

OUTSIDE SOURCES AFFECT THE SCHOOL

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THE American public school is nearing the end of a decade during which many people have progressively shown less regard for human values, less concern for the development of the individual pupil as a person, less concern for moral values and for the relationship between school practice and behavioral goals. As an institution, the school has become more impersonal and rigid.

The responsibility for this can, to a great extent, be placed upon influences outside the schools. However, there were those inside the schools who encouraged the trend, sometimes out of confusion resulting from a barrage of criticism, sometimes because they welcomed the change or because it was found professionally expedient to go along.

My own conviction is that the dehumanizing of the schools is damaging many children and youth and will lead either to a counterbalancing public protest or to an eventual alienation of the public school from the youth it is supposed to serve.

When one speaks of "outside" influences that affect the schools, it is necessary to make a distinction. The American public school, as a social institution, does not exist nor has it ever existed in isolation from the society of which it is a part. It is affected by social change and, in turn, it to some degree effects social change. Generally speaking, however, changes to which schools have had to respond in the past were not aimed directly or even primarily toward the school itself. For example, an aroused public conscience brought about the abolition of child labor, which, in turn, was followed by compulsory attendance legislation. These changes had a profound effect on the schools. Successive waves of immigration during the second half of the 19th century had significant impact. The passing of the isolated one-room school and school consolidation followed the invention of motor transportation and construction of modern roads. The Great Depression brought to the secondary schools youth who otherwise would not have been there and forced the schools to consider what had

to be done if the needs of all American youth were to be met. The number of illustrations could be multiplied.

Such changes represented an influence to which schools had to accommodate if they were to continue as a social institution. However, this kind of influence was not brought to bear consciously or directly by individuals or groups for the expressed purpose of changing the nature of the school. As change took place in response to such influences it was accomplished for the most part by teachers, administrators, and other educational leaders with the help of able and dedicated persons and groups from many walks of life.

In the Humane Tradition

Among the conclusions in the report of the 1956 White House Conference on Education were these:

The order given by the American people to the schools is grand in its simplicity: in addition to intellectual achievement (the schools should) foster morality, happiness and any useful ability. The talent of each child is to be sought out and developed to the fullest. . . . This new ideal for the schools is a natural development in this country: It recognizes the paramount importance of the individual in a free society. . . . This great new goal for our schools is unanimously approved.

We were warned that although the schools will teach skills currently needed by the Nation, this should never be done at the expense of the individual.

Such statements were an extension of the historical purposes that guided the schools.

The 1956 White House Conference on Education Report marked a water-

shed. It is one of the last significant statements on educational purpose in the humane tradition. Subsequently, beginning in 1957 and thereafter, a new kind of influence was brought to bear. This influence represented a direct effort by a relatively few individuals and by well-financed organizations outside the schools to exert pressures on the schools to change their philosophy, their concept of function and purpose and to change attitudes about the curriculum and about pupils.

The fear generated by Russian space achievements in 1957 in the beginning provided an excuse if not a valid reason for the new proposals. The mass media provided instant communication of criticism and projected "reforms." By and large, neither school personnel, parents or other citizens were involved in formulating the proposals, nor were they given the opportunity to study and appraise them.

Trends Since 1957

The period from 1957 to the present may be characterized as follows:

1. The schools should concentrate on the education of the academically elite, who, it was argued, would be the future leaders of the nation. Along with this theory was the charge that schools were "soft" and should become "tough." The sole concern of schools should be "intellectual" and the intellectual program should be "rigorous."

To support these premises, American schools were compared unfavorably, although usually superficially, with European schools and with those of the Soviet Union. Arguments were advanced for separate schools for so-called gifted pupils.

2. The comprehensive secondary school was also defended. But the efforts of those who administered and taught in the schools, along with those who taught in schools of education, were disparaged.

3. Professional organizations of teachers and administrators, along with organizations of school boards and the Parent-Teacher Associations were given the unflattering name of "The Establishment" or were referred to as "the public school crowd."

4. Teacher education was criticized and certification and licensing procedures attacked. A widely read book on the American high school concentrated its recommendations largely on the number of subjects to be required or offered and on the establishment of a proposed hierarchy of subject matter values.

5. Some foundations provided large sums to advance points of view such as those mentioned above. Some departed from traditional practice of supporting objective research and promoted the ideas of foundation staff members in efforts to bring about change which the latter considered to be necessary or desirable.

6. The "scholars," often supported by government grants, began to rewrite the curriculum.

7. Free lance writers took up the subject of the schools and turned out books and magazine articles of the "What's Wrong With" and the "Why Johnny Can't" variety. The general impression created was that the schools and those who worked in them had failed miserably.

It is not the intent here to defend

all that was going on in the schools prior to 1957. Neither is it the intent to suggest that those who made proposals or criticized had no right to do so. It is the intent to say that many major trends in the *last eight years have been unfortunate and that these trends have been largely stimulated by forces outside of the schools.*

These forces should be clearly identified with the failure of the schools to help each human being realize his potential and his aspirations. The proponents should be faced with the psychosocial ills that have become part of the statistics now so familiar to educators across the nation. The parents and other citizens of our nation should understand that these are the forces that seek to extend and reinforce their influence on American Education. The danger is great, for at a time when more and more curriculum leaders and parents are recognizing the need to humanize the schools these forces present themselves as the positive alternative. They are not the positive alternative.

They are the people who propose organizational patterns which widen the gaps between the decision makers and the boys and girls. They are the ones who seek to lead but who have no public mandate to lead. They represent themselves, not the parents, teachers and others who are close to the children and youth that the schools are supposed to serve. Their efforts result in increased rigidity and not in programs which release the potential of human beings.

These are the forces that found the cold war environment, with its focus on national goals, favorable to their purposes. These are the forces which

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view the individual as a national resource to be tested, graded and guided into predetermined occupations dictated by national needs. These forces do not seek to implement the aspirations of the people but only to impose their solutions on them.

Fred M. Hechinger, *New York Times* Education Editor, who often appears to be sympathetic to these forces, admitted as much when he declared, in the *New York Times* of July 22, 1965:

The most striking fact of the recent White House Conference on Education was the changing of the guard of educational leadership. The representatives of educational organizations who used to symbolize the Establishment seemed displaced by men and women who represent *themselves* and their *own ideas*.

Despite the increased use of tranquilizers among elementary and second-

ary school children and youth, despite the pediatricians' warnings about the increased number of youth being treated for psychosomatic illness, despite the increase in the number of students failing school subjects, despite the number of suicides among our youth and despite the increased frequency of other psychosocial problems among our school age population, the forces responsible for many of these pressures seek to reinforce and extend their leadership.

We hear more and more about national assessment, new "nonprofit" agencies, increased Federal control, and national policy conferences which exclude those who are closest to the children and youth of our nation.

As national goals are allowed to submerge the individual; as technological and organizational educational schemes become ends in themselves; as education becomes more centralized at the Federal level; as national assessment testing becomes accepted as the prime measure of educational outcomes; as curriculum people are restricted to the implementation of national programs; then teaching will be reduced to telling with the best tellers passing on what has been discovered and organized into artificial content structures.

Evaluation will be a simple matter of measuring quantitatively the retention per pupil. Learning will be reduced to memorization through stimulus response exercises. Questioning will be the prerogative of the teacher and the machine. Values, thinking, growing and other important dimensions of learning will become peripheral and many human beings will continue to fall by the wayside.

Recommitment

There are many alternative directions of growth which the schools may take, alternatives which respect rather than negate human values. These alternatives increase rather than restrict the responsibility of learners and teachers for mutually planning what is to be learned and how it is to be learned. They provide for flexibility of method and for more rather than less recognition of individual differences. They encourage the development of power in complex thinking rather than putting primary stress on simple recall.

If the schools move in new directions, report cards as presently conceived will be inadequate as a means of describing the growth of each child in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding as we evaluate in many ways. Classrooms

will be filled with things to paint on, speak into, look through, read, write on, listen to, touch and hold onto, compare, value and think about and on and on. Learning will take place in many ways and teachers will make rich uses of such materials in providing experiences of high quality. Students will explore and discover as well as develop skills. In this environment teachers will make contact with children and with the community.

The alternative proposed here is rooted in our democratic ideal. It places great faith in the worth and dignity of every human being. In my judgment as the schools are guided by the people who are committed to this ideal the individual will find fulfillment and the nation will prosper.

Our task is great. We must provide the leadership that is needed today.

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