excellence of the senior high school, its staff, its pupils, its role and its future in our society and our world.

"Toward Self-Direction" will be viewed in the February issue. Articles will attempt to answer the central question of education in a democratic society: Can self-direction be fostered effectively in a school setting that encourages mutual involvement in learning experiences and freedom of choice and inquiry?

"When Media Serve People" will be treated in March. What happens in school when media are used to heighten the interactive, integrative and enrichment processes in the service of children, young people, teachers and others?

The April issue will look at the question, "Teacher—or Technician?" The approach will be to examine the teacher's role today, the objectives of teaching, of preservice and in-service education of teachers, and current means for assisting professionalization of teachers.

The year will close with a May examination of "Let's Rate Supervision." Assessed here will be the supervisor's role in making the school a more humane institution and the years of schooling a liberating and enabling as well as educative experience.

—ROBERT R. LEEPER, *Editor*, Educational Leadership

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