

The Crisis

At commencement exercises across the nation untold thousands of high school graduates will receive a counterfeit diploma: a mere 12-year attendance certificate. Many of these tassel-capped students marching slowly down the aisle with lifted chins and throbbing hearts to receive their long-sought diplomas will one day come to this shocking discovery—they have been cheated of an education. It is not that they were intellectually unable to learn; rather, they were inadequately trained. A large number of these students face a bleak future because of their faulty education.

Educational Crisis

“For the 17th straight year, scholastic achievement among American high school students has fallen to a new low,” states *U.S. News & World Report* in referring to Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT).¹ Colleges across America have felt the impact of the verbal and math decline, insisting that inadequately trained high school graduates take remedial classes. Even bright students have been affected; some professors coined the term *straight-A illiteracy*: bright students graduating without writing competence.²

The *Boston Globe* after a six-month investigation reports that Boston’s public school system, the oldest in the nation, may now be classified as one of the worst. One-third of the high school students taking more than two academic courses failed more than half of their basic academic subjects. Daily attendance records showed nearly one-fourth of the high school students absent. The general pattern emerged: The longer a child was educated in Boston schools, the lower he placed on a national reading test.³

There are reports in our nation of slight progress, but educational achievement has fallen to such an extent that these ripples of success are not enough. Here is a report from a national news-magazine:

School test scores are rising after 9 years of decline. But don’t cheer yet. Math, science achievement levels are lower than they

were a decade ago.

More than a quarter of high-school graduates leave with only one year of math. And more than half have taken only one year of science.

Trained teachers are scarce. Half of those hired last year to each math and science weren't qualified. They were certified in other fields.⁴

Educators, parents, and concerned individuals need to examine why American education has failed to train its students properly. The nation's largest school system, New York City, reports 80 percent of the eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-graders, including those college bound, failed or barely passed a writing competency test. In addition, only 48 percent of registered high school sophomores graduate; among minority students the dropout rate is even higher.⁵

Not only are students improperly taught the basics of reading, writing, and math; they are also shortchanged in history and science. Instead of a course in solid history, many students are taught a watered-down version of social science. "All the history courses my daughter has taken seem to indicate that nothing much happened before 1950," complains Thomas O'Connor, an official of the Massachusetts Board of Education.⁶ "The Organization of American Historians is pessimistic about the future of its discipline," reports Newsweek. "Many teachers, OAH officials admit, simply find it easier to attract student interest with current events than to insist that pupils master the more rigorous skills of memorization and analysis."⁷

"America may be on its way to technological illiteracy, comments a New York Times News Service, "with most of its citizens unable to think and function effectively in an increasingly complex technical society.

"That disturbing possibility is raised by a crescendo of voices from the nation's scientific leadership . . . The National Science Board, the government's top policy-making body for science education, has called the situation 'critical.'"⁸ Another government report says that the Soviet Union, West Germany, and Japan are ahead of the United States in elementary and secondary school programs in science and mathematics.⁹

In the wake of the Sputnik challenge, the schools of America

“squandered the gains in student achievement” and committed “an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.” So reports the National Commission on Excellence in Education after its 18-member panel, appointed by Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell, examined American education.

The commission spent 18 months attending public hearings, examining educational studies, and hearing a variety of experts. “Our nation is at risk,” claimed the commission in its scathing report card on American education. The panel, including college presidents, high school principals, scholars, and others, gave this unanimous assessment: “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.”¹⁰

Disciplinal Crisis

To discover what was happening inside New York City schools, I taught as a substitute teacher for 28 days in 27 different schools in some of the best and worst schools in the city. Some classes were orderly, but in that short time I observed students climbing on desks, tables and cabinets; throwing paper airplanes and balls in class-rooms; running around the rooms and halls; yelling, fighting, and knocking over chairs and desks. While substituting, I have been threatened, been cursed, had my foot stamped on, seen a teacher assaulted, and stopped numerous fights. But this is just my personal experience.

Ann Landers printed a letter from an Iowa teacher who resigned because she was “sick of being called foul names, sick of hearing students use four-letter words, fed up on garbage and fights in the halls, and the ‘you-can’t-make-me’ attitude.”

Ann Landers responded, “Your letter sounds as if it was written in 1968. I am of the opinion that students of all ages are looking better, thinking better and behaving better. If I’ve been misled, I hope you teachers out there will let me know.”

Did they respond?

Listen to Ann Landers as she tells it, “I’m sorry (and more than a little chagrined) to report that they have been letting me know-in strong language and large numbers. I’ve been told I’m clearly ‘off my rocker,’

'completely out of touch,' 'crazy as a loon,' and 'living in Disneyland.'

“These are some of the responses she received in one week:

From Richmond, VA: That Iowa teacher took the words right out of my mouth. I'm no quitter, but I, too, am considering resigning. These kids are more than I can take.

Armada, Mich.: I drive a school bus and “Iowa teacher” is right. Today's students are undisciplined, unmotivated and I've had it with their filthy language.

Bryan, Tex.: Most teachers are so worn out trying to maintain discipline that they have no time or energy for teaching. Kids who want to learn are being ripped off.

Royal Oak, Mich.: The public would not believe what goes on in the average classroom. Anyone who goes into teaching today should have his head examined.

Memphis, Tenn.: I've taught school for 25 years. These last five years have been the worst. Everything that isn't nailed down disappears. The language in the halls and classrooms is unprintable. (P.S. Our students are from 5 to 11.)

Chicago: I am a teacher who is also ready to quit. I have a nervous stomach from the fist-fighting in my classes. A student pulled a knife on me last week. Three teachers in our school were assaulted last month. It's a nightmare! ¹¹

When Dr. Alfred Bloch, a psychiatrist at the University of California in Los Angeles, examined more than 200 teachers assigned to inner-city schools, he found they suffered damage far beyond mere cuts and bruises. “Bloch bases his diagnosis on a five-year study of teachers in Los Angeles,” reports *Newsweek*. “His patients ranged from instructors who had been the victims of sustained verbal threats but no real violence to one woman whose hair had been set on fire by students protesting low grades.” Bloch stated, “Few had received adequate support from the

school system. The woman whose hair had been burned complained to the principal—and was chastised for leaving her classroom unattended. Her experiences finally led to a suicide attempt, and she has never gone back to school.”

These “battered teachers,” Bloch said, showed a number of stress symptoms, such as high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, head-aches, lowered self-esteem, stomach trouble and disturbed sleep. The doctor discovered these teachers suffered the same kind of battle fatigue as soldiers in combat.¹² *Time* reports that in just one year more than 100,000 teachers were attacked in our nation’s schools.¹³

Racial Crisis

Racial issues such as busing, racial quotas, minority discipline, and bilingual education have divided Americans. Cities have closed down schools and experienced fierce riots over racial problems. Many minorities suffer because of their inferior education. One black union official, complaining about high school graduates in his city, says some “can’t even read their own names on their diplomas.”¹⁴

Moral Crisis

Within the past 15 years there has been a dramatic change in moral behavior among the youth. Many parents are angered over their children’s textbooks. In some schools children are required to read books that use the vilest language in the name of relevancy. For nine weeks, schools were boycotted in Kanawha County, West Virginia, because of textbooks. I went to Charleston to interview Alice Moore, who spearheaded the protest, and to examine these textbooks.

Parents are also disturbed over the new sexual standards being promoted by schools. To obtain information about sex education, I wrote to more than 50 sex education sources. Today America is experiencing a sexual revolution; as a result, venereal disease and unwanted pregnancies among teenagers are climbing to unprecedented heights. To combat this problem, one hears conflicting voices. Some clamor for more sex education while others blame current sex education programs for increasing this social plague. These problems will be examined.

Successful Schools

In spite of many educational failures, there are successful schools. One such school was previously a disaster; today, it is radically transformed. “Four years ago, Manierre Elementary School in Chicago’s inner city had only plywood where windows used to be,” reports the *American School Board Journal*. “To local educators, it was known as the ‘snake pit.’ Students spent their time playing baseball in the hallways, sipping wine, gambling and throwing furniture out of the windows. Only two of the 800 pupils could read. Teacher morale was understandably low; teachers had seen six principals come and go in a five-year period.”¹⁵

Today windows have glass, litter is nonexistent, and learning is taking place. “We are 100 percent successful at the primary level in teaching reading,” Principal Alice Blair told me in an interview. “Every child in this school that comes through reads.” Major discipline problems no longer exist. Blair has guided these children from failure to success.

“Reading achievement in inner-city schools does not have to be as low as it usually is,” concludes a study of successful schools by the nonprofit Council for Basic Education. “A sense of purpose, relative quiet and pleasure in learning” was the atmosphere of the successful schools, noted George Weber, associate director of the council, while “disorder, noise, tension and confusion” permeated the less successful schools.¹⁶

In searching for the deficiencies the students already had when they entered my classes, I discovered the reasons. I probed further for answers for the national crisis. These root causes and solutions for the educational, disciplinal, racial, and moral crises facing American schools will be presented. To train successful students does not entail vast new expenditures, rather, educators need to eliminate their faulty training methods and implement those that have been proved successful.

What transpires in schools has repercussions far beyond classrooms; it affects every aspect of our national life. America, and particularly the schools, has seriously departed from its historical past and embraced an alien philosophy. The foundational truths our forefathers stood for will be examined. America has prospered because we have followed these concepts. However, because today we have abandoned our historical past, our society and schools are facing a grave crisis. The national future will be

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largely determined by how the upcoming generation is taught. I urge you to take not just an outside look at education but a unique inside excursion through the largest institution in the United States. You will enter with me into various schools and classrooms to see what is happening. You will read firsthand what children are being taught in some literature and sex education classes. After revealing what is transpiring, this book will present detailed practical solutions so that together we can make our school— institutions of success.