

THE FRANCHISED SCHOOL AND THE
EDUCATIONAL SUPERMARKET

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tation Department at Syracuse University.

The Educational Enterprise endures
its problem and critics with such
stiff-necked forbearance, almost
stoical, that one might be tempted to
think for a fleeting moment that theirs
is indifference to the slings and
arrows, that this Establishment easily
suffers the unsufferable. We feel
this is hardly the situation.

In spite of their growing hordes,
centrality to this civilizations'
vision of itself, affluence, and moral
rectitude, there is both ample

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documentation and fair general agreement that educators -- in the broadest as well as narrowest context the term connotes -- are a sensitive lot, beset with doubt and anxieties. They are neither indifferent to the "Muck-rakers" in or out of the Establishment nor happy with the presumed uplifting influence of open and honest debate. "Puzzlement" and "Hurt" are more accurate words to portray the feelings of educators when confronted with issues or, for that matter, unrestricted choices.

Why? Better question now: Could it be any other way? And, given the circumstances of our teachers and their training, given the world as it is and what it was and this moment as antecedent of tomorrow, one might answer that it could not be any other way and the future portends yesterday.

Now, time for the revealing first question: Why? The Educational Enterprise is no more capable of dealing with revisionism than any other Monolith, be it World Communist or I.B.M. That is, embedded in any Monolith are possibilities for flexibility and change (else it crumbles), but only such freedom as it is contained within the parameters of rigidly enforced rules, regulations, customs, and values.

In one sense, not only historians, but all thinkers, struggle to describe the past so as to better permit a different future, one that will not be little more than a larger mass of the past. In another sense, we envision a future to better comprehend the past and the present. For example, man invents a machine that thinks, to teach him how he thinks. Stated one more way, all of life is the product of not only all that was life but all that will be life. Consequently, at worst, the Educational Monolith becomes impossible to comprehend and,
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at best, it is impossible to comprehend, but but unequally so. That is, at our best, the effort may be instructive; there is profit to be earned in the honest process of an illuminating failure. And, in this complex difficult world, that which is personally valuable, that which one does for himself to save himself, is worthwhile. Therefore, there is no great shortage of scholars and practitioners, both insiders and outsiders, who study the Educational Monolith -- as we studied it, and as we have learned something of ourselves and our education.

Not far from the surface of every educational argument is that single block of ideological stone, that massive solid, uniform, no-option, no-alternative slot machine of one system. It's found in the children's classrooms because their teacher's teachers found it in theirs. Within the flexibility of a system that encourages almost infinite varieties of methods and curricula, that fosters open schools contiguous to traditional schools, and both free schools and special schools, is an oppressive tradition that demands allegiance to but not create because you are what you are and what you must certainly become, children cannot change remarkable as, and because, their teachers cannot. "Let us seek the best way for all people because one individual is incapable of finding it for himself. Let us create together and, thus, avoid my confrontation with myself as creator as well as user, mover as well as follower, the responsible being as well as the responsibility."

Hence, saneness of mind is the mortal that binds and strengthens the monolith. In the elementary classroom, the child who remembers well scores well; and in the college, the student who consumes and implements is the progenitor of the Mother of the Year or the Teacher of the Year.

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We train technicians in our colleges who, from the beginning and to the present, seek competency. We train for technical skills and we train for people to live apart from those who appear different or think differently or whose metaphors are different. That is, our technical consumer education promotes an invariance of life and spirit, both by the influence of the technology on man and by man's subsequent behavior as a consuming experience-bound being. Consequently, the apparent and, in a sense, real, flexibility and innovation in our schools! We advertise segregated schools, open schools, free schools, and ungraded schools in the Educational Supermarket for the same reasons others advertise the Chevrolet, Keds, and popsicles. We believe we have the best product or, at the very least, we wish to convince the consumer that -- all things being equal -- our products offer the most value. As a result, and resulting from, our schools have become franchises, duplicative in the same way General Motors and Howard Johnson are duplicative, strengthened by our teachers' colleges who have always been Educational Supermarkets -- "You don't have to (we know you can't really) think independently and create, see all the goodies we offer, choose within this wide array, consume to your satiation level, beyond if you wish, buy, buy, but don't create, don't struggle to understand the process from the product, don't go beyond the boundaries of the marketplace, be different, but don't be different from any of the rest of us, be a part of this wonderful educational slot machine world."

What does humanity receive for its educational investment? Without doubt, most children learn to read and write, some progress far beyond their teacher's hopes, some far beyond their teachers. It isn't that consumerism prevents learning; merely, it interferes with it. That is, to the degree that teachers do not discourage abstract behavior and classroom variance, learning (changing)

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must be given a better chance to occur. To the degree that teachers - elementary and university teachers alike - impose a standard curriculum, method, school organization, even content (possibly, especially content), the Educational Monolith will thrive.

What we need more of are: child and teacher independence (thus fostering their interdependence), learning toward greater generalizations, inductive models, options, and the maximization of heterogeneous groupings of people. What we need less of are mandated curricula, lonely teachers and children, segregated classes and schools, for whatever the reasons, consumerism to the discouragement of creativeness and program consolidation.

In education, the Monolith is not the teachers' colleges, or the segregated class, or even the pedantic curriculum. The Monolith is created and held together from the rubble of destroyed options, from the absence of not so much the bricks and structures of alternative educational designs (for these too have been known to victimize those who hold minority views), but alternative thinking and values.

The Franchised School and the Educational Supermarket, the fulcrum of the Monolith, are the enemies of those who would seek an education for themselves, not because of their wickedness but because they represent a limited view of human potential, and what the world can become, and that the world is each man, not multiplied but singular, unique and valuable; and, that each man can create to help himself.

AND THUS, TO HELP ALL PEOPLE.

In essence, we have suggested that educational models be studied from historical rather than prescriptive perspectives. That is curriculum, methods, media, and school organization might be studied and understood in the context of what was accomplished rather than what must be attempted.

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This strategy seems less restrictive and promises greater discovery and innovation than the traditional prescriptive "best method" strategy. The literature in pedagogy and psychology confirms this position, i.e., there is no consistent significant source of independent (treatment) variation obtaining from special methods, curricula, strategies, or administrative organizations. Further, there exists the belief here, and elsewhere, that the process of creating educational environments contributes more to the aforementioned independent variation than the environments themselves, especially when these are artificially contrived from Educational Supermarkets. There may be risks to our approach, but there are pay-offs too, from taking risks. And, if we don't take such risks, we may, albeit unwittingly, increase the prevalence of aliens in this Promised Land.