

The Educational Maze

At some schools students may attend class, take a walk, or leisurely bask in the sun. At other schools pupils may be found running and playing ball in the halls, learning to read by using comic books, unlocking the secrets of math with dice and cards, or strolling about in T-shirts and patched, faded jeans. Then there are schools where discipline, patriotism, dress codes, drills, homework, tests, grades, and a heavy emphasis on the three R's prevail. These schools represent three basic educational systems.

Three Basic Educational Systems

In free schools, students have complete control.

In open schools—also known as open education, open classroom, open corridor, informal educational, integrated day, and progressive schools—students possess basic control.

In fundamental schools—also called fundamental education, traditional school, closed classroom, contemporary school, formal education, and self-contained classroom—teachers possess basic control.

Two other possibilities are worth mentioning: the situation in which teachers have absolute control while students are totally submissive; and the radical approach of Ivan Illich, author of *Deschooling*, who favors eliminating schools altogether by training youth in craft centers and using libraries as resource centers for those who wish to pursue book learning. Since these avenues are practically nonexistent, we will concentrate on examining the free, open, and fundamental schools.

Free Schools

The most famous free school is Summerhill, a small boarding school founded in 1921, in the village of Leiston, in Suffolk, England. It has about 25 boys and 20 girls ranging in ages from 5 to 15. Summerhill has been directed by A.S. Neill, and in his book, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, he describes his principles: “The pupils do not have to stand room inspection and no one picks up after them. They

are left free. No one tells them what to wear: they put on any kind of costume they want to at any time.”¹ Newspapers have nicknamed it “Go-as-you-please School.”

Neill and his wife had one main idea: “Make the school fit the child—instead of making the child fit the school.” They said they were going to “allow children freedom to be themselves. In order to do this, we had to renounce all discipline, all direction, all suggestion, all moral training, all religious instruction. We have been called brave, but it did not require courage. All it required was what we had—a complete belief in the child as a good, not an evil, being. For almost forty years, this belief in the goodness of the child has never wavered; it rather has become a final faith.”

At Summerhill, class examinations have been eliminated and lessons are optional. Children can stay away from classes “for years if they want to.” One boy came to the school at age 5 and left at 17, “without having in all those years gone to a single lesson.”² When Herbert C. Rudman, professor of education at Michigan State University, questioned Neill about his school, he said, “I am concerned with a living process” and not “whether the children learn or not.”³

Neill asks in his book, “How can happiness be bestowed?” He says, “My own answer is: *Abolish authority. Let the child be himself. Don't push him around. Don't teach him. Don't lecture him. Don't elevate him. Don't force him to do anything.*”

Notwithstanding, even at Summerhill, Neill has found times when he must disregard his theory. He says, “One of the school rules is that after ten o'clock at night there shall be quietness on the upper corridor.” On another occasion, he tells how he felt compelled at a General School Meeting “to launch a vigorous attack on the seniors for being not antisocial but asocial, breaking the bedtime rules by sitting up far too late and taking no interest in what the juniors were doing in an antisocial way.” However, Neill did say, “Freedom does not mean the abrogation of common sense.” In other words, though one has rejected all discipline, authority, directions, and suggestions for children, if this approach fails, apply common sense and use what one has renounced.

The workshop, Neill found, was the “most troublesome department of a free school.” The shop was always left open for children, but “every

tool got lost or damaged.” He had built his own private workshop, but his conscience bothered him. So he decided to open it, and within six months not a good tool was left.

Then Neill built an extra workshop for the school that would always remain open. He had it “fitted out with everything necessary—bench, vise, saws, chisels, planes, hammers, pliers, set squares, and so on.” Four months later, as he was showing a visitor The Educational Maze 45 around the school, he went to unlock the workshop. The visitor complained, “This doesn’t look like freedom, does it?”

“Well, you see,” Neill said hurriedly, “the children have *another* workshop which is open all day long.” When he showed his open workshop, everything was missing except the bench; even the vise was gone!

When a parent asked, “What shall I do when my boy of nine hammers nails into my furniture?” Neill counseled:

Take the hammer from him and tell him it is your furniture, and you won’t have him damaging what doesn’t belong to him.

And if he doesn’t stop hammering then, dear woman, then sell your furniture and with the proceeds go to some psychologist who will help you realize how you made your boy a problem child. No happy, free child will want to damage furniture, unless of course the furniture is the only thing in the home that can be used for hammering nails into.⁴

Back in 1931 Ethel Mannin, in her book *Common Sense and the Child*, presented this glowing report of A. S. Neill’s school:

Let us take an actually free community of children and see what happens. I know such a community—a school of boys and girls of all ages, from three to seventeen, where there is no discipline at all, and *it is the happiest community imaginable, and nobody does any of the wild and outrageous things which theoretically take place when discipline is dispensed with*. It is a case of the theory being upset by the facts. Nobody smashes windows or jumps on the piano or wages war on the adults, for

the simple reason that in such a community, the adults not being law-makers, nor set in authority, are not the enemy; when there is complete freedom there is nothing to be revolutionary about. Nobody is violent because nobody has a grievance. The desire to smash windows and knock the furniture about is the impulse of frustration; the child's way of getting back on adults. Truly it is "the law that makes the crime."⁵

Mannin certainly portrays a utopia. However, when Neill describes his own school, he frankly admits, "Furniture to a child is practically nonexistent. So at Summerhill we buy old car seats and old bus seats. And in a month or two they look like wrecks." When they decided to insulate some rooms with beaverboard, the children began to pick holes in it, and the "wall of the ping-pong room looked like Berlin after the bombardment," Neill said.⁶ The school has since been taken over by an internal group of counterculturists known as the "Summerhill Collective."

Suzanne S. Fremon, author of *Children and Their Parents*, wrote about "Why Free Schools Fail": "Nine months is the average life of a free school." (The term free refers not to the cost but to the freedom from curriculum and discipline.) Fremon asks, "Why, then, if free schools—at least in the early and middle grades—are such fine places, do they close almost as regularly as new ones open?" She replies, "Partly because many of them, however high their ideals, are unable to put these into practice. In some free schools the atmosphere is not friendly, but edgy; many kids seem just to mope around, and there is very little indication that anyone is, in fact, learning to read."

A "major educational and psychological weakness of free schools," notes Fremon, is that "a teacher may refuse to acknowledge that as an adult he knows more than a seven-year-old student. There is in the free schools a general willingness to allow students to abandon projects when they become difficult, without helping them to overcome the difficulties. The instructors pride themselves in not imposing their values on children—a consequence of the misguided belief that a teacher shouldn't 'teach' as such but should exist solely as a 'resource person' who is available for help when a child decides he wants to learn something." She

cites one instructor who “declined to teach her students how to spell, on the grounds that this would be ‘imposing values’ on them”⁷ *Time* notes about free schools that “the number of children involved, have never been large—perhaps one-tenth of 1% of the nation’s students.”⁸

In 1969 there were up to 450 “free universities”—academic utopias where students and faculty could pursue any subject of interest without any pressure from grades, credits, or formal examinations. These new schools wanted to instill self-understanding, self-respect, and independent thought into the educational system. They subscribed to Educator Mark Hopkins’ concept that all that is needed for education is two people and a log. “Unfortunately,” *Time* points out, “some participants in the free university movement are in danger of misinterpreting that idea. Those who see no difference between teachers and students in effect reject the intellectual hierarchy that is basic to learning. Teachers, after all, are supposed to know more than students. If both are ‘equal,’ the result is initially stimulating and ultimately numbing. Everyone goes his way—inward.”⁹

“Heliotrope, an independent free university in San Francisco,” notes *Time* in describing some of the programs in these schools, “offers courses in body surfing, howling at the moon and ‘bofing,’ which is Heliotropese for fencing with Styrofoam foils. Santa Cruz Free University has a class entitled ‘Of Course We’ll Like It,’ a forum -that guarantees the uncritical acceptance of unpublished poems, unpurchased paintings and unaired songs. ‘Let’s get together and take loving care of one another’s ego.’ urges the course prospectus. It is hard to see how this will lead to better poems, paintings or songs. Self-indulgence could turn free universities into a travesty of education in which ‘rapping’ replaces research, and reason gives way to sensuality.”¹⁰ The “free university” has now fizzled out, but some of the concepts are very much alive in our present school system.

Open Schools

One of the recent trends permeating the nation’s schools is “open education.” The open classroom received its inspiration from the British and has been hailed as the panacea for the beleaguered American educational system. Some open school concepts and goals are as follows: Every

child should become a self-directed individual and take responsibility for his own learning and behavior. In this flexible environment of freedom, children are permitted to be creative and to develop their innate abilities. Though children are free, there is guidance: at times teacher and student negotiate what will be learned; on other occasions, the child decides by himself what he will learn and then informs the teacher. Each child can learn according to his need, interests, and readiness; no set amount of knowledge is to be learned by a certain age or grade.

Some proponents of open education claim that because of increasing complexities of modern living children need to develop self-discipline at an earlier age. Open classes allow them to discover how to make proper decisions as well as how to fail; in such an atmosphere pupils are permitted to make their non-threatening failures a learning experience toward success. Teachers must trust the child to make proper choices; the principal must trust the teacher. In this mutual area of trust, teachers as well as children are free to experiment and fail, without fear or threat of being labeled as failures. This non-failing environment allows both teacher and child to grow, teachers being free to explore their own interests and thereby pass their learning experiences to their pupils, and children being free to learn and experiment and to become productive citizens. By this means the boredom of learning is eliminated and a joyful atmosphere is created. Work and play are no longer opposites. By transforming work into play, the educational experience has been changed from drudgery to pleasure.

Both free and open education stress that students should be free to determine how and when to learn. The difference between the two is that in free schools students are the sole determinators, whereas in the open schools the teacher still plays a significant role in learning. In free schools pupils themselves decide whether they want to read at all; open education strives to teach children to read when they are ready and at their own pace.

I visited a number of open classrooms to observe their operation. In one class the room was divided into sections, and in some sections tables and chairs were placed for children to work on their individual projects. Children were scattered everywhere; some were playing while others were working. An aide was teaching math to a group of four children in

this combined first- and second-grade class. When one child decided not to do math, the aide tried to encourage him.

“Come on, don’t be lazy,” she admonished. But the pull of the wild was stronger than the benefits of math; the child walked away. He returned with a plastic ball and broke it over the head of another boy sitting at the table. Now a second boy left and began to play with a gun. “You want to sit over there?” said the aide to the first boy. Then she diagnosed the boy’s problem: “You’re tired. Go over there and relax on the mat.”

The boy with the gun returned, but she took his gun away. In the short time I observed her, she had constant interruptions with just these four children; in the end only two were doing math. Passing another open education class in this school I observed a large group of students on the floor. When a girl left the room, I asked her what they were doing on the floor. She said the art teacher had given them the privilege of doing art or playing an organized game; those on the floor had chosen to play Probe.

In a fifth- and sixth-grade class some students were making a mural. But one boy was drawing on the blackboard, another was flying an airplane, and two youngsters were playing the game of Battleship with their chairs and desk in the hall. In this school open classroom was called “open corridor.” It lived up to its title; children could be seen playing and running in the halls.

This scene I observed in a school in Manhattan that was hailed as having a good open education program. The teacher, with six years of open classroom experience, did not use the contract system. Instead she endeavored to use the “freedom with guidance” principle.

The 26 first- and second-grade pupils were noisily grouped on a carpet in the corner of the room. These are some excerpts of the conversation between the teacher and her students.

“I would like to begin. I would like to begin. Come on children. When it’s quiet I will begin to talk. Children, listen. Listen, children. Please stop it. Paul, I want that to stop. Does anyone have a good idea to write on?”

“Bullet Man,” a child cried out.

“How many would like to write on Bullet Man?” the teacher asked.

Someone suggested writing about buildings. “That’s an excellent suggestion. We’ll use that.”

“Boo,” yelled some of the disappointed children.

One child wanted to write about Bugs Bunny.

“You’ll write later about Bugs Bunny.”

“I hate it!” the child retorted.

Another child objected, so the teacher let him write about Bullet Man.

Then she instructed the class,

“You can write about Bullet Man or about your favorite building in New York City.”

Still there were objections. “You can write about your favorite cartoon,” she finally offered the class.

As soon as they were finished they had “work period.” The children scampered around the room doing anything they wanted.

Fundamental Schools

Fundamental or traditional schools offer a disciplined environment in which every child is taught the basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, history, science, fine arts, and practical arts. The primary emphasis is on learning; on increasing knowledge; on doing research; on developing open-mindedness, logic, and deep thinking; and on encouraging self-discipline. A positive image of America and the democratic ideals upon which our nation was built are taught and held in high esteem. Teachers endeavor to develop proper conduct, good manners, neatness, courtesy, and moral development. Students are expected to be punctual, do regularly assigned homework, and turn in assignments when due. Counselors are utilized to guide students for realistic future goals.

Students in high school choose their field of interest and also have the options to take various electives. However, once a course is entered upon, they are expected to do the work and learn the material. Teachers do not wait for the “good feeling” before students become motivated to learn; tests and grades are given; students who do not measure up to course standards fail. A disciplined atmosphere is always maintained. Students are obligated to respect the rights of others and are held responsible for their own antisocial actions. The values of individual achievement and competition are balanced with teamwork, cooperation, and citizenship.

The picture of a fundamental school as an ironclad, fully structured system with a teacher holding a rod in one hand and a book in the other, whose stern face peers unforgiving at a group of frightened children, is

false. A pleasant atmosphere can be maintained within the framework of standards and discipline. Within the concepts of fundamental education, individual projects, field trips, and outside speakers can be utilized to enrich the experiences of children. In elementary classes, there can be a science corner, an art center, and math, history, and English areas to promote the natural curiosity of children. Pupils can be instructed in groups or individually. Though children are taught to write properly by using correct spelling, grammar, and content, teachers can provide writing assignments in which pupils choose subjects of their own interest.

Progressive vs. Fundamental Education

The problem today is actually between the concepts of open education and the concepts of fundamental education; very few real free schools exist. Though we are considering open education, it is basically neoprogressivism: the old-fashioned permissiveness with a slightly new addition. Open education has eliminated the concept of “nondirective” error; a contract is made to be fulfilled within a given time, but students perform their work at their own pace and whenever they desire. In a traditional environment students are grouped according to their ability; then they are expected to learn what is taught. If they are unable to grasp the material, they are encouraged to go home and study; if they fail to understand, the teacher endeavors to assist. However, if they cannot master the material, they repeat the course.

The philosophy of open education has an excellent concept in trying to encourage children to become self-directed. But there is a deep-rooted flaw: Advocates of this system misunderstand the nature of children. They assume that *every* child, after receiving guidance, will possess the maturity to make proper choices as a disciplined adult.

The difference between free, open, and fundamental schools can be exemplified by the dietitian in charge of a school cafeteria with an ample supply of nourishing food and desserts. In a free atmosphere, children are permitted to choose anything they wish, from nourishing meats and vegetables to hot dogs, French fries, chips, soda pop, chocolate cake, candy bars, and bubble gum. In an open atmosphere, the dietitian lectures students on how to eat properly, and then lets them pick whatever foods they want; all the while hoping they will choose wholesome foods. The

dietitian may even stand by the meat and vegetable trays to encourage the children to take these nutritional foods, but without applying any pressure. In a fundamental atmosphere, the dietitian presents the same lecture to the children, but then each child is required to take a meat, two vegetables, and a container of milk. For dessert, the child may choose, but even here the dietitian provides tasty and nutritional servings.

What would the children choose? The majority would certainly relish the free atmosphere; it would produce the greatest immediate joy. Why would a free atmosphere be so appreciated by the children? They lack the maturity and the ability to understand what is best for their own future health. What would parents desire, or even the same children when they became mature adults? Practically all would choose the fundamental atmosphere; they know that this produces the greatest health and happiness.

Let any parents implement the self-motivating approach used in open education when they want their child to vacuum the house, and discover what will happen. Some theorists claim that in a relationship of mutual trust between parent and child the strain of confrontation will be avoided and one of the basic parent-child conflicts eliminated. Parents need to wait until the child is stimulated by that innate urge to pick up the vacuum cleaner, or they can make a contract with the child stipulating that the vacuuming must be completed within a week but leaving him to make the final decision as to exact time. It is inhumane and undemocratic for a parent to impose arbitrary decisions upon a child, thereby subverting his tender personality and creating a slavish individual. When a child does become motivated, by all means, do not criticize him for sloppy work. A non-failing atmosphere must be provided; in this way the work experience will miraculously be turned from drudgery into pleasure.

How would a traditional mother handle the situation if she wanted her child to vacuum the house? Mother would determine that the house needs a total vacuuming every Friday, so when the child came home from school she would be expected to undertake that task. Mom would allow flexibility in scheduling if her child had some important place to go, but she would expect the vacuuming to be done that night or the next day.

Once taught how to vacuum properly, the child would be obliged to do the job right each time. If it were done incorrectly, the mother would

not be afraid of damaging a tender personality by saying, “You did it sloppily.” She would also say, “Now go and do the vacuuming all over again—but right!”

Regardless of the child’s reaction, she had to do it the way she was taught. She had a choice of which room she wanted to do first, and she had the option to use all her creative imagination on how to get the job done faster. Mom desired only that her house became clean according to her standards. Having trained her child, she expected her to work to her full potential. The impossible was not demanded, but she wanted her best.

What did this do for the child? It taught her one of life’s most valuable lessons: There are times when one must work whether one feels like it or not. Many of today’s youth have been destroyed because of the stress on working only when they have a good feeling, instead of learning how to discipline their life. These artificial progressive concepts do not prepare youth for the rigors of life.

James D. Koerner, speaking to the Wisconsin Education Association Council, spoke of the bandwagon of progressive education, which has never really run out of gas but still exerts a strong influence. In the early 1940’s it was called “life-adjustment education.” Badly battered in the 50’s, it became “consumer education,” followed by “education for creative leisure” and then “quality education.” Now, it is “open classroom.” “The history of public education in America for most of this century can be read as a history of faddishness,” analyzed Koerner.”¹¹ All these various movements can be traced back to the progressive movement of the 20’s and 30’s, which was the result of John Dewey’s permissive educational philosophy. But though society has seen and experienced the failures of progressive education, it keeps on emerging with some new catchy title.

More than 40 years ago Dr. Leslie B. Hohman, associate in psychiatry, Johns Hopkins Medical School, and assistant visiting psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins Hospital, made this remark concerning the progressive movement in his day: “In some advanced classrooms held up to us as ideal by the propagandists, nothing that would be recognized as teaching by a reasonably conservative educator is tolerated. The wise and helpful concept that activities should spring from the initiative of the pupils is magnified into a fetish. Practically any conceivable class occupation is

all right—just so long as some bubbling child proposes it out of his own ‘immediate interests’ without a suggestion from the teacher.” He asks, “Will the ‘unhampered child’ always be fortunate enough to encounter in adulthood only those who will bow down at the altar of this new religion of his sacred self-activeness and creativeness?”¹²

Dr. Hilde Bruch, author of *Don't Be Afraid of Your Child*, asserts, “Many of the progressive schools make similar errors in continuing a playful, completely child-centered nondirective atmosphere.” She relates how pathetic it is “to watch intelligent and eager children with a real thirst for learning and knowledge, let us say of seven or eight, become fretful and disappointed with their schools because they do not learn enough and find no real challenge for mental effort in a routine that soft-pedals the idea of ‘work’ out of fear of putting ‘pressure’ on the child or making him dislike school.”¹³

The concepts of the progressive movement have been like a cancer destroying the vitals of our educational system. Open education is the new progressive trend of today, which will produce the failures for the 80's. The utopian dreamers will then devise another progressive name and add some educational twist for the 90's. Progressiveness needs to be dealt a deathblow and proper education provided for all children. The consequence of faddish addiction to progressive ideas is that innocent students are the victims. By the droves they are leaving schools as failures because educational leaders have not implemented carefully proven methods of instruction.

The same progressive ideas are being used in many of the so called traditional schools. There is a vast degree of interrelationship among the various methods of teaching in free schools, open schools, and traditional schools. Some open schools tend to be more free while others incorporate more fundamental-style learning; some traditional classes incorporate various degrees of free and open school principles. It is relatively easy to become deceived by titles. Educators have looked at school failures and observed that many have a traditional setting, but they neglect to realize that though the classroom is a traditional one, the learning experience taking place is a progressive one.

Instead of seeing the problem as the utilization of progressive policies, these educational leaders blame today's failures on the traditional

system. So what do many of them propose as their solution? Believe it or not—more progressive concepts! Children need more freedom and fewer restrictions. Their policies will only plunge the schools into greater disaster.

Arthur E. Salz, assistant professor of education, Queens College, New York, in an article, “The Truly Open Classroom,” asks,

Why is it that most open classroom teachers I work with still feel that automatic response in arithmetic operations is vitally important” since cheap calculators are available? He then says,

“Why is it that these same teachers who get most of their news information from television or radio, most of their literary stimuli from film or videotape, and most of their real excitement in life from skiing, folk dancing, listening to poetry, or making love, still believe that reading is the most important thing kids should be learning?” Salz assesses educational experiences: “Did I get a kick out of that experience? Was it challenging? Did it force me to do my best thinking? Was this thinking pleasurable? These are key questions. The long-range assessment is much more difficult. We have tended, in the past, to believe that what we learned in school had *practical* value in the future. In reality this was a myth. Little that we learn in school is useful in helping us control and better our environment. . . . The ‘good feeling’ one gets from understanding something becomes the only justification for having learned something.” And he goes on, “The overwhelming conclusion for me is that if we evaluate experiences, both in terms of their immediate impact on the person and on the future enrichment to his life, then all subject matter, all domains of man’s endeavors, possess equal potential for being educative experiences. Learning science has no more inherent value than learning sculpture; social studies is no more valuable than basketball.”¹⁴

Paul Goodman, who holds a Ph.D. in humanities from the University of Chicago and has written numerous books and articles, states:

Up to age twelve, there is no point to formal subjects or a prearranged curriculum. With guidance, whatever a child experiences is educational. Dewey’s idea is a good one: It makes no difference *what* is learned at this age, so long as the child goes on wanting to learn something further. Teachers for this age

are those who like children, pay attention to them, answer their questions, enjoy taking them around the city and helping them explore, imitate, try out, and who sing songs with them and teach them games. Any benevolent grownup—literate or illiterate—has plenty to teach an eight-year-old; the only profitable training for teachers is a group therapy and, perhaps, a course in child development. . . . It has been shown that whatever is useful in the present eight-year elementary curriculum can be learned in four months by a normal child of twelve. If let alone, in fact, he will have learned most of it by himself.¹⁵

No wonder some children are failing when educators express opinions like these: Pleasure should be the primary goal of education. So what if students are in high school and cannot read; one can always listen to a radio, TV, or tape recorder. Furthermore, who needs math when computers are so commonplace? Why, learning basketball, baseball, or ping-pong is just as valuable to some educators as learning the three R's.

The latest educational fad is the “alternate educational program”: Parents can choose the type of school they wish for their child, either a free, an open, or a fundamental school. This sounds like an excellent idea, and it is a better system than the present one. But what happens when children graduate from these different schools with their various abilities and enter other schools? The same problems will be encountered as before, with some children lacking basic knowledge.

It is imperative that *every* school should ensure that each graduate be proficient in the basics. There is no excuse for a normal child entering junior high school to be deficient in the three R's. There may be different schools responsive to various needs and abilities of students, but any school that fails to produce children with sufficient basic knowledge has no right to exist.

One reason why some students still achieve success in progressive school systems is that there are still principals, teachers, and parents fighting these concepts. Though children from disciplined homes suffer from progressive programs, many do manage to survive the system, thanks to the home—not to the school. Nevertheless, the progressive

system continues. And while children are doing their own thing in the open classroom learning art and weaving, at night many weary parents are doing as one irate Connecticut mother with a child in a sixth-grade open classroom did. She took the worksheets the teacher had given her son to teach himself, and she sat down and taught him.

Progressive and Fundamental Schools Evaluated

“Supporters of the open classroom,” states *Newsweek*, “contend that there is still no fair system available to judge the relative effectiveness of the two methods at any given moment. Standardized testing, they say, is geared to the traditional curriculum; the open classroom produces cumulative progress academically, and, at the same time, develops immeasurably happier children.

“‘What the children are now getting cannot be measured by any conventional tests,’ declares Ronald Henderson, director of the Early Childhood Education Center at the University of Arizona. . . . Yet the public may not accept this argument for very long. At the Rincon Elementary School in Livermore, Calif., children’s reading scores last year were lower than for neighboring traditional schools. So, in violation of informal teaching methods, Rincon was forced this year to step up its concentration on reading.

“Open classrooms, in fact, may not be able to survive a series of such apparent testing failures. As public awareness of the new system grows, so will the number of critics who find informal teaching suspiciously similar to the ‘progressive education’ that overtook many U.S. schools in the ’20s and ’30s.”¹⁶

Dr. Rhodes Boyson, headmaster of a 1,300-pupil comprehensive school in a deprived section of London, asserts, “There is now a tremendous body of evidence that the introduction of neo-progressive teaching methods in British primary schools (for 5-to-11 year olds) has brought a distinct fall in standards of literacy.” He states that “it is only over the last 5 years that we have come to realize how really disastrous these methods have been.”¹⁷

Today’s Child reports that “Boyson also cited a study by Bernice Martin, a Bedford College (London) sociologist, that found that non-structured schools had particularly adverse effects on the personality

development of working class pupils, ‘whom the neo-progressives pretend to hold most dear.’”¹⁸

Answering the question “Do open schools promote affective development?” John H. Hollifield, in *Today’s Education*, says:

Maybe they don’t increase academic achievement, say proponents of open schools, but that’s because their emphasis is on other development, such as creativity or self-esteem. But this study of 50 fifth graders in an open school and 50 in a traditional school gives low grades to the open school in all areas. The open-school students were deficient in academic achievement, showed significantly higher levels of school anxiety, and showed no significant increases in creativity, self esteem, or locus of control.

The open-school fifth graders had been in their school for two-and-a-half years, so the study seems to be showing long range effects.¹⁹

From London the *New York Times* discloses:

The conflict between advocates of traditional and progressive education has flared anew here with the publication of a new study praising old-fashioned methods.

The debate has significance to parents trying to choose the proper schools for their children both here and in the United States, because Britain’s primary school system, perhaps the most advanced in the world, has had significant influence over American education practices.

The central findings of the report, which has attracted widespread attention and critical response here, are that pupils who are taught formally by traditional methods tested significantly higher in the basic subjects: reading, writing and arithmetic, were less prone to make grammatical and spelling errors, and were no worse at imaginative story writing than children in progressive classes.

The report that set off the renewed conflict between the

traditionalists and the progressives was written by Dr. Neville Bennett and a research team from Lancaster University.²⁰

U.S. News & World Report tells about “two separate federally financed studies of nearly 40,000 students over the past three years,” and one study, by Abt Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts, “found that highly structured programs that emphasized basic skills have been much more successful than open classrooms, particularly in raising the achievement of low-income children.” Interestingly, the article added, “What’s more, those children in traditional classrooms apparently acquire greater self-esteem than do youngsters taught in other ways.”²¹

The tragedy of these unsuccessful schools is that hordes of young men and women are walking the streets bearing the scars of the failures of the schools. Progressive education appealed to Mrs. Wolynski as she happily enrolled her four-year-old daughter, Mara, in a private school in Greenwich Village. The school attracted upper middle-class professionals desiring to give their children a different education from the pressurized one they had received.

Children had the educational freedom not to learn, and anything that bored them they were permitted to drop. Mara Wolynski, now a freelance writer, in writing about her experience, says, “It was school policy that we were forbidden to be bored or miserable or made to compete with one another.” There were no tests or difficult times. “The way we learned history was by trying to recreate its least important elements. One year, we pounded corn, made tepees, ate buffalo meat and learned two Indian words. That was early American history. Another year we made elaborate costumes, clay pots, and papier-mache gods. That was Greek culture. Another year we were all maidens and knights in armor because it was time to learn about the Middle Ages. We drank our orange juice from tin-foil goblets but never found out what the Middle Ages were. They were just ‘The Middle Ages.’”

Creativity was the way to bring happiness, so children did not learn to read until third grade. It was feared that early reading would dampen creativity. “The one thing they taught us very well,” says Wolynski, “was to hate intellectuality and anything connected with it. Accordingly, we were forced to be creative for nine years.” Though the school, which had

16 teachers, put a great deal of emphasis on arts, they never produced one good artist. The children were not taught techniques; it was believed that organization hampered creativity.

When these children graduated from their “Canaan,” they, and also their parents, felt a deep sense of abandonment. Whichever schools the children attended afterward, they were the underachievers and belonged to the culturally disadvantaged. One student failed in one of the worst high schools; at the age of 20 he committed suicide. Others entered mental institutions, and Wolynski adds, “They were free, once again, to create during occupational therapy.”

When Mara Wolynski started high school, the school psychologist was perplexed over why she was blocking information. He wanted to give her a series of psychological tests to discover the reasons. The trouble was, she says, “I wasn’t blocking because I had no information to block.” She was not alone; most of her classmates were experiencing the same difficulties because of the inadequate education they had received.

Teachers were puzzled at how she entered high school. “I did manage to stumble *not* only through high school,” she says, “but also through college.” First she attended junior college because she was rejected by all of the other, four-year colleges. Finally, she made it into New York University, “hating it all the way as I had been taught to. I am still amazed that I have a B.A.”

Puzzled parents cannot figure out why their alert, inquisitive children were returned nine years later as crippled adolescents. Some may endeavor to justify this progressive school, saying that it was just her class, but the “same bizarre behavior pattern in succeeding graduating classes” was seen, notes Wolynski.

Now she sees her 12-year-old brother attending a traditional school where he is learning college-grade math. And Wolynski adds, “I know that he knows more about many other things besides math than I do.” Her 15-year-old brother was yanked out of the progressive school at the age of eight by her reformed mother so that he would not become like his sister. She also noted the superiority of the traditional educational experience he is receiving.

“And now I’ve come to see that the real job of school,” concludes Wolynski, “is to entice the student into the web of knowledge and then,

if he's not enticed, to drag him in. I wish I had been."²²

For Mara Wolynski it is too late, but can we permit the next generation to be ruined by these disastrous concepts? The sad fact is that, though the massive failures of the schools are now common knowledge, the solution offered by many leading educators is still more progressive concepts. They have become so deceived with the cunning arguments of this philosophy that they refuse to abandon its concepts.

Educational Solutions

Discipline, standards, grades, tests, control, obedience, and work bring horror to some educators' minds. They think of freedom, self-direction, individuality, choice, self-discipline, trust, and play. But why cannot these two concepts be combined—discipline and freedom—as in a truly democratic fundamental school? This is the key to effective learning.

The ways to remedy the appalling inadequacies of students are extremely simple, and their implementation will revolutionize the entire educational system. For schools to succeed they must put an end to the last 50 years of progressive ideas, which have undermined the foundations of education. The simple solutions for the educational crisis are as follows:

1. Eliminate automatic promotion by establishing basic standards for each grade.
2. Provide graduation requirements for junior high and high school.
3. Provide competent teachers and administrators who will properly supervise and train the children.
4. Implement fundamental educational procedures of directional teaching that endeavors to develop both bright and slow children's full potential by expecting and encouraging all children to learn and study.

It is inexcusable for schools not to produce students with a basic knowledge in reading, writing, arithmetic, science, history and the functions of our government. Only as concerned parents and educators mobilize to insist on incorporating these proven educational methods will schools be able to teach our children and save our nation from further disaster.