

For The Record: Spaces And Transitions

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We began our five years in this editorial chair with talk of helping to create a "public space ... where freedom could appear." We found in that notion (adapted from Hannah Arendt) an analogy to public education, which had only recently become a matter of central concern to the nation as a whole. We also found in it an analogy to our particular project, which was to edit a journal that would somehow widen the sphere of rational discourse with regard to education and at once make possible the kind of confrontations that occur when people speak authentically to one another about significant things.

That was in 1965, the very middle of what Richard Rovere was to call "this slum of a decade." It was two years after John F. Kennedy's assassination, almost a year after the revolt on the Berkeley campus, almost a year after the drastic escalation of the Vietnamese war. The Watts riots had taken place just a few months earlier; and people were still contemplating the slogan, "Burn, baby, burn!" Talk of separatism and Black Power was already in the air, although Martin Luther King was attempting to carry his particular mode of non-violent militancy into the North. The S.D.S. was still moderately hopeful about its poverty projects in the cities; and the humanist prose of the Port Huron statement, with its focus on "personal independence" and the search for meaning, was still dominant in the rhetoric of student rebels. The first Vietnam Teach-in had taken place during the preceding spring; a responsible peace movement seemed to be organizing at universities throughout the country, the kind of movement that gave some people considerable hope. The War on Poverty had begun; the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts had been passed. More funds were being appropriated for compensatory and remedial work with the children of the poor than ever in history before. Attention, for the first time, was being directed to the arts and humanities by the Federal Government; discussions were launched, not only about the "culture of

poverty," but about the "arts of poverty" too. The so-called "rock revolution" was only beginning; "flower children" still wandered the San Francisco streets, and the public had just about discovered LSD. Lionel Trilling (in *Beyond Culture*) was already pointing to the rise of an "adversary culture"; but the foundations of what Theodore Roszak was later to call the "counter-culture"—with its accompaniments of drug-taking, mysticism, pastoralism, subjectivism, and anti-materialism—were first being laid.

Perhaps strangely, for all the ambiguities and difficulties in view, for all our lurking doubts about the promised "Great Society," for all our growing outrage at the draft and the Vietnamese war, we thought there was a tonic sense around us—a sense of possibility. We were not frightened by the disorder on the Berkeley campus; we were not overly depressed by the spectacle of Watts. On every front people seemed to be stirring. Of course there were "rising expectations" and more and more frequent disillusionments. Of course there were incidents of violence; but oftentimes, it seemed to us, the violence (as in Watts) was warranted, and it resulted (so it appeared) in attention for the first time being paid. We were impressed by what we perceived as a burgeoning of idealism, of a "new morality" centered on the existing individual. Although we had some disagreements with the "new romantic" critics of education (Goodman, Holt, then Kozol and Kohl), we felt that they, too, were directing our attention to (using Goodman's language) "people" rather than "personnel." We recalled something Thomas Jefferson once said about the "tree of liberty"; and, rightly or wrongly, we believed that that tree was being "watered" by the dissent we saw around us, the protests, the great refusals of all kinds.

Then came what several have called "the year of obscenities"—1968. That was the year Robert Kennedy was killed, and Martin Luther King. It was the year of the Chicago Convention it was the year of the frustrated

McCarthy campaign. Since then (and we think for good reason) we have lost the tonic sense of possibility. We are not, in any traditional mode, pessimistic, since we believe that a pessimistic educator is almost a contradiction in terms. (Why choose to work in education, if there is nothing valuable to communicate, nothing worthwhile to do?) We think, in fact, as we have so often done, of Camus. In an essay called "The Almond Trees" (in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*), he wrote: "Let us not listen too much to those who proclaim that the world is at an end. Civilizations do not die so easily, and even if our world were to collapse, it would not have been the first. It is indeed true that we live in tragic times. But too many people confuse tragedy with despair. 'Tragedy,' Lawrence said, 'ought to be a great kick at misery.' This is a healthy and immediately applicable thought. There are many things today deserving such a kick."

We are in the mood for kicking, and we hope other people are as well. We hope that large numbers of educators—in classrooms, in administrative offices, in university lecture halls, in mini-schools—will become willing (faced with so much "misery") to sacrifice whatever complacency they enjoy and confront the "tragedy" of the times. This is no time for complacency, or automatism, or indifference, or piety. There are thousands upon thousands of poor children unable to learn how to read. There are high school students sickening in boredom or desperation; there are others taking violent action against those they consider "authority." On the one hand, as community leaders in the slums question the legitimacy of their schools, a stern demand for more "cognitive learning" is raised. On the other hand, as middle-class students suspect manipulation by the establishment, the disciplines of the social sciences are mocked and undermined. The intellectual young want to "turn on," to "encounter" one another, to create autonomous identities. Those who suffer deficits want to receive academic diplomas, to enroll in the colleges, to join the mainstream.

Against the expressed desire of the Federal government, the Southern schools have been ordered to desegregate immediately;

but before the first cries of Maddoxian agony are stilled, the problem of de-facto segregation in the North has been raised. There is talk of requiring desegregation there as well; and Southerners are rejoicing in the correct belief that the pressure upon them would be less. In the meanwhile, to complicate the matter even more, CORE leaders are traveling about the South objecting to desegregation, demanding separatism in the school districts, talking about Black identity.

These are but a few examples of the problematic situations confronting the concerned educator today. Most of them involve moral tension as well as methodological uncertainty; and there are few guidelines any longer for the individual to consult. Yet the individual teacher or the individual administrator is likely to be evaluated, assessed, held (as President Nixon and Dr. Kenneth Clark both say) "accountable" for what his students achieve. As never before, he is going to be thrown back upon his own resources, his own strength, his own commitment. If he is to survive, he must—as never before—choose himself with respect to his own life-world.

No single person can deal with all the uncertainties plaguing education today, although he probably ought to be aware of the general shape of things. His main focus must be on his own situation, in its immediacy and concreteness, with its specific possibilities and its specific lacks. If he is a classroom teacher, this means that he must attend, as a full person, to the diverse children with whom he works. He must be able to heed them, to listen to them, to act in the several ways required for enabling different ones of them to learn to learn. Abstract directives will be of little help. Sweeping statements about the "structure" of his subject matter or about the "level of conceptual development" he can expect will not really solve the problem of relating to Juan or Sally or George. Nor will they solve the problem of how to deal with, how to present his particular subject matter, since there are always alternative ways. If he is an empirical researcher or a school psychologist or an administrator, the situation to which he must relate is hugely different from the one confronting the

classroom teacher. Hopefully, each one can see well enough to note how his own situation shades off into the distances, meets the horizon, sometimes meets or merges with other human situations. But the lacks, the unfulfilled needs of his own particular context are the ones that should involve and preoccupy each individual, making his own personal, intentional contribution to the larger social enterprise.

We have tried, in the course of our editorship, to address ourselves repeatedly to the individual, the "single one." We have hoped to perform a significant function for that "single one" eager to look towards the horizons, to widen his own world. And we believe that this may be one of the contributions to be made by an educational journal, one of many educational journals in this country. The record is somewhat unique in its vastly diversified reading audience. Our readers are so diversified, in fact, that we can never subsume them under any single rubric, even the rubric "educationist." We have tried, therefore, to make it possible for many voices to speak from our pages—the voices of mathematicians, community leaders, professors of literature, social studies teachers, restless students, verse-writing children, and professional poets. And we have made an effort, through most of these five years, to imagine an individual on the other side, an individual committed to engaging in some specific educational action, opening our pages with the weariness and excitement of his work still inside him, evoking questions, making him care.

We hand over our editorial torch to our successor with a sense of confidence that he cares—and that he knows as well as we do how many things there are "deserving such a kick." He will be concerned, we are sure, with inequities and deficiencies, and also with potentialities. He will pay heed to the difficulties and the wonders of pluralism, to restive communities and to competing schools and to the stubbornly vital common school. He will deal with legitimacy too, and accountability, and with the way people say things and make things, and with the way they search for meaning. But he will express his concern in his own way; since, at the record, editors are free to choose

themselves. With trust in him, with regard for him, we are proud to present the new writer of this column—Frank G. Jennings, FGJ.

MG

Torch-catching is a dangerous game in which the first act is almost always a lie. The sequel is both better and worse than the opening. Education is such a disorderly undertaking, riven by justified fears, preening itself for imagined achievements and harried by its putative betters in academia and on Main Street. Education is such a gallant quest, seeking the holy spark in everyman, the touch of genius in the favored few, finding excellence in the ordinary and splendid possibilities even in society's shadows. Of all of the helping professions, of all of the people-changing institutions none are quite so willing as teachers and schools to attempt Promethean acts. None are so willing to provide that "difference that makes a difference." None have the capacity to suffer and survive those local tragedies that measure the distance between reach and grasp.

It is the uniquely American kind of brashness to act as if ordered schooling can provide absolute compensation to the child for the deficiencies of his birthplace and time and can remove all the mean restraints that hamper growth of mind and spirit.

Education lives amid contending myths of rationality and feeling, of openness and certainty, convinced without warrant that doing is the light and the way toward productive understanding, as though purpose were an emergent quality of any act. This may be true for poets and the fools of God, but it leads to fakery in the classroom. It leads to innovation as an act of social contrition. It leaves the student a castaway on a morally barren island in the midst of our social seas.

Despite the weariness of some of education's critics with questions of goals and values, we must enunciate purposes, we must define provisional goals, we must declare what we intend to do—and then act with a kind of renewable courage to attain those partial and incomplete victories in

social endeavors that are all that is available within the human condition.

The American people are possessed of appropriate and precise instincts in these matters. Education is not and can never be an afterthought in our social processes. It was not so for our Founding Fathers. It was not so for our colonial ancestors. It cannot be for us.

If the past decades of anxiety, turmoil, and achievement bespeak anything beyond chaos, they are indicators of our clarifying awareness that we must now re-order the social and political institutions of education so that they will function effectively for each citizen, for every community, and for the national commonwealth.

This should be—must be our specific emphasis: Every child, whatever his condition of birth, must find in the schools unconditioned support for his acquisition of the essential social and learning skills. No child should ever fail in these achievements; too many of them do today. Every child, as he progresses through childhood into youth, must come to know and to use the formal knowledge and the informal procedures that are fundamental to an effective and satisfying life as a citizen of this nation. An intolerable number of our children are still being prevented from gaining this goal.

There is no need here to elaborate this point; it is a cherished democratic cliché. It is mentioned in order to focus upon our inescapable need to have in the highest councils of governments informed and impassioned advocates of the centrality of education, viewed as a social institution, to all of our affairs as a people.

There is ancient and incontestable wisdom in the observation that "Philosophy is no good unless it bakes bread." And there is a nagging pertinence to the affairs of schools in the newly enunciated wisdom of the

ecologists who remind us that "You can never merely do one thing. . . ." For education must be conceived and carried on as a meddler institution—fat one that is—as once the church was—the unabashed conscience of the people. No teacher, no administrator of any school, and most certainly no Commissioner of Education can afford the destructive luxury of pretending to moral neutrality. There are some things that enhance the human condition. There are many things that are brutalizing to it. The differences must be measured and declared.

Education is a vocation in the antique meaning of that misused word. We must hold to the unqualified conviction that the teaching of children and youth takes precedence over every other organized social act that man is capable of—and our conduct of the schools must celebrate that recognition.

FGJ

