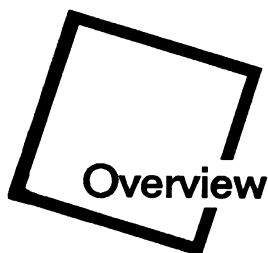




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Overview

It is possible to design a system of education that will help individuals develop their full potential and realize their great worth to society while simultaneously reducing crime, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and suicide. My colleagues and I have developed, over a twenty-year period, a framework or pattern to follow in designing such a system. It is the result of teachers and parents from two elementary schools working together with a nontraditional approach.

This book will accomplish three things: first, it will show why traditional education has been so resistant to change — so reform proof — which must be understood before we can move ahead. Second, it will introduce a mental frame of reference that frees teachers and parents from slavery to obsolete traditions so that education can be redesigned. And third, it will give examples of strategies that can be used immediately with students to begin the process of building a totally new system of education.

Curriculum Worship: The Impenetrable Barrier

The decade of the 1980s was one of much talk about educational reform. In the name of reform, a few surface changes were made, but

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"If our aim is to encourage spiritual growth according to a vision of what is of ultimate eternal value, then we must not leave the education of our children to chance. We must deliberately build an environment which promotes the ideals of wholeness, wisdom, and love."

— W. Nikola-Lisa

nothing really significant occurred to affect, deep down, what has been happening in schools for hundreds of years. Great teachers are still fighting the system in order to touch hearts and change lives, but more and more are burning out in the process. They find there is a limit to the energy they can give to overriding bureaucratic requirements, rules, and regulations in order to reach their students.

After studying and being involved in education for a combined total of nearly a hundred years, my colleagues and I believe that we have discovered the main barrier that prevents needed reform from taking place. It is a stubborn obstacle that will not be moved until we realize it is there.

The enormous dam that prevents progress in education is an attitude that is held by many educators — a belief that curriculum is king. Our society has an obsession with curriculum. Every few years another reform tide sweeps across the land and with it comes an irresistible urge to write a new curriculum in hope that this will cure our ailing system of education.

My associates and I have found that it is impossible to reform education within the prevailing frame of reference, which is characterized by a mental fixation on curriculum development instead of human development. Education has evolved into a purposeless organization that emphasizes standardized achievement and "minimum competence" over maximum achievement and the full development of individual potential. We have found in numerous surveys with groups of teachers and parents that they cannot name their state, district, or school goals of education. Those responsible for helping students learn do not know what the curriculum is supposed to accomplish. Thus, instead of being guided by goals, our teachers are slaves to curriculum, which has become an end in and of itself. All students are fed the same bland curriculum diet regardless of vast differences in gifts, talents, interests, and experiences. Teachers are required to do the impossible: standardize students.

"I desire that there be as many different persons in the world as possible; I would have each one be very careful to find out and preserve his own way."

— Henry David Thoreau

An emphasis on standardization may be a major contributor to the alarming increase in suicide, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and crime. Students who do not fit the common mould into which they are being forced are dropping out of school in record numbers. Standardized achievement testing has become the trademark of the "effectiveness movement," through which a school's effectiveness is



Frame One

The Mission of Education

IF WE COULD ERASE ALL OUR PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT EDUCATION and begin a new educational program, what would it be like? Imagine that you are part of a task force whose job is to establish a new system of education for a world in turmoil that is quickly destroying itself. Where do you start?

Consider the theories, the foundation, upon which education will be based. A new framework needs a “mission” statement. What you are trying to accomplish must be clearly in mind, because without that image, the steps toward realizing your goal will never emerge.

Our mission statement grew out of analyzing numerous surveys to determine parent priorities for education: “The goal of education is to develop great human beings who are valuable contributors to society.”

This statement equates greatness with being a contributor to society. It sets a new goal for education: guiding students toward becoming great human beings. This concept is the foundation upon which this guide has been based. It is one that even very young children can understand; they learn quickly what it means to help out in a family, a class, or a community. It is easy to help children see that education is a process of “becoming” a good, contributing human being. “Greatness” is a measure of one’s contributions.