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The Future of Our Educational Institutions

by

Mortimer J. Adler

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Part 3 of 3

3. First, however, permit me to differentiate three different types of instruction, all of which are called teaching; and three different types of instructors, all of whom are called teachers.
 - a. One kind of teacher performs the function of imparting knowledge or information, either by monitoring its acquisition through the reading of text-books, through drills and other exercises, or by some form of teaching by telling, that is, lecturing.
 - b. A second performs the function of developing intellectual skills of all sorts by methods akin to coaching in the sphere of bodily or athletic skills.
 - (1) Such teaching by coaching is clearly different from teaching by monitoring or by lecturing.
 - (2) It involves the supervision of performance, almost on a one-to-one basis, in which the correct action is repeatedly exercised and inadequate or faulty performances are corrected and caused to be eliminated.
 - c. The third performs the function of stimulating the imagination and the intellect by awakening its creative and inquisitive powers by questioning and by discussion, in order to produce better appreciation of what is experienced. Such teaching by questioning and discussion is as different from monitoring and lecturing as the latter is different from coaching.
 - d. Yet all three are called teaching, and all three types of instructors are called teachers. That conceals the true state of affairs as much as if we were to call all the members of a surgical team surgeons, instead of calling some surgical nurses, some surgical anesthetists, and some surgical operators.
 - e. The differentiation of the three kinds of instruction and of instructors calls for setting up in our schools instructional teams, analogous to the surgical teams in our hospitals.
4. It will be recognized at once that these three types of instruction accord with three different ways in which the human mind can be improved.
 - a. The mind can be improved by the acquisition of information and organized knowledge, with or without a reasonable understanding of what is known. This improvement is produced by the didactic instruction that uses text-books, supervises drills and exercises, tests accomplishment, and teaches by telling (with or without discussion after lectures have been heard).
 - b. The mind can be improved by the acquisition of intellectual skills—all the skills of learning and of communicating. This improvement is produced by kind of instruction that we have called coaching.
 - c. The mind can be improved by an increase in the understanding of what it knows and by an increase in its appreciation of what it experiences. This

improvement is produced by the kind of instruction that is teaching by questioning and discussion—Socratic, maieutic, or interrogative teaching that lifts the mind up from understanding less to understanding more.

It should be added here that if lecturing is followed by ample time for discussion of the content of the lecture, by questioning on the part of the hearers of the lecture, it adds a dialectical or maieutic dimension to what would otherwise be merely didactic instruction.

5. Finally, let me present an all-too-brief answer to the question of how and where the instructional personnel should be trained to become competent executors of the curriculum proposed for basic schooling.
 - a. The negative answer is clear: *not* as they are now trained and *not* trained in teachers colleges, normal schools, or schools of education.
 - b. The positive answer involves the following points:
 - (1) The instructional staff should themselves have the same kind of basic schooling that is envisaged by the proposed curriculum.
 - (2) They should have much more than that: their education should cover the same areas of knowledge, the whole range of intellectual skills, and the same works of human art included in the curriculum of basic schooling, but at a much higher level, and at much greater depth.
 - (3) This heightened and deepened education of the instructional personnel should be accomplished in advanced education—for all at the college level and for some at the university level.
 - (a) All should be certified by a Master of Arts degree that signifies their competence in the liberal arts of which their students will become bachelors on the completion of basic schooling. This M.A. should not involve the writing of a thesis.
 - (b) Some should be certified by our taking what is now an honorary degree—the L. H. D.—and making it an earned degree. They should be Doctors of Humane Letters.
 - (4) None should be certified by the B. S. in Education, as most of them now are.
 - (5) Above all, none should be certified by the Ph.D. as it is currently awarded for competence in highly specialized scholarship or research.
 - (a) The Ph. D. should be retained as a certification for college teachers, with specialized competence as instructors in one or another of the elective specialized majors.

- (b) The L.H.D. should be adopted as certification of advanced liberal and general humanistic education, as preparation for teaching at the level of basic schooling. This is the only way that the requisite teaching personnel can be properly trained.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

- A. I said at the beginning that I would save for the end some suggestions concerning the solution of the critical problem that would confront us if we were to try to enact the reforms proposed and to substitute the proposed curriculum for the various courses of study now operative in the first twelve years of schooling.
- B. The problem can be stated very simply;
1. The curriculum proposed is undifferentiated in its aims; it is the same for the whole school population, with no elective choices except in the matter of foreign languages.
 2. But the school population involves a wide range of individual differences—differences in educational aptitude, differences in pre-school nurturing, differences in home backgrounds, differences in social, economic, and ethnic influences, and so on.
 3. The differences exist whether they are due to innate inequalities, nurtural inequalities, or unequally favorable environments.
 4. To state the problem as simply as possible, let us take the normal distribution curve and divide it into three segments—a lower third, a middle third, and an upper third—where the lower third is least amenable to the kind of instruction envisaged, where the middle third is moderately amenable to it, and the upper third is well-adapted to it, whether by their unequal innate endowments or by equally significant inequalities due to nurtural or environmental factors.
 5. The question to be answered is this: How can a curriculum undifferentiated in its aims, the same for all, with no elective choices except with respect to foreign languages, be administered so that it *succeeds equally well* with children of the lower third, the middle third, and the upper third of the normal distribution curve?
- C. The answer to that question turns on our understanding of the phrase “succeeds equally well.”
1. It succeeds equally well with all three sectors of the curve if it achieves for each sector a result that is proportionate to the ability of that sector.
 - a. A half pint container cannot hold as much liquid as a quart or gallon container, but each is equally full, in the proportional sense of equality, if each is filled to the brim.

- b. Two children, widely apart in their capacities for learning, have their capacities equally realized or fulfilled if the capacity of each is realized or fulfilled to the utmost.
 - 2. In other words, though the curriculum is the same in its objectives and its content for all, all are not carried by it to the same quantitative goal, but only to the same qualitative goal.
 - a. One child may not end up knowing as much, understanding as much, or being as skilled as another.
 - b. But each should end up knowing as much, understanding as much, and being as skilled as he or she is able to be.
 - 3. Children of different initial capacity, whatever the causes of that difference, can become equally well educated at the level of basic schooling if each is educated up to his or her capacity.
- D. The solution of this difficult problem involves one other innovation of the utmost importance. It may take years to work it out in detail.
 - 1. The curriculum proposed is undifferentiated in its objectives for all and undifferentiated in its content.
 - 2. But that does not mean that it must also be undifferentiated in the methods, materials, and means employed in giving instruction to the three segments of the normal distribution curve.
 - a. For example, if books are to be read in order to learn how to read, the books chosen for this purpose need not be the same books for all three sectors.
 - b. They should be books of analagous difficulty. To learn how to read one must tackle books over one's head.
 - (1) One would not set the bar for chinning at the same height for all students in a gymnasium.
 - (2) So one must select books of graded difficulty, the most difficult for the upper third, books of moderate difficulty for the middle third, and the least difficult books for the lower third.
 - (3) For each third, the books must be of a difficulty proportionate to the ability of that third—always over the heads of those learning how to read, so that they can stretch, but not so far over their heads that they cannot get hold at all.
 - 1. The principle underlying this one example is the principle of using analogously equivalent materials—materials that achieve the same objectives, but are proportioned to the ability of the learner.

2. This principle applies to instruction in other parts of the proposed curriculum—to instruction in subject-matters, to the development of intellectual skills, and to the understanding of fundamental ideas.

3. There are other considerations that I do not have the time to deal with in detail; such as student-teacher ratios for the three sectors of the normal distribution curve; a differential rate of learning for the three sectors; different measures of satisfactory accomplishment for the three sectors; the resort to homogenous classes for certain types of instruction and to heterogeneous classes for other types of instruction; and so on.

E. There are also, of course, many other problems to be solved that I have not even mentioned, especially the problem of our overcrowded urban schools; the problem of our underpaid teachers; the problem of how to require conformity to standards of conduct that are not only conducive to, but also indispensable to, learning; the problem of automatic promotion from grade to grade; the problem of expelling from school the violators of those minimal necessary standards of conduct; the problem of adequate fiscal support for a school system that would not only be better but might also be much more expensive than any that now exists.

F. I know that you will have all these problems and many more in mind as I put to you the question with which I wish to close.

1. Let me suppose for the moment that I have persuaded you that the program for basic schooling proposed by the Paideia Project offers a sound and sensible reconstitution and reform of basic schooling.

2. If you are not persuaded, the question is not for you. But of those who are persuaded, let me ask:

What are the chances of such a reconstitution and reform being accomplished or even approximated by the end of this century?

3. I must confess that I do not have much hope that it can or will come to pass. Yet I cannot yield to complete despair, for to do so is accompanied by grave forebodings about the future of our democratic society and all its free institutions.

a. We are not now giving our future citizens the kind of schooling they need to make democracy work as it should.

b. We are not now giving them the kind of schooling they need to lead the kind of human lives our society pledges and promises for all when it gives them the other conditions they need for the pursuit of happiness.

c. If we continue to fail, democracy cannot prosper and our people will not enjoy the essential human fulfillments that our society intends them all to have.



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Founded in 1990 by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann

Max Weismann, Publisher Emeritus

Elaine Weismann, Publisher and Editor

Phone: 312-943-1076

Mobile: 312-280-1011

Ken Dzigan, Senior Fellow and Archivist

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