FROM OZZIE AND HARRIET TO BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD:

MASS MEDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE LOSS OF SELF

AND THE DILEMMA OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

By

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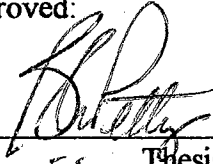
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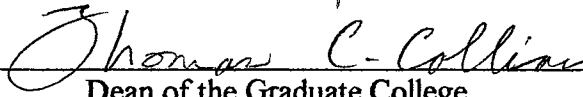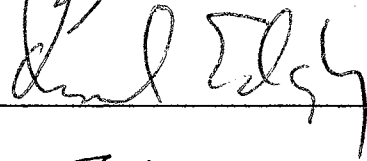Master of Arts
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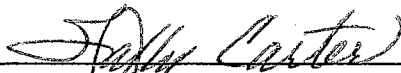
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THE EVOLUTION OF SELF-IDENTITY

IN SEARCH OF REALITY

Introduction

> On Saturday I went shopping with my teenage daughter. I needed a dress
> for a party the next week. I saw a very attractive dress, black, a daring cut,
> and with silver sequins. I was very excited until I tried it on. Dejectedly, I
> had to tell my daughter, that I just couldn't take it. It just wasn't me. My
> daughter responded with gentle mockery, "But Mom, that isn't the point.
> With that dress you would really be somebody" (Gergen, 1993, p. 139).

It seems in this world of ours all anyone wants to be is *somebody*. And, all too

often, that sense of *being* is provided for us by artificial means. In order to be accepted in

that other worldly realm of ones peers and whirl of social contacts, what one wears, owns

and otherwise flaunts provides, for many, their status, their sense of self worth. It's what

makes them stand out, or at the very least, fit in. The problem, in part, becomes one of

fluidity. Popular culture fads change at the gust of the wind. What's *in* today may be *out*

tomorrow (Fiske, 1989b, p. 130). And so, while little Susie the first half of the year may

be defining her *self* by the hole-in-the-knee jeans she wears, by years end she may be

wearing a sharp and stylish Starter jacket. The question, of course, becomes, can students

today maintain a sense of self equilibrium in their academic pursuit while constantly striving to be somebody else?

Sam Keen aptly states in his book <u>Fire</u> <u>in</u> <u>the</u> <u>Belly</u>, "with or without boots and Levi's most of us aspire (and fail) to be Marlboro men" (1991, p. 141). The reason? Stuart Crystal, a Starter jacket spokesman puts it into perspective: "we're selling fantasy" (Today's must-have, p. 10). But fantasy is not reality. If kids today project an aura of somebody elseness, who is left to inhabit their consciousness? Madonna, Axel, Garth? Whatever happened to ones being identified by what they do, their academic attainment, for instance? It has simply gotten to a point where "good grades have taken a back seat to American students desire for designer clothes and trendy jackets" (Associated Press, 1989, p. A1). To be *accepted*, they perceive a need to follow the tune of the commercial piper. Television has indoctrinated them and many respond to the message, which simply comes across as *buy me* (Mander, 1978, p. 169).

In one form or another, man has always defined his status by his possessions. Before the advent of TV, it was more or less a fairly accurate reflection of ones being. There was not an obsessive need to replace the "real self with an imposter" (Gergen, 1993, p. 154), a reflection of the commercial imagery created by the pundits of Madison Avenue. And yet,

> A Ralph Lauren polo shirt says something very different than its Fruit of the Loom equivalent. The implicit message is that manhood can be purchased. And the expense of the luxury items we own marks our progress along the path of the good life as it is defined by the consumer society (Keen, 1991, p. 53).

But what happens when that desire is stymied by economic reality? What happens when a

student cannot fit into the mode because they cannot afford it? *Some* rebel. And some, in

frustration at their inability to succeed (a success measured by possessions) turn to

violence.

> Some students dress to kill, others kill to dress. In classrooms and streets
> across this country, high school students are being mugged and killed for
> their leather coats, their athletic shoes and their jewelry (Rivera, 1991,
> ABC TV).

Others, however, create their identity by becoming nonconformist. They resist

materialism through adoption of those things mainstreamers find scandalous, offensive and

vulgar (Fiske, 1989b, p. 127). And yet, many of these same rebels are *wannabes*. Every

day students see television testimonials proclaiming that if they do not have whatever is

being plugged, touted, heralded or endorsed, they better run out and get it because it will

improve their athletic prowess, heighten their sex appeal and increase their all-around

likeability. They *want to be* part of the very mainstream they rebel against. But, they

cannot due to the economic reality of their every day world undergirded by a basic literacy

handicap reflected through an inability to organize classroom knowledge "into a coherent

structure" (Winn, 1985, p. 16). And so they create other identities, often through a total

disregard for authority figures. These are the students who constantly test school limits by

seeing what they can get away with just short of getting expelled. These are the Beavis

and Butt-heads of today's postmodern society, quite the antithesis of the television families

of the 1950s like the Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, "Kelloggs happy family" (Cohen, 1987,

p. 78) where decorum and conformity ruled the hallways of sons Ricky and Davids school.

Beavis and Butt-head are cartoon characters who found life in *Frog Baseball*, an entry by their creator Mike Judge in the *Sick and Twisted* animation festival. Subsequently, Beavis and Butt-head made their debut on MTV on March 8th, 1993, and the rest is history (Shales, 1993, p. 9). Two fictional antisocial fourteen year olds, who have no redeeming qualities and are "rude, crude, vile, perverse and disgusting" (Schwartz, 1993, p. 4) catapulted to instant pop culture celebrity status.

Beavis and Butt-head, "dumber than lettuce" (Schwartz, 1993, p. 4), became one of the hottest, most watched, properties on MTV. But why? According to sociologist Charles Edgley, the show is "giving younger adolescents something they can relate to...They aren't rebelling. They're retelling experiences they've had" (Schwartz, 1993, p. 4). Few can buy into the American dream of designer jackets, jeans and footwear. Therefore, it should be no surprise that Beavis and Butt-head have touched a chord with so many of today's youth, especially the disenfranchised, non-hip, not-with-it misaligned misfits whose identity is not always found in material *things*.

What should frighten many educators is that "Beavis and Butt-head may represent a larger segment of reality than most of us would like to admit" (Rosenberg, 1993, p. F29). As a result, this anti-culture, anti-everything duo are spawning a plethora of pop culture idioms and merchandising spinoffs which the wannabes acquire to further identify with their non-identification. The *outsiders* are now becoming *insiders* as they enter mainstream consciousness. Vulgarism has become panache.

Beavis and Butt-heads philosophy exemplifies a prevalent view held by many of today's youth. These two miscreants divide their world simply into "things that suck" and

"things that are cool" (Leland, 1993, p. 50). In their new book, in what the reader is reminded as their wheezy monotonistic laughing style *huh-huh, huh-huh, huh-huh,* they proudly claim, "Yeah, huh-huh, we're cool. We live in this town and have crappy jobs and go to a sucky school with a bunch of morons" (Johnson & Marcil, 1993, p. 1). But that says it all doesn't it? That's life. Economic reality sucks. School sucks. Other people suck, except perhaps for fellow "peckerwoods" (Young, 1993, p. 45) and babes with big boobs.

Beavis and Butt-head are losers. But, "they are not just any losers. They are specifically *our* losers, totems of an age of decline and nonachievement. One in five people who graduated from college between 1984 and 1990 holds a job that does not require a college education. If this is not hard economic reality for a whole generation, it is psychological reality" (Leland, 1993, p. 50). Maybe that is why Beavis and Butt-head have "no substantial aspirations, no ambition, no long-term goals, nothing (Shales, 1993, p. 9). They represent the reality of todays popular culture, epitomizing our world and all that is in it. They are the postmodern generation, tomorrows leaders, the present-day authority figures who Beavis and Butt-head refer to as "ass-wipes" (Young, 1993, p. 87).

Alan Bloom, in his book The Closing of the American Mind, refers to popular culture as "nonstop commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy" (Bloom, 1987, p. 75). Beavis and Butt-head would call this *cool*. But isn't that the way it is supposed to be? "Popular pleasures must be those of the oppressed, they must contain elements of the opposition, the evasive, the scandalous, the offensive, the vulgar, the resistant" (Fiske, 1989, p. 127). Perhaps. But if Beavis and Butt-head do, indeed, represent a postmodern

reality, then they have entered the mainstream where oppression is the norm and have captured mans basest being where vulgarism reigns supreme.

Remorse is dead, conscience is gone, and there is no sense of right or wrong. We are left to stare dull and vacant-eyed at imbecilic yet entertaining schlock fed to us by an over-zealous yet accommodating mass media. Like the pied piper it continues to lead us to the precipice, an end of what for us has been a postmodern way of life. If the reality of this life is now delineated by the nothingness of Beavis and Butt-head, then the only thing left is a new beginning. Perhaps there is yet hope for those who teeter on the brink of a social abyss where senseless violence over materialistic want, educational meaninglessness, and economic oblivion are rampant. Things may have been on a slide. But, it is not too late. After all, when one has bottomed out, there is no where else to go but up. So, the question becomes, *what's next?* To formulate a response, it is important to glance at the path travelled.

Historical Insight

At the turn of the century, life for youth was quite different from that posed and prissied by a pubescent MTV generation. Children were sheltered from the vulgarities of adult life by both language and print. There, simply, were some things which were strictly forbidden topics. Schools adhered to a formal age-graded system which assigned what knowledge should be bestowed on youth and in what sequence (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 227). Even social relationships were structured, in part, by the limited modes of transportation and means of communication. As a result, "from birth to death one could

depend on relatively even-textured social surroundings. Words, faces, gestures and possibilities were relatively consistent, coherent, and slow to change" (Gergen, 1991, p. 61). In other words, there existed a seemingly reasonable semblance of social stability. Reliability was a key ingredient. But there was more. The twentieth century brought with it yet an adherence to the romantic ideal. Family was still an important concept. Community was something to which one belonged. And trust, was a childlike essence which undergirded individual "passion, purpose, depth, and personal significance" (Gergen, 1991, p. 27).

Yet, the world was at the dawn of a new awakening. Like a soothsayer, a gift from the gods, the technological revolution promised to bring about wondrous changes, all to the benefit of man. Technology gave birth to film, radio and, ultimately, television. And, the world was never the same.

Life took on other passions and purposes cloaked in an artificial sense of being represented by artificial families whose joys and sorrows became our artificial own as we watched them unfold weekly on TV. Among the many shows which became our extended family in the 1950s were *Father Knows Best, Make Room for Daddy, Leave it to Beaver,* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet.* "These programs produced a sense of intimacy and authenticity by encouraging viewers to believe that the characters were real families who just happened to live their lives on TV" (Spigel, 1992, p. 158). Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, in fact, were married in real life and their sons Ricky and David played those same roles on the show.

These programs continued to perpetuate the myth that parents knew infinitely more than their offspring (Postman, 1983, p. 11). Mom and dad still reigned supreme and "good, clean family normality was the reigning aesthetic" (Spiegel, 1992, p. 177). As Ella Taylor states in Prime-Time Families:

> The small mishaps of Beaver Cleaver and Ricky Nelson played themselves out unclouded by financial troubles, street violence, drug abuse, or marital discord. The television children of the 1950s inhabited a universe in which mild sibling quarrels were quickly but fairly adjudicated by sage, kindly parents equipped with endless reserves of time and patience--marital teams offering clearcut rules for moral guidance. Taken together, these shows proposed family life as a charming excursion into modernity, but resting on the unshakable stability of tradition. Parents would love and respect each other and their children forever. The children would grow up, go to college, and take up lives identical; in ,most respects to those of their parents (1989, pp. 26-27).

This television picture of the perfect family embodies the American dream: mom, dad, and kids in a "warm, loving, comfortable relationship in which there are no major problems or at least no problems that cannot be solved in 30 or 60 minutes" (Huston, et al. 1992, p. 38). Reality, however, presents a different picture. Not every household has a father who is always there to offer sage advice and guidance for his kids (Greenfield, 1981, p. 97). In fact, ever more representative of many American youth, Beavis and Butt-head appear to be latch-key children from broken homes, "perhaps fathered by the same man who no longer comes around. Their mothers are otherwise occupied and figure not a whit in their stunningly tasteless activities" (Young, 1993, p. 87). No wonder they play with fire, have utter disrespect for authority, and are "twin cabbages of stupidity" (Rosenberg, 1993, p. F1). They are what so many have become, products of a fantasy world created by producers, directors, actors and a supporting cast.

Beavis and Butt-head are popular because "no matter how far removed they are from ones own generation or socioeconomic level, everybody feels as though, at some time in their lives they have known these guys" (Shales, 1993, p. 9). It is an identification of those who have spent more time interacting with television than with their own families (Harvey, 1989, p. 6). Reich even made the observation more than twenty years ago:

> The television world is what our society claims itself to be, what it demands that we believe. But when the television child finally encounters the real world, he does not find families like Ozzie, Harriet, David, and Ricky, "Father Knows Best," or "My Three Sons." He does not find the clean suburbs of television but the sordid slums of reality...He does not find perpetual smiles or the effervescent high spirits of a Coke ad, but anxieties and monotony. And when he stops believing in this mythic world, the breach in his credulity is irreparable. (1971, pp. 220-221).

If Beavis and Butt-head did not exist, it probably would be necessary to create them, but with a sprinkling of some redemptive quality. Every society has had its youthful social misfits, youth who seemly answer a primal call with conscious abandonment, responding to some inherent need to rebel, to carve a generational niche all their own. After all, it is their way of being *in the world.*

The twists and turns of the evolutionary process are filled with both antedotes and horror stories. Modern history is littered with the residue. One can look back and, like the trash dump anthropologist, go through the garbage to chronicle the journey. No matter how vocal the prophets of gloom and doom, there have always been those who professed that *this too will pass.* In time, new fads and *in* things evolve as a counter-culture to the existing popular-culture bringing with them a sense of exhilaration which --

can only accompany doing the unconventional. Theodore Roszak in his book Making of a

Counter Culture refers to it as being:

> ...so radically disaffected from the main stream assumptions of our society
> that it scarcely looks to many as culture at all, but takes on the alarming
> appearance of a barbaric intrusion (1969, p. 42).

Beavis and Butt-head's vulgarity, insensitivity and perverse cruelty, however,

underscore a nihilism reflected in their distorted self aggrandizement. Theirs is a world in

decay, a postmodern world which presents a more accurate commentary on the state of

the current social order than any nightly newscast. Theirs is not a message of hope.

Instead, it is one of barbarism.

Behold! The Goths stand at the gate ready to rip asunder the status quo. There

appear to be only two outcomes--aloneness and angst in the depths of ones own self-made

hell or redemption by way of a return to a morality, exemplified by the likes of Ozzie and

Harriet, where compassion and caring and a respect for human dignity give a new meaning

to self worth.

Chapter Overview

This writing, then, is a chronicle of a personal journey, the *lived experience*

of an educator from an age of enlightened modernism through the uncertainties of a

postmodern world dominated by the influence of the mass media to the edge of a new

tomorrow. If there is to be hope for the future, then we, as guardians of our young, have

a responsibility to maximize our students potential, to unleash their individual ingenuity

and creativity, uninhibited by the structures which heretofore have held them back.

In order to fully achieve this, it is important to incorporate a methodology, a way of going about arriving at a sense of the world and all that is in it. Chapter Two, then, examines the phenomenological method, "a disciplined, rigorous effort to understand experience profoundly and authentically" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, in press).

The writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, van Manen, Pinar, Reynolds, and others, define its parameters which, singularly, is reflected as Husserl's *Lebenswelt,* the world of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 182). True understanding, therefore, can only come from a "knowledge of self-as-knower-of-the-world" (Grumet, 1992, p. 30). It gives life its texture, which Jan Jagodzinski calls, "the exposed history of the *thing* embodies on its patina, worn like your skin" (1991, p. 165). Texture, therefore, is:

> ...an understanding of our waste and decay. What we consume and dispose, both physically and mentally, allows us to grow. What we excrete from our minds and our bodies may be reused and placed in new contexts. It is through our failures that we learn who we are. Repair is nurturing and healing. All living things require nurture and healing if their life is to be preserved. Everything new demands that it be approached with new demands, that it be approached with a "soft" instrumentalism, gently prodded and closely felt (Jagodzinski, 1991, p. 166).

This, then, is the essence of the phenomenological method. While Beavis and Butt-head may be representative of waste and decay where superficial external factors dominate their measly existence, self as knower of the world comes about through arriving at a nurturing and compassionate perspective. That is why Chapter Two requires looking

not just outwardly but inwardly as well to capture the totality of the lived experience--to make sense of that which seems senseless.

Chapter Three is a review of the literature in its historical context. The youth forces which shape our society are a multi-layered regurgitated hodgepodge sewn together by the discordant themes of a postmodern history washed out, used up, exhausted. But it is a history, *their* history, which requires examination, because in order to understand where we are at any given moment in time, it is important that we fully identify the path travelled to arrive there. This chapter will examine the rhythm, the pulsating beat of those who have gone before in this generation. Like the steady tempo of the native drum, Americans at the turn of the century relied on self-sufficiency to see them through. Their own abilities to succeed or not were one certainty upon which they could rely. It was the pioneer spirit, the modern era identified with Yankee ingenuity and pride, the stuff of the American dream. We now, however, are at a point where the beat is no longer discernable. Like the frenzied pitch of incendiary punk rock, it ignites our primal instincts, throwing us together in some sort of prehistoric slam dance in which we are left to gasp and grunt and make no sense at all. Like Beavis and Butt-head, we are left with a life seemingly void of meaning but for our own other world fantasies, the likes of which cause male dominated alter-egos to "spank the monkey" (a Beavis and Butt-head term for masturbation) (Young, 1993, p. 87), an only friend in a friendless world where *self* is all that is left.

Charles Reich in his book The Greening of America refers to such self realization as arriving at consciousness. It is, he says, "the whole man; his head; his way of life. It is

that by which he creates his own life and thus creates the society in which he lives" (1970, p. 15). And so it is that Chapter Three will review this consciousness as a study of self, a reflection of society from the turn of the century to 1970 when The Greening of America was published. Beyond this, it will develop and define three additional consciousness levels: one past, one which we are just now exiting and the one which awaits us. In the former two, the paths were chosen for us. In the latter, there is a fork in the road. On the one hand we have the wherewithal to be true to self and take on the challenge of the *technofuture* on our own terms. Or, we can be like lemmings who blindly follow one another over the edge into unfathomable oblivion. The choice is ours.

Chapter Four, then, takes an in-depth look at the forces which have brought us to where we are through a phenomenological perspective. Since the advent of television, many students appear to have become enslaved, insatiably addicted to its imagery. They have placed television at the alter and worshiped the mindless images which flicker across their consciousness. They have become molded and shaped by its messages. Advertisers have told these students who they are and who they must be and they rush out and buy the newest, super-nifty-gotta-have-it *toys* as a result. Their entire existence has rested on artificial perceptions of self where "new belief systems arrive as regularly as the daily mail" (Anderson, 1990, p. 10). What has happened is that for many students, television has become a "dominant source for the validation of social reality" (McLeod & O'Keefe, 1972, p. 159). Ira Mitroff and Warren Bennis in the preface to their book The Unreality Industry provide even greater clarity:

TV not only defines what is reality, but much more importantly and disturbingly, TV obliterates the very distinction, the very line, between reality and unreality (1989, p. 32).

If students cannot know who and what they are between their social world which tells them one thing and the school which tells them another, how can they possibly attain any true sense of self? They are left to become nothing more than a disposable product, manufactured and discarded by the very system responsible for nurturing them.

Experts estimate that the average American youngster views a whopping 30,000 to 40,000 TV commercials per year (Jaenicke & Jaenicke, 1989, p. 15). The visual feast of consumer goods and services dished up and served to students daily cannot help but have a decidedly negative impact on their lives. Not only does evidence show that considerable TV viewing distorts their sense of self but it further handicaps their ability to learn. Media scholar Jay Stein puts it this way:

> Classroom education is death and educators are deadheads, while television beats out the lively pulse of life. In contrast to dull appearing teachers of artificial subjects, the crooners, columnists and comedians of media content seem sparklingly alive, even though they may not always present a desirable side of life. The ways of civilization, as seen through the Media, are not those of the educator and the idealist, but rather, are those of the merchant and the materialist (1979, p. 54).

Media analyst, writer and lecturer Jean Kilbourne, agrees:

> Advertisers are aware of their role and do not hesitate to take advantage of the insecurities and anxieties of young people, in the guise of offering solutions. A cigarette provides a symbol of independence. A pair of designer jeans conveys status. The right perfume or beer resolves doubts about femininity or masculinity (1982, p. 211).

These are the things that have been and are still important to many youth. Even Beavis and Butt-head would aspire to be *somebody* commodified and defined by *stuff*, as

reflected in the *Skull* and *Death Rock* t-shirts they wear. But theirs is an apparent

hopeless existence in a hopeless society populated by uninspired teachers in schools where

control and warehousing take precedence over learning (Reich, 1971, p. 149). To Beavis

and Butt-head school "sucks" (Johnson & Marcil, 1993, p. 1) and they openly display a

"contempt for pedagogic authority" (Young, 1993, p. 87), which is not so surprising when

their teachers are portrayed by the likes of "Mr. Buzzcut, the homicidal physical education

instructor and '60s-refugee-turned-teacher Mr. Van Driessen" (Berry, 1994, p. 37).

It serves as a stark reminder that we have created our own monster and it is not

television. It is an immobilized and antiquated factory school system which seemingly

perpetuates a near static level of mediocrity. The only escape route left therefore is to

destroy it and start anew. But this is not a recent revelation. Educators have known

about the need for quite some time. As Jonathan Kozol, author of <u>Savage Inequalities</u>

affirms, "American education has gone to hell in a handcart" (cited in Doyle, 1993,

p. 626).

Chapter Four, then, is also an examination of the two major forces which brought

this about: an unresponsive educational system and a seemingly omnipotent media

monolith. Working in tandem, they have contributed to the students identity muddle.

The education system appears to be numbed to inaction because many teachers

simply do not know how to fight a national epidemic which has infected the minds of

America's youth: *a loss of self.* It is an identity epidemic so wide spread that a recent U.S.

Census Bureau report confirms the educators worst fear. More than one third of high

school age students have either fallen behind within their respective grade levels or have

dropped out of school entirely in search of the *good life* with their personal identity and distorted expectations firmly in hand (Kominski & Adams, 1993, p. 5). Is it no wonder, then, that many teachers see these students as little more than blips on the radar screen of life? They know they are there. They just have difficulty keeping up with who and what they are.

As a result, a *curriculum of containment* has evolved. These teachers do their best but with the classroom a battleground, they are far outnumbered. It is one teacher, attempting (often times succeeding) to make education more entertaining than the popular culture fare which clutters their students minds. And so, the information is conveyed, assignments given and a sigh of relief expressed if classroom management has held disruption to a minimum. Get through each period unscathed becomes one more goal for many teachers who just want to make it through intact in order to be ready to face the next battle. Chapter Four is ultimately an attempt then to understand one students personal journey through the educational maze. It is at once an intensely intimate revelation as well as a reflection of something more--a loss of self which is representative of so many youth today, the Beavis and Butt-heads struggling to learn *where they are at* and *why*, and *where they would like to be*.

Chapter Five, then, provides insight as to how these students might realize their perception of the American dream in a technologically dominated world. In the upcoming "cyberspace" (Solomon, 1993, p. 40) of technology, even many experts have no idea how education, religion, work, sex and human relationships will be impacted. According to

author Neil Postman in his book <u>Technopoly</u>, technology has the potential to make life

"easier, cleaner, and longer" (1992, p. 12). The alternative:

> ...it destroys the vital sources of our humanity. It creates a culture without
> a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social
> relations that make human life worth living (Postman, 1992, p. 12).

Education, however, should not be a fight, especially against the forces of

technology. But fundamental changes will need to occur before the battle for the minds of

todays students is fully won. As author Marie Winn observes:

> Only by working for changes in attitude and policy towards children and
> families, only by joining the struggle against the passive pull of television,
> only by turning away from materialism and towards more spiritual goals,
> away from self-absorption and towards sacrifice and devotion to those in
> need of help, our children, may we achieve our goals for higher education.
> And we must start, as ever, by seeking those changes in ourselves. Only
> then can we possibly succeed on a larger scale (1983, p. 20).

Few dispute the fact that the system of education as we know it must change. But sitting

passively on the sidelines is not the answer. It requires a collective effort by those

teachers willing to commit to making it happen. It's time to say *enough*!

Chapter Five looks at a number of changes which perhaps need to occur in the

fundamental character and structure of the factory school system as we know it. Teachers

for too long have been locked into the constraints which fuel the curriculum of

containment. The system makes its demands, often adhering to mandated state guidelines,

and the teacher complies while the students continue to reflect a persona of whatever it is

they perceive themselves to be. Authors and educators Victor Lowenfeld and William

Brittain see it this way:

Our education system has done little to change the increasing loss of
identity with oneself. Rewards are given for neat papers, for correct
answers, for recalling the proper information. Little is done to stimulate
the child to find the rewards from within the learning process: to find
satisfaction in solving his own problems, to take pleasure in developing
greater knowledge and understanding for its own sake, or to measure
success or failure in areas of importance to self (1982, p. 16).

On a local level, teachers can make a difference. It may mean bucking an
entrenched bureaucracy or working with them to create a climate of learning within the
present system. But one thing is certain. Educators cannot continue to ignore the social
influences which have molded the students before them. "By ignoring the culture and
social forms that are authorized by youth and simultaneously empower or disempower
them, educators risk complicitly silencing and negating their students" (Giroux, 1989,
p. 3). Such professional irresponsibility is reprehensible. Many students may already be
lost. But, continuing to teach in ignorant bliss or confused anxiety will achieve nothing.

One alternative has been articulated by educators Russell Dobson, Judith Dobson
and J. Randall Koetting:

...perhaps equal time should be given to what children are and could be as
to what they should be. Such an endeavor in schools would necessitate the
creation of a school culture in which learning flourishes primarily because
of internal student motivation rather than externally initiated stimuli (1985,
p. 83).

Certainly, such an undertaking can and should begin with the individual teacher. But it is
not as easy as words would make it seem. There are still the Beavis and Butt-heads
staring back, daring anyone to educate them. Unleashing *their* individual initiatives might
be inviting the worst imaginable disaster. Where, then, should the educator begin?

First, students need to know that they are respected as individuals. Externals need to be stripped away. Nike and Calvin Kleins aside, the student is still a human being born with an innate curiosity which can be tapped. It must begin, as William Reynolds proposes, with a critical caring, a *curriculum of compassion*:

> Compassion would allow us to return to the original enthusiasm with which children greet the world. Compassion would allow the passion for knowledge and life to re-turn. Return what has been lost as we travel the prescribed paths of a compassionless and disabling school system with its preordained curriculum. Compassion would allow us to support our children, believe in our children, endure for the sake of the children, and hope for the children (1993, p. 3).

Compassion and caring must necessarily dominate the curriculum, where independence is respected, creative ingenuity is encouraged and potential is challenged. Ultimately, the students identity and self-worth must be centered more on their own individual ability than a *curriculum of consumption*.

Inevitably, the artificiality of the material world of popular culture will continue to be a factor in the students life both in and out of the classroom. But, through infinite patience, steadfast diligence and a firm commitment to see that students do succeed, whatever the odds, television just may become less a dictator of fashion trends and purveyor of polluted minds.

Chapter Five, of course, offers no magical prescriptions for the social ills which plague our students lives. But the status quo as it exists, serves as a call for a future where educational excellence is not merely an unfulfilled yearning but a universal

realization. It's a call which cannot go unanswered. The alternative, after all, is unthinkable--a world populated by Beavis and Butt-head clones. *Huh-huh, huh-huh, huh-huh*.

CHAPTER II

LEBENSWELT: THE WORLD OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Charles Reich, in his book The Greening of America, speaks of consciousness as

being an individual's "background, education, politics, insight, values, emotions, and

philosophy" (1971, p. 15). It is, he says, the way in which an individual creates his/her

own life and, in turn, creates the society in which they live. Consciousness, therefore, is

the individuals head, his/her way of life. This is the man or woman we see daily: on the

elevator, walking their dog, doing all the various and sundry things which make up ones

daily existence. Consciousness, whether real or not, Reich feels, is what is important in

life. It is the physical manifestation of ones *being in the world*. It represents the

individuals everyday encounters, the things which impact their being, the things which

provide for a sense of self. This is the individuals *immediate lived experience*, or as

Edmund Husserl calls it, his *Lebenswelt* (cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 182).

The individual is made, in part, by the clothes he/she wears, the car they drive, the

job they hold and by the lover at their side. These are the marks of a *conscious* individual-

-stuff which is *cool*, which gives them a sense of who and what they are. However, more

often than not, that perception is distorted, warped by external factors which influence a subconscious other self.

What happens, for instance, at home in the dark of the night when the lights are off at their office, the car is parked in the garage, their clothes are in the hamper and the lover at their side is no longer there? Where do their thoughts reside? Who are they now? The stripping down of the conscious being leaves the man or woman bare to deal with their own inner self--yet another dimension of their Lebenswelt.

Nicholas Evreinoff in his essay The Never Ending Show says quite accurately that "we are constantly playing a part when in society...we like to see ourselves theatricalized" (1990, pp. 421-422). We look in the mirror of life and what we see is rarely objective truth. We deny the reflection because in the millisecond of the moment, mortality stares back with bemused acknowledgement of our own, often times, hypocritic self delusion. And so, like a fictional reincarnation of Walter Mitty (Thurber, 1945, pp. 47-51), we liken ourselves to a caped super-hero dressed in brightly colored tights ready to take on the world and win. Most of the time we succeed in the charade. Most of the time it is a myth.

This is why phenomenology as a research methodology for this writing is important. It is a disciplined, rigorous effort to understand experience profoundly and authentically" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, in press). It asks the question "what is it that the individual sees in life?" (Willis, 1991, p. 173). According to James MacDonald:

> The quality of lived experience resides in the relationships that exist in our
> lives. Thus, the way we relate to other people, the way we organize and
> administer power, the relationship of our work to our self-esteem, how we

feel about what we are doing, and what meaning our lives have in concrete contexts are all ways of thinking about the quality of our experience (1988, p. 162).

This lived experience, however, can never be placed in its immediacy. We can only interpret it through past reflection and hope that, somehow we will gain greater understanding and clarity out of life. Max van Manen provides this example:

> ...if one tries to reflect on one's anger while being angry, one finds that the anger has already changed or dissipated. Thus, phenomenological reflection is not *introspective* but *retrospective* (1991, p. 10).

Merleau-Ponty adds that "phenomenology is the study of essences" (cited in van Manen, 1991, p. 184) which means that it provides us with the opportunity to grasp the basic insights which enable us to come in more direct contact with the world. It means staring in the mirror for just a bit longer and grasping the significance of what we see. Whether or not we permit that vision to alter our consciousness is irrelevant. Consciousness is always transitive. Our daily existence swirls with the ebb and flow of varying experiences which solidify, alter, change or otherwise impact our perceptions of our world.

When I began to formulate in my mind what this writing would be about, I discovered that my initial concept of what would evolve radically changed. It was no longer just a matter of how the external forces of the world shaped my attitude and my way of thinking. It became more a matter of how I, as an individual researcher, interpreted them from my own frame of reference. I came to realize that this phenomenological study would take on the shape of what it means to be a human being. This meant that I could no longer remain in the safety of predictability. Instead, as an individual whose thoughts, feelings, dreams and desires make up his being, I would be

required to acknowledge my own reality and express myself in a way which makes the invisible visible.

Human Science Research

This writing then, is as Merleau-Ponty says, a form of "human science research that seizes life and gives reflective expression to it" (cited in van Manen, 1991, p. 38). The writing itself becomes a reflective textual activity which enables one to express, as Jagodzinski pointed out, the *texture* of the lived experience as though it were worn on your skin. In this sense, phenomenology is the descriptive study of the Lebenswelt, an exercise in attempting to achieve the unachievable: "to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than an explication of meaning can reveal" (van Manen, 1991, p. 18). No matter how accurate we might be in capturing the essence of that which we have lived through, by virtue of our continuing existence, new experiences impact and reshape our perceptions at any given moment. Therefore, consciousness of our Lebenswelt gives us perceptions of our daily life world perceptions and, further, perceptions of those perceptions. It is a never-ending process. As George Willis states in response to the question of what phenomenological inquiry is:

> These personal and inwardly perceptual portions of individual life-worlds
> are where our distinctively human experience begins. Everything flows
> from them. In this sense they are nothing less than the basic curricula of
> our individual lives (1991, p. 175).

In any study of the lived human experience, the researcher must keep one question in mind: what is this lived experience like? In this writing the question might be framed: *what is it like to be a student in todays public schools?* as it attempts to capture the essence of the students life world--a world influenced and shaped, to a large degree, by the media.

Human science is the *systematic* study of the human experience. It involves writing because writing is an endeavor which brings to the surface those thoughts which were previously internalized. "To write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one's own depth" (van Manen, 1991, p. 127). This means that the human science research process is virtually inseparable from the writing process. Writing is a discursive expression of thought. In writing, we are forced to read what we have written and reflect on it. It may be a true representation of our inner being. It may be a manifestation of some other part of ourselves. But what happens in this review process is a formation of reflective thought which crystallizes our perceptions and provides us, in turn, with yet another aspect of our Lebenswelt upon which to reflect. Scholars like Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty tell us that this activity of "researching and reflecting on the one hand, and reading and writing on the other hand, are indeed quite indistinguishable" (van Manen, 1991, p. 126). It is what sets phenomenology apart from other disciplines because":

> It does not aim to explicate meanings specific to particular cultures (ethnography), to certain social groups (sociology), to historical periods (history), to mental types (psychology), or to an individuals personal life history (biography) (van Manen, 1991, p. 11).

Phenomenology, simply, attempts to form meaning from experiences we encounter within our Lebenswelt.

> ...that is why, when you listen to a presentation of a phenomenological
> nature, you will listen in vain for the punch-line, the latest information, or
> the big news. As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a
> summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to
> present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the
> result. The poem is the thing. So phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a
> poetizing project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal
> telling, wherein (according to Merleau-Ponty) we aim to involve the voice
> in an original singing of the world (van Manen, 1991, p. 13).

Within this poetic process, however, there exists warning, a siren song whose melodic rhythm calls to the inner being and touches a chord which responds in expressive form. It is not always the case that there exists a yearning for such expression or even an ability. Indeed, one may be barely conscious it even exists. Like the shadow world in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, we perceive what we believe to be reality but can only truly know it when we come to the light (Plato, 1992, pp. 186-189). Therein lies the difference. *Knowing* is one thing. *Understanding* is another.

Phenomenological poetizing moves us, in part, to achieve the latter. It is not an easy process, for it requires looking in the mirror of life and instead of turning away at the horror of what we may see, acknowledging its existence and expressing it as best we can in written fom. As human science research, van Manen outlines four things this writing must be: *oriented, strong, rich* and *deep*.

First, it requires being *oriented* to the text. This requires an absorption of a single thought. It means being immersed in the totality of that which interests me, mainly the

impact of media on the students sense of self. It means being driven, committed to a quest in an attempt "to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (van Manen, 1991, p. 31).

The *strength* of the text develops through investigating experience as it is lived As Husserl says, it is a turning "to the things themselves" (cited in van Manen, 1991, p. 31). This means that my perceptions as I write come from without and within. It is a reflection of the world and me in it, a world of "living relations and shared situations" (van Manen, 1991, p. 32). Once I have a grasp of *who* I am in relationship to *where* I am, I should be able to come to a better understanding of how I fit in the scheme of the greater whole, my own personal Lebenswelt.

The *richness* of this writing comes about through "the creation of a text that will bring my experience in the world to words" (Grumet, 1002, p. 33), words which create an emotive response from you, the reader. This will be achieved not only through poetization but also through story telling, anecdotes and other descriptive means.

The *depth* of this writing, then, will come about through maintaining a strong and oriented relationship to that which is being described. It requires remaining focused, insuring that all elements brought into the phenomenological process are tied together, giving validity to the greater whole. It requires that sense be made out of what I am presenting or the entire endeavor ends up being a wasted exercise in futility. This, then, will necessitate writing and rewriting until satisfactory meaning is achieved. This meaning, however, is not always clearly defined from the outset. It comes about through the writing process. van Manen explains it this way:

A phenomenological researcher cannot just write down his or her question
at the beginning of the study. There it is! Question mark at the end! No,
in his or her phenomenological description the researcher/writer must *pull*
the reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but
wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the human
scientist does (1991, p. 44).

This, then, is the challenge of this writing as it proceeds. As an examination of the

pedagogic experience, it must present itself in unique enough form to tap the innate

curiosity of you, the reader, and pull you into the text. This writing, therefore, is not just

about guiding you through a trip to Oz but in engaging you in thoughtful reflection, what

Heidegger calls a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement--a "wondering about the project

of life, of living, of what it means to live a life" (cited in van Manen, 1991, p. 12). This,

then, is what this phenomenological method must achieve, ultimately, what van Manen

calls "an original *singing of the world*" (1991, p. 13).

CHAPTER III

DE-EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

HISTORY IN RETREAT

Introduction

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a
delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she
took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and
they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and
made themselves lion coverings. Genesis 3: 6-7 (Ryrie, 1978, p. 11).

Man was born with an innate curiosity. Sometimes that curiosity has led to disastrous

consequences, other times to marvelous discoveries. Regardless, it has led to change--if

nothing else, a new consciousness. In the case of Adam and Eve, it was cognition of their

nakedness. Their response? To cover themselves with fig leaves, the first recorded

instance of mans desire to be clothed. In the beginning, men and women covered

themselves because modesty prevailed. But at some point, such covering took on more

utilitarian purposes. It helped shield them from the cold. It protected them from the

weaponry of others. And, it gave them an aura; a persona; an identity. It was their mark

and they and others were conscious of it. It gave them cause to shout *l'chiam--to life*!

In most instances, this external facade served as a fairly accurate reflection of the

man, woman or even childs position in society, a badge of recognition which they either

inherited or earned. Their vocabulary and customs further served to delineate who they were within their tribal existence. Yet, each was a "source of his own achievement and fulfillment. One worked for oneself, not for society" (Reich, 1970, p. 21). In early America, this was manifested in the frontier spirit, where the individual was defined by his or her possessions. Most often, they were what they made, a product of their own accomplishment.

Consciousness I

Charles Reich, in his classic work The Greening of America (1970) provided great insight into the American identity of self from the nineteenth century through the 1960s. He defined the evolutionary process in terms of three Consciousness levels which essentially make up the individual's perception of his or her reality (Dobson, Dobson, & Koetting, 1984a, p. 1). This Consciousness, according to Reich "gives us the elements from which we can fashion an argument about what has happened and what is happening in America" (1970, p. 16).

In Consciousness I he speaks of frontiersmen as individuals in whom God dwelt because they had but their own resources upon which to draw (1970, p. 385). These were the individuals who would triumph over life because of "ordinary virtues--plainness, character, honesty [and] hard work. The innocent was the pioneer, the settler, the westerner, the boy who makes good. He was a moral being, and ultimately it would be his goodness, not his knowingness, that would triumph" (1970, p. 23). But, his was success wrought of hard knocks. The word *innocent* describes well the naivety with which he

went about his day-to-day existence. He carved for himself his niche in the world through the blood, sweat and tears which made him who and what he was. While romanticists paint this as an epic time in American history, it was more a harsh reality where survival belonged to the fittest and, often times, the most ruthless. In Consciousness I,

> Each individual must live life alone, for one persons advantage is another's loss. The world is a rat race with the spoils going to the winner. There always has been and always will be aggression, a struggle for power and a pecking order. Success or winning are determined by character, morality, hard work, and self-denial. Material success is the road to happiness (Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1984a, p. 1).

Even then, nineteenth century man could not help but realize that materialism counted. But, it was the fruit of ones labor, a necessity of survival. Rugged individualism was a requirement within the communal sphere. Even with the great migration West, most of the populace was rooted to the same geographic locale most of their lives. Their world consisted of friends and neighbors. "There was no separation between work and living" (Reich, 1970, p. 27). They were an extension of their world and all that was in it.

With the dawning of a new century, the landscape of America changed. The independence of the frontiersman was replaced by "robber barons, business piracy, ruinous competition, unreliable products and false advertising, grotesque inequality, and the chaos of excessive individualism and a lack of coordination and planning" (Reich, 1970, p. 63). Progress was no longer linked to self-improvement and self-discipline. Life became increasingly more focused on a materialism met less by ones own creation and more by the industrial expansionism sweeping the youthful nation. As the public's insatiability for consumer goods increased, the frontiersman receded into the annals of history to be

replaced by a technological monolith to which the citizen owed allegiance. "What was once considered humanly possible, an issue involving values and human ends, was now reduced to what was technically possible" (Giroux, 1983, p. 200).

Consciousness II

Consciousness II, for Reich, reflects the industrial revolution in full swing. With innovation comes the need to regulate it, to tame it, to tie men and women to it. The system dominates. The *system* is the *law*. It "constitutes the true reality" (1970, pp. 70-71).

The frontiersman mentality of Consciousness I held that the American dream was the reality. These were the people who believed that success was "determined by character, morality, hard work, and self denial" (1970, p. 24). What happened, however, when the individual surrendered to the dominance of those who controlled the machine he or she discovered they were no longer in competition against others but rather the system (1970, p. 38)? The system became god-like. And mankind bowed down and paid homage. "The god they served [did] not speak of righteousness or goodness or mercy or grace. Their god [spoke] of efficiency, precision, objectivity" (Postman, 1992, p. 90). As author Sam Keen describes it:

> In the secular theology of economic man work replaced God as the source
> from whom all blessings flowed. The escalating gross national product, or
> at least the rising Dow Jones index was the outward and visible sign of
> progress toward the kingdom of God; full employment was grace;
> unemployment was sin. The industrious, especially entrepreneurs with
> capital were God's chosen people, but even laborers were sanctified
> because they participated in the productive economy (1991, p. 55).

Self-reliance was a word in passing, a whisper in the wind of that which once was and would be no more. The individual was malleable and "could be sold artificial pleasure and artificial dreams to replace the high human and spiritual adventure that had once been America" (Reich, 1970, p. 40).

The independent nature which typified the frontiersman was now responsive to the forces of government and commerce. His or her function in society was what mattered. It was a function which was measured by extrinsic factors. In the school, it was through the mark received on the test and subsequent gold star. In life, it was the promotion or raise culminating in the gold plated watch for a job well done. As a result, individuals gave up something of themselves. It was a sacrifice for the greater good. And, there was no denying who received the better deal. It was a trade off which the individual came to accept. The apparatus was what was important. After all, the belief was that the individual should do his or her best to fit into a function that was needed by society, subordinating himself to the requirements thrust upon them by his station in life. It was his responsibility and he accepted it because they had no other choice (Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1984a, p. 1).

> Man's most basic activity was dominated by the most impersonal of masters--money. Man became alienated from himself as money, not inner needs, called the tune. Man began to defer or abandon his real needs, and increasingly his wants became subject to outside manipulation. Losing both his work-essence and his need-essence, man was no longer a unique individual but an extension of the production-consumption system (Reich, 1970, p. 29).

The individual was bound. The fruits of his or her labor depended on others. The entrepreneur was required to kowtow to government regulations, supply and demand

requirements, unions and more. The individual punched the time clock, earned his or her

wage, and accepted that he or she was a *Ford* man, a *Coca-Cola* woman, a product of the

corporate entity which provided their livelihood. Reich defined this belonging in this way:

> It is necessary to dress properly, to follow all the rules, to placate authority
> whenever possible. Any slip will be irrevocable. Below the surface of
> success is an abyss where one can fall, where one becomes a non-person.
> Courage is out of the question; it is not possible to fight the system because
> the system is the source of one's existence; the day of individual
> independence is over (1970, p. 69).

It was a traitorous thought to be too independent. Yet, not all men and women

were satisfied with the status quo as defined by Consciousness II. The restive spirit

conjured up unfulfilled dreams. They yearned to break the shackles which bound them to

an uncaring, unfeeling social behemoth which dominated their daily existence. Yet, "the

man who failed to play by the game would be destroyed" (Reich, 1970, p. 67). Along the

way, like Willie Lohman, Arthur Millers tragic protagonist in <u>Death of a Salesman</u> (1976),

the discarded human by-product of a relentless corporate America littered the landscape,

whatever measly legacy they wrought forgotten with the dawn. Man was no longer

important. The wheels of industry shattered what, for him, was a self perception rooted in

the call of the wild. He was no longer the frontiersman blazing a trail for all to follow.

Consciousness II was at an end. It was time to begin anew.

<p style="text-align:center">Consciousness III</p>

What happened to bring about Consciousness III, according to Reich was a sense

of powerlessness. "We lost the ability to control our lives or our society because we had

placed ourselves excessively under the domination of the market and technology" (1970,

p. 381). Consciousness III was different. It was nothing short of rebellion. It began in

1967 and continued through the writing of The Greening of America (1970, p. 422).

Americans were getting killed in Vietnam. Demonstrators took to the streets. The civil

rights movement gained momentum. Sixties counter culture guru Timothy Leary's "Tune

in, turn on, drop out" (cited in Anderson, 1990, p. 45) was the slogan of the day for many.

Materialism was shunned. Woodstock brought pot and free love to the front pages and

the chords and lyrics of Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, Jimmy Hendrix and others left the soul of

the nation pulsating with an unadulterated freedom which left the corridors of power in

seemingly confused disarray. Consciousness III was a search for meaning, community and

liberation, for man was

> ...not part of a machine, not a robot, not a being meant to starve, or be
> killed in war, or driven like a beast, not an enemy to his own kind and to all
> other kinds, not a creature to be controlled, regulated, administered,
> trained, clipped, coated, anesthetized (Reich, 1970, p. 426).

Consciousness III transcended the state. It brought men and women up from the

depths of repression to the birth of a radiant idealism exemplified by a burning desire for a

realistic peace, international order and social justice for all mankind. The Consciousness

III community transcended "the technological state by restoring some of the wordless

security and sharing of tribal man, the ineffable meaning of experience that is shared"

(Reich, 1970, p. 421). All over the nation, attunement was the essence of the communal

spirit figuratively breaking the bread and passing the wine in liberated togetherness.

The community of men and women whose foundation was Consciousness III felt

themselves free from the structures which heretofore bound them to authority and

subservience. It was a liberation which enabled the individual to create his or her own philosophy, values, life-style, and culture from a new beginning (Reich, 1970, p. 241).

Consciousness III disdained the consumptive society. Bell-bottoms and tie-dyed t-shirts, peace necklaces and the like may have been the dress of the day, but there was no over-riding need to conform to a certain standard. The tables turned and soon the white-shirted IBMers uniformity in dress made him the odd-man out.

Consciousness III came to be identified with the *me generation* (Shor, 1986, p. 28). Self was important but only as it related to others in friendship, companionship, love and respect. Its essence was honesty and responsibility sans the "socially imposed duty" (Reich, 1970, p. 244) which dominated Consciousness II. Consciousness III drew "energy from new sources: from the group, the community, from eros, from the freedom of technology, from the uninhibited self" (Reich, 1970, p. 251). To this end, Consciousness III sought

> ...restoration of the non-material elements of man's existence, the elements
> like the natural environment and the spiritual that were passed by in the
> rush of material development. It [sought] to transcend science and
> technology, to restore them to their proper place as tools of man rather
> than as the determinants of man's existence (Reich, 1970, pp. 382-383).

It must be remembered that Reich ends his discourse with Consciousness III. But Consciousness III did not remain much longer than The Greening of America publication date. Like Consciousness I and II, it could not maintain its foothold in a society forever in flux. It had to give way to a new Consciousness, one neither Reich or anyone could fully anticipate. Change occurs. The raving redneck may once have called the malcontents

long-haired hippie creeps but it did not take long for the accuser to adopt the mores of those they once-upon-a-time ridiculed.

> Blue jeans, signals of antimaterialist protest, are slowly transformed into designer items so expensive that only a materialist can afford them. Black leather accessories with metal studs, symbols of punk disgust with bourgeois culture, are retooled and reclaimed by the bourgeois as fashion items. The symbols of retrenchment and renewal thus function as authorless texts, to be interpreted and reinterpreted across time and culture. And as such diffusion takes place so are the original causes defused (Gergen, 1991, p. 224).

As such, the liberation which Consciousness III professed captured the imagination but for a moment of time and faded into obscurity, save for the occasional televised nostalgic look back. Technology did not dissolve into a tool of man but continued even more forcefully as a determinant of his existence. And, again, the individual gave deference to it because, despite protestations and posturings they were simply left with little choice. "An obsessive need for immediate gratification, a lack of concern for consequences [and] an almost promiscuous preoccupation with consumption" (Postman, 1985a, p. 291) took hold.

Consciousness IV arrived with a subtle vengeance destined to leave a permanent scar on the psyche of modern man. Peace, love and brotherhood may have been attractive ideals but they were impractical. They could not and did not serve to feed the insatiable appetite of a corporate America which commanded and demanded allegiance to a consumptive consciousness. And, try as anyone might, all that was left of Consciousness III were tattered remnants of a turbulent era as the feel-good lyrics of The Carpenters,

Donny & Marie Osmond and the Bee Gees brought *Saturday Night Fever* to yet a new

American consciousness.

Consciousness IV

As flower children wilted with the passing of time and the Vietnam war wound

down and civil rights issues were becoming less divisive, there were fewer external forces

fueling the frenzied upsurge of protestation. Liberated though many might have felt, there

remained a reliance on the very foundations which they rebelled against. The *good life*

which many so desperately sought inevitably could only be secured through adoption of

the definitions provided by the cultural elite. In his book Culture Wars, Ira Shor looks at

it this way:

> The unnecessary struggle for the good life produced a cynical, self-
> absorbed age. This mean era followed hotly on the years of the flower
> children...Distracting glitter accompanied an ominous fact of life: it was
> taking more and more to get you less and less. The new austerity
> produced this unhappy situation because it destroyed the very thing it
> needed to build consensus--the American Dream (1986, p. 28).

The 1950s saw modernism in its heyday. The industrialization early in the century

brought marvelous conveniences to the home. Life was easier in post-war America. And

television served to reinforce the notion that social and economic security could be

achieved through Dads keeping his nose to the corporate grindstone and *bringing home*

the bacon. The media portrayed him as a dedicated provider while Mom was glorified as

the pristine homemaker, the *Palmolive* woman whose devotion to family was legendary.

And, kids were portrayed as cleanly scrubbed, energetic youngsters whose *no cavities*

smiles made parenting a noble cause. "In its capacity as a unifying agent, television fit well with the more general postwar hopes for a return to domestic values. It was seen as a kind of household cement which promised to reassemble the splintered lives of families who had been separated during the war" (Spigel, 1990, p. 76).

This Norman Rockwellism illusion was shattered, however, with the volatility of the 1960s whose turbulent upheaval was brought into homes everywhere via the nineteen-inch screen. It barely lasted a decade but nonetheless created a schism, a void which people scrambled to fill. Yet, there were no more Davey Crocket coonskin caps, Mouseketeer lunch boxes, or Roy Rogers horse-shoe coin-banks, the feel good materialism of the 1950s which, at least for kids , gave definition to their concept of the American dream. Still, there followed an attempt on the part of mom and dad to recapture the essence of that which once was.

> In reaction to the growing sense of unreality brought on by the difficult adjustment to the new realities of modern life, Americans of all social classes retreated to and engaged in a frenzy-like search for authentic experience (Mitroff & Bennis 1989, p. 140).

Whatever the outcome, much of what they encountered was a virtual reproduction of what they saw in the media. By this time, family life increasingly revolved more around *what's on* than *what are we going to do*. Dad, mom and the kids knew what they were going to do. They were going to engage in a family bonding experience with television. Early on, Americans may have been known as the *salt of the earth*, but now they were developing into root vegetables known as *couch potatoes* (Ehrenreich, 1988, p. 9). It did not take long for the me generation, where personal liberation was the order of the day, to

grab hold of a popular culture which provided a greater sense of security. Independent choice no longer mattered. In Consciousness IV, it was okay to become what others, specifically the popular media, made you out to be. You were molded and created. You were told who you were and who you must be. The thing about it was, many were not cognizant, for the most part, of the powerful forces at work shaping their consciousness. They were and remain--the *pop generation* (Willis, 1989, p. 138).

The seventies and eighties seemed sparklingly alive for many. The prophets of doom were left without a voice following an easing of the cold war. Vietnam was at an end. Minorities had more equality. The economy was not all so bad. And easy-credit sprung up like dandelions on a courthouse lawn--wild, pretty, temporal and not necessarily a good thing. A "trickle-down culture" (Will, 1993, p. 84) evolved where capturing the good life consisted in seeking gratification for every craving--yearnings and desires brought into the home accompanying a plethora of televised gruel from the *Young and Restless* to *Monday Night Football* to the *Flintstones*. There was something for everyone.

What evolved was a seemingly hedonistic national experience where consumers flitted "from one purchase to the next, losing the capacity to delay gratification, victims of their own unquenchable desires" (Seiter, 1993, p. 40). As the eighties gave way to the nineties, this insatiability led many individuals to a decadence layered in weakness, laziness and self-indulgency. Men and women became "morally flawed" (Seiter, 1993, p. 40). They were captives, victims commodified and programmed to respond to a "cacophony of competing voices" (Gergen, 1991, p. 140). *BUY me and be a sexy woman! BUY me and*

be a macho man! BUY me and be an awesome kid! Commercial vulgarization became one of the "endemic pests of twentieth

century Western life, like the flies that swarm to sweets in the summer" (Roszak, 1969, p. 38).

The message for the individual became: I am what I buy, acquire, use, surround myself with, display and wear--those things which make me who I perceive I am or who I would like to be (Seiter, 1993, p. 4). And the pundits of Madison Avenue were only so happy to present a dizzying array of choices. It was a figurative game of spin-the-bottle with the individual, like the bottle itself, substantive but with nothing within. Author Philip Slater in his book The Pursuit of Loneliness makes the following observation:

> The more successful we are in getting ourselves to substitute products for real satisfactions--in generating esoteric erotic itches that cannot be scratched outside the world of fantasy, but lend themselves well to marketing--the stronger becomes the desire to obtain pure and uncontaminated gratifications (1970, p. 92).

Such gratification, however, is exceedingly difficult to come by in the best of times. What we perceive to be a need may not be an actual need at all. Our very identification with reality may be nothing more than an illusion prepared for us by those whose whole purpose is to endow us with a "critical self-consciousness in tune with the solutions of the marketplace" (Ewen, 1976, p. 38).

Knowingly or unknowingly, the Consciousness IV individual has an unerring tendency to respond as others would have him respond. Malleable, he has lost his freedom to *pseudo-choice*, wherein he makes decisions influenced by external factors of

which he is not cognizant. Jeffrey Schrank, author of <u>Snap, Crackle and Popular Taste</u>

defines it this way:

> Pseudo-choice serves nicely to create the illusion of freedom and preserve
> us from the introspection needed to determine what we really want. One
> reason freedom has become increasingly susceptible to control is that it has
> changed its meaning in the popular mind. Freedom has increasingly
> become associated with a feeling rather than a state of being (1977, p. 12).

The Consciousness IV individual is in a constant state of dissatisfaction. He or

she has an incessant desire to look good and to even smell good. There exists a sense that

"happiness can be bought, that there are instant solutions to life's complex problems, and

that products can fulfill us and meet our deepest human needs" (Kilbourne, 1982, p. 212).

But it just does not happen that way.

We can mask the symptom of our own lot in life but it simply does not disappear.

There is no magic wand. We still must wake up and confront our own reality, however

harsh it may be. And yet Consciousness IV proclaims that we are captive to our own

material belonging. "Todays freedom is molded and taut. An animal in perpetual heat.

Individuals are identical, but come in colors. Over this rainbow lies the promise of

perpetual pleasure" (Ewen, & Ewen, 1982, p. 109). Not all women who wear tight fitting

Calvins are an ethereal gift to womanhood. Not all men who splash on *Polo* aftershave

are imbued with sexual irresistibility. And yet, we allow this to be a natural expectation.

We are duped, susceptible to any message which would offer us hope to a sometimes

hopeless happenstance. Advertisers have our number and for many it is *zero*. And yet, we

continue to offer ourselves up as sacrifices to the pagan god of materialism, devoured with

unanswered prayers yet on lips begging for a quick fix which simply does not exist. We

constantly cling, as Daniel Miller says in his book <u>Material Culture and Mass</u>

<u>Consumption</u>, to:

> ...the image of something better to escape into, or something we want
> deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes-
> -these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that
> something other than what is can be imagined or may be realized (1987,
> p. 215).

This is what led to the Consciousness IV individual into yet a new Consciousness.

Everything was fine as long as one drank the *King of Beers*, drove the *Heartbeat of*

America, and ate the *Breakfast of Champions*. How could one go wrong? The problem,

of course, arose with the discovery that material things change little. As Reich, for

instance, so succinctly pointed out:

> Who can say what it is to the ordinary middle-class worker, who has many
> of the advertised products but lacks the sensuality and freedom they are
> supposed to bring? The one thing that we can be sure of is that the aim of
> advertising is to create dissatisfaction, and if the American middle-class is
> still somewhat satisfied, television will keep on trying to subvert it (1970,
> p. 215).

Advertising is the fodder of the consumptive consciousness. It demands not only

that the consumer purchase its goods, "but that he experience a self-conscious perspective

that he had previously been socially and psychically denied" (Ewen, 1976, p. 36). It is this

incessant urge to be wanted, needed and loved--to be accepted, not necessarily for what

one is but for what one perceives they are and can be. The individual is induced to adopt

a preconceived, prepackaged ideal which they are made to feel "ashamed and guilty"

(Kilbourne, 1982, p. 212) if they fail to emulate it. After all, the *advertising feel good*

society repetitively reminds all of us that being loved is contingent upon owning,

displaying and wearing the right stuff. Without the *stuff* the man and woman is left to stare at a self-image not necessarily to their liking. They are left with the stark realization that whatever equality they might aspire to is an "equality attainable only by those with purchasing power: those without are defined out of existence" (Fiske, 1989a, p. 15). The inevitable conclusion one makes is that if one does not have it, one *just ain't going to get it*, at least over night, because nothing works short of miracles and they are in short supply.

Consciousness V arrived and with it the postmodern world in its full glory.

> In the postmodern world there is no individual essence to which one remains true or committed. One's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships. In the case of "Who am I?" it is a teeming world of provisional possibilities (Gergen, 1993, p. 139).

And so, while the Consciousness IV individual was commodified and defined by the material world, those very things served to sever them further from the identity he or she had so desperately attempted to cultivate.

What Consciousness V sees is a shell of the former self which like "Humpty-Dumpty is not going to be put back together again" (Anderson, 1990, p. 5). Herbert Muller in his book The Children of Frankenstein put this future transition in perspective when he says that modern man:

> ...may have become tired of life but not satiated with life because he has no such clear idea of its meaning. He knows only that it offers all kinds of goods, many more than he can hope to acquire, and what he seizes is always something provisional and not definitive...His happiness in possessing and consuming too often does not make him feel more alive. Hence the common feelings of hollowness, pointlessness (1970, p. 338).

And so it is that the Consciousness V individual is resigned and indifferent. They feel that

it really does not matter who they are. There is, simply, a lack of security in their lives

and, as such, they are defined as the postmodern *why bother* generation (Risher, 1990).

Consciousness V

> In recent years, many Americans have had the uneasy feeling that the
> American Dream was slipping away from them. They were right (Cerio &
> Howard, 1994, p. 8).

What emerges with the arrival of the postmodern Consciousness V is a resigned

indifference among many. A lack of security permeates so many phases of life. According

to Kenneth Gergen in his treatise The Saturated Self:

> With the spread of postmodern consciousness, we see the demise of
> personal definition, reason, authority, commitment, trust, the sense of
> authenticity, sincerity, belief in leadership, depth of feeling, and faith in
> progress. In their stead, an open slate emerges on which persons may
> inscribe, erase, and rewrite their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-
> expanding, and incoherent network of relationships invites or permits
> (1991, p. 228).

The problem is, that personal meaning for most is shallow and ever changing. "If you

don't like the plot, you can always try your hand at creating another one and seeing if

anybody wants to take part in it" (Anderson, 1990, p. 12). It is about transitory

allegiances. Who is the good guy and who is the bad guy? Are we for or against Bob

Packwood, Michael Jackson, Lorena Bobbitt, Tonya Harding, or whoever may be

dominating the news headlines of the day? We are, in one form or another, forced to take

sides. But, do we care? The answer, of course, is *not really*. Because, there are more

pressing personal matters deserving our attention. What has evolved, then, for the

Consciousness V individual is this:

> His life is organized around the idea of taste than of right or wrong; his
> world is aesthetic rather than moral. You could call him disillusioned
> except that he has never dared care about anything passionately enough to
> have developed hope or illusion (Keen, 1991, p. 111).

Self preservation becomes the focus of the Consciousness V individual and even

then there is the greatest of uncertainty just how safe one really is. AIDS is epidemic.

Drive by shootings are common place. Terrorist bombings even occur in the heart of

Manhattan. What is left for the consumptive Consciousness IV individual? Reich saw it

coming:

> What good is a $250,000 cooperative apartment if, due to the decay in
> schooling and job training, a robber waits in the hallway or elevator? A
> luxurious suburban home, if one is a prisoner in it, surrounded by locked
> gates, private watchmen, and beware-of-the-dog signs to ward off the
> discontented populace? Shopping in the city if one is likely to get caught in
> a breakdown of the subway, commuter rail services, or in a giant traffic jam
> (1970, p. 218)?

But it does not stop there. Merging industries, expanding technologies, and a competitive

marketplace have eroded what, for many, was a sense of job security. Layoffs, cut-backs

and forced retirements have left many displaced workers unemployed along with middle

and upper level managers who suddenly discover themselves no longer needed (Weis,

1990, p. 7). And many graduates have been found "standing with diploma in hand in front

of taxi garages and McDonald's wondering what cabs and burgers [have] to do with

degrees in teaching or architecture" (Shor, 1986, p. 88).

For many, *life's a bitch*. And, it seems there is not much they can do about it. The

old *grin and bear it* axiom has become the motto of the day despite feelings of "isolation,

frustration, insecurity, anxiety, impotence, emptiness [and] meaninglessness" (Muller,

1970, p. 334). This is the Consciousness V individual. This is what he and she contends

with daily--if not directly, then indirectly. At some point, at some time, the societal

dissolution that is going on leads them to simply shrug their shoulders, withdraw, and say

so what? There is a prevalent feeling that they have achieved a level of meaninglessness in

the scheme of human development. One can talk of change but, in the end, there is the

perception that it really does not matter what one thinks. After all, the Consciousness V

individual is just along for the ride.

We let others create our world for us and we respond. That is our job. That is

what we do best.

> As we absorb the views, values and visions of others, and live out the
> multiple plots in which we are enmeshed, we enter a postmodern
> consciousness. It is a world in which we no longer experience a secure
> sense of self, and in which doubt is increasingly placed on the very
> assumption of a bounded identity with palpable attributes (Gergen, 1991,
> pp. 15-16).

In Consciousness IV, we were molded and created. We had our image and we wore it on

our persons and it said Calvin Klein, GAP, and Nike, among others. It meant something

to be perceived as somebody. Self mattered. But, the Consciousness V individual finds

life marked with feelings of apathy, boredom, habit and routine.

> We feel dissatisfied with our marriage, our job and our children. The route
> we take to work, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, are visible
> reminders of an awful sense of monotony...What we object to is the sense
> that we are sinking into a patterned way of existence in all these areas; that

they no longer appear to us as fresh and novel. They are becoming routinized. They no longer help us to constitute our identity (Cohen, 1987, p. 46).

We are left to face the humdrumness of unreality, dished out and served up with a flourish to our stale and burned out appetites. The dizzying array of materialism which bombarded the Consciousness IV individual, now leaves the Consciousness V man and woman in a state of non-identification. It used to be *cool* to be seen with the latest aviator shades, air bubble sneakers and designer jacket. There was a certain persona to create, a certain aura to maintain. It set one apart from *the other guy*. But the consumptive market place changed that. If one *has it* and everyone else wants it, then whatever identity there may have been is shattered in copycat fashion.

What once meant being *with it* is now passe. There is just no sense any longer of trying to be different. As we are molded, folded and spindled we just do not give a damn. Whatever niche we may try to carve for ourselves leaves us unfulfilled. Reich likens such a process to the Magic Kingdom:

> ...exploitation, substitution, numbing of awareness--may be seen at once in the phenomenon of Disneyland. Economic progress destroys nature, adventure, traditions, and the local community. A plastic substitute is constructed and admission is charged. Advertising and promotion then work to convince the people that they are really experiencing Main Street, The Wild West, the history and adventure of America. As the families flock to the clean, sunny, happy enclosure, how many of them realize that something precious has been taken from them, that they are being charged for a substitute that offers only sterile pretense in place of real experience (1970, p. 184)?

Earlier in his work Reich referred to this unreality as "the true source of powerlessness" (1970, p. 13). We let others do the *talkin'* and we do the *walkin'*. We have become

plasticized--reproductions in a world of quick fixes to complex problems. It is like using

the cash advance on ones Mastercard to pay the Visa bill. We are products of an

"unregulated marketplace of realities" (Anderson, 1990, p. 6). The reality, however,

which one presents is often a facade.

The Consciousness V individual is playing at life. He or she is searching for

happiness in "a compulsive, joyless effort to escape boredom" (Muller, 1970, p. 5). They

are the individuals with television remote control in hand flipping through the channels for

hours on end because *there's nothing good on* and *there's nothing else to do*. This is what

is left of life for many. They are flipping through each day in search of something that is

good and they are not finding it.

The result is that many individuals are left with "no sense of belonging, no capacity

for lasting relationships, no respect for limits [and] no grasp of the future" (Postman,

1985b, p. 293). This is the essence of the Consciousness V individual. This is what brings

about resigned indifference. Nothing concrete in life is left. We are faced with a myriad

of possibilities, each of which produces an "army of escape-attempt managers who

supervise and regulate these routes" (Cohen, 1987, p. 21). We are socially saturated, a

definition of which is provided by Gergen in The Saturated Self:

> Emerging technologies saturate us with the voices of humankind--both
> harmonious and alien. As we absorb their varied rhymes and reasons, they
> become part of us and we of them. Social saturation furnishes us with a
> multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self. For
> everything we "know to be true" about ourselves, other voices within
> respond with doubt and even derision. This fragmentation of self-
> conceptions corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected
> relationships. These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us
> to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an "authentic self"

with knowable characteristics recedes from view. The fully saturated self becomes no self at all (1991, pp. 6-7).

This whole process of *loss of self* could not occur without powerful social forces exerting their influence. What Gergen is talking about, to a large extent, is the degree to which the media impacts our lives. He goes on to say "the postmodern condition more generally is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality--to be accepted as a legitimate expressions of the true and the good" (1991, p. 7). Therein lies a problem. How does one decipher for ones self what is good when so many avenues are touted as being *the best*?

> We are subject to an incredible paradox. In our age, some of the most intense emotional experiences of the great masses of people revolve around forms of unreality that are themselves the direct products of technology. Earlier regarded as one of the most potent forms of unreality, technology is now responsible for producing some of unreality's strongest forms (Mitroff, & Bennis, 1989, p. 142).

While the influence of the media is not a new phenomenon, the theatricalness of it has reached dimensions nearing perfection. When television viewers get teary-eyed over a sixty second Hallmark Card commercial, we know that the masters of manipulation have discovered how to pull the strings that make the human puppet dance. "The industry part of unreality turns on the fact that, as a society, we no longer leave the invention of unreality to random chance or accident. No way. Unreality is big business" (Mitroff & Bennis, 1989, p. xii). It dominates nearly every aspect of life for adults as well as youth.

Each individual creates his or her own reality, in part, out of the unreality which confronts them. It is "not just a manipulation of popular culture, it constitutes a crucial element in the construction of imaginary life" (Arnowitz, 1989, p. 199). But it is this very

life which constitutes the reality of ones daily existence. And the Consciousness V individual is aware of it. That is why they have assumed a *so what* attitude. If life is a lie, then one may as well live it as best one can.

"*I don't want realism, I want magic!*" (cited in Cohen, 1987, p. 88) says Blanche Dubois, in the Tennessee Williams play <u>A</u> <u>Streetcar</u> <u>Named</u> <u>Desire</u>. And that says it all. Fantasy and illusion is what the postmodern life is all about. Movies such as <u>Pretty</u> <u>Woman</u> and <u>Sleepless</u> <u>in</u> <u>Seattle</u> continue to fuel the American preoccupation with something-otherness. Their connectedness comes from the imaginary. The Consciousness V individual has a *why bother* outlook because there is no longer any need to care. It is done for them. As a result there are no longer any postmodern moments. Postmodernism may once have had an epochal impact on the prevailing consciousness but it can no longer maintain its grip on the here and now. It has outlived its ability to explain and, as such, is pushed aside with the ascendancy of Consciousness VI's *interactivism*.

Consciousness VI

> Considering that kids grow up with TV, a one-way medium, there's a tendency toward noninteractivity. This is the first century when technology has been the primary mode of people reaching each other. After this, it will be interactive technology [Jason Lanier, Virtual Reality Pioneer]. (Omni, 1991, p. 117).

In Consciousness V we were resigned to accept that which came our way. Apathy was the prevalent attitude. Choices were made for us whether we liked them or not. And, there was little we could do. That, however, is changing.

We see ourselves on the verge of a new consciousness with unlimited possibilities for human potential. Consciousness VI individuals are responsive to their environment and with one another, an interaction providing for a greater sense of self direction. The opportunity to become what they, rather than what others, choose exists. They care and, as a result, they control their own destiny. But unlike earlier consciousness, what awaits offers two distinct paths.

In the first instance, the individual finds himself so saturated with artificiality that true self is no longer recognizable. He is so immersed in a plastic environment, he passively accepts whatever hegemonic media pastiche comes his way. All that is left is stagnation and a sense of aloneness and angst and the claim that *I escape, therefore I am*.

> "The lonely crowd," then, denotes the kind of subjectivism that haunts the mass in the technical era, and by extension a mode of being that haunts each of us in our own separate existences (Barrett 1986, p. 234).

The second instance provides the greatest of potential. The individual is confronted with an exhilarating sense of adventure. Theirs is a world of active acceptance and personal growth. They take advantage of the creative challenges confronting them and achieve a sense of community, sharing a greater bond with fellow travelers. *I participate, therefore I am* is their credo.

There is little doubt that this writing will in short order be outdated. History moves on. But, for now---at this particular juncture, we find ourselves on the threshold of a tomorrow which offers a magnificent array of possibilities. It is an "electronic super-highway" (Elmer-Dewitt, 1993, pp. 51-52), a five hundred channel universe where individuals, at home, can call up movies on demand, shop for whatever they might wish

arrangements, reserve concert tickets, browse classified ads, call up a favorite novel, play

interactive games, look up encyclopedic references, and even communicate with the world

at large. This and more will soon be available through the home video screen, made

possible through a marriage between cable, telephone and computer technologies. It will

change the face of our world as we know it (Elmer-Dewitt, 1993, pp. 52-53).

The impact has yet to be felt. But soon, this technological revolution will, indeed,

forever alter the way in which we live.

> The final destination is a post-channel universe of essentially unlimited
> choice: virtually everything produced for the medium, past or present, plus
> a wealth of other information and entertainment options, stored in
> computer banks and available instantly at the touch of a button. A dazzling
> scenario, to be sure. Maybe a little scary. And definitely fraught with
> uncertainties. No one involved in the TV industry has a precise idea of
> what the new world will look like, or how the audience will react to
> it...Will we all wind up watching more TV or less? Or all go quietly mad
> (Zoglin, 1993, p. 56)?

On the madness side, the danger for the Consciousness VI individual is that this vast just-

at-the-finger-tip resource will eliminate the need for human interaction. This is not to say

that it will negate the desire for human contact. That has been and always will be an

essential requirement for a fulfilling existence (Pinar, 1975d, p. 369). However,

interactive action, in this context, refers to communication. Will the new technology

isolate men and women within a cocoon of their own making? If one can browse through

the stores of a mall, see the latest in video offerings and play virtual reality based games

without leaving home, what need is there to get out and make any significant social

contact? Technology will redefine superficiality and escapism while promising "heaven on

earth through the conveniences of technological progress...the ecstasy of consumption"

(Postman, 1992, p. 179).

The danger in this lies in the fact that one can lose control over self-directedness.

Certainly, the choices will be there. The question is how much the individual will allow

the medium to control him or her as opposed to their controlling it. This is an important

consideration in that "without some control over ones existence there can be no

empowerment and no self-esteem" (Fiske, 1989b, p. 10). H. Stephen Glenn and Jane

Nelson in their book Raising Self-Reliant Children In A Self-Indulgent World agree:

> Without a meaningful role it is difficult to develop a sense of meaning,
> purpose, and significance through being needed, listened to, and taken
> seriously (1989, p. 7).

The problem with the upcoming interactive world is that technology can, if

allowed, become the surrogate friend or family member, reinforcing ones perceived needs

if not satisfying them. Perhaps, then, the satirical bedtime question may become *have you*

hugged your TV today? And the individual, under the covers and in the dark, will discover

an overriding sense of aloneness.

> But , of course, there is a dark side to this friend. Its gifts are not without
> a heavy cost. Stated in the most dramatic terms, the accusation can be
> made that the uncontrolled growth of technology destroys the vital sources
> of our humanity. It creates a culture without a moral foundation. It
> undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human
> life worth living (Postman, 1992, p. xii).

The alternative to this scenario is the individual who embraces the new interactive

age with zest, vigor and joy, who commands its allegiance instead of the other way

around. He or she will have a choice and will make it wisely. In the end, they will become possessors of their own identities empowered with the ability to create and direct their own experiences and be somebody good, be happy and, most of all, be themselves (Anderson, 1990, p. 131).

This is not an unreasonable goal. The coming super-highway of information will enable one to become something of the renaissance man or woman. It should enhance ones world view, expand ones educational opportunities, and provide near limitless avenues for interaction on a more personal level. The Consciousness VI individual will discover a freedom heretofore unrealized. And "it is only to the extent that people have freedom to make choices that they can live as moral beings" (Pinar, 1975d, p. 366). So, in some way, technology all the more strips away the boundaries which separate men and women from one another and, more importantly, from themselves. It sensitizes them to their own humanity in relation to others. Reich, himself, in response to the consequences of emerging new technology, made the following observation:

> What is the central idea of America unless it is each man's ability to create
> his own life? The dream was deferred for many generations in order to
> create a technology that could raise life to a higher level. It need be, it can
> be, delayed no longer (1970, p. 386).

Delayed it is not. America is on the verge of a technological explosion. Its ramifications will be felt from the farm to the factory, from the home to the school. Life will change for the Consciousness VI individual but it will require a willingness to move with it instead of fighting against it. In response, we will be forced to rethink the way we do business, the way we play and the way we educate our youth.

If ever there were a call to take dramatic steps to make this the resilient rebirth of idealism of heroic proportions, the time is now. We can no longer allow urban decay, homelessness, crime and fear to rule our cities. We can no longer accept massive unemployment and an untrained, unskilled work force. We can no longer continue to under-educate our children in a nationwide antiquated factory school system unresponsive to their needs and the needs of society. Consciousness VI demands better.

Summary

Consciousness to Reich is a term used not just to set out an individuals opinions, information or values at any point in history. Rather, it is "a total configuration in any given individual, which makes up his whole perception of reality, his whole world view" (1970, p. 13). In reviewing the American Consciousness from the mid-1800s onward, we see a natural progression. It is not necessarily one in which reality is fully grasped by those living it at the time. And yet,

> Our world as formed by our perceptions, transcribed in our language, creates our reality. To understand our perceptions we must seek an understanding of the foundation for our ideas and beliefs (Parnell, 1993, p. 16).

A review of the historical consciousness provides an understanding of why we are at this particular juncture in our lives. It is important to realize that there have been and continue to be dynamic forces at work in shaping how we live and what we come to know as our reality of the world in which we live.

The table at the end of this Chapter illustrates the progression. The frontier spirit's rugged individualism evolved not so much by choice but by necessity. There were some things the individual simply needed to do in order to survive from day to day.

With the advent of the industrial revolution, men and women were more responsive to a corporate machine which came to dominate their existence. Their lives revolved around their function in the workplace. At the same time, however, television came into being and dramatically altered American life. Ones identity became further muddled as the television representation of reality became the reality of many of those who watched it (Probst, 1983, p. 87).

Television brought the American consciousness to a new level of awareness. The 1960s saw a country searching for its soul. And what it found was not the peace and love professed by the budding sub-culture but the stark reality of violence brought into living-rooms everywhere.

With the retreat of the sixties, America once again flourished as a consumer consciousness took hold of the imagination. Toothpaste now gave *sex appeal*. And underwear made you *feel good all under*. Self was defined by commodities. Identity was worn or owned. And we let it happen because we were malleable and not even aware of it.

In Consciousness V, however, the American standard began faltering. Unemployment, homelessness, violence, the spread of AIDS, semi-literate high school graduates and a host of other problems came nibbling on the heels of the Consciousness

IV individual. As a result, the realization for a whole generation evolved that it does not matter what one thinks or does.

> What emerges is a portrait of a generation living in fear. The security of their parents generation, and the optimistic view of the future, is no longer taken for granted...For them...the American Dream may be dying (Ingrassia, 1993, p. 52).

Consciousness VI, however, offers the glitter of the new interactive tomorrow. And yet, two paths loom before us. On the one hand there is immobility, stagnation and aloneness. On the other there is exuberance, growth and a sense of community. The choice is ours.

It will require a response to the world in which we are entering. And it must be an educated response.

> For many students school culture has little to do with either their histories or their interests; instead, it becomes the culture of dead time, something to be endured and from which to escape. Of course, school culture is really a battleground around which meanings are defined, knowledge is legitimated, and futures are sometimes created or destroyed (Arnowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 133).

School, however, should not be a battleground. It should be a place where the student is infused with curiosity, challenged to excel and provided with opportunities to confront the vast resources at hand. Even more so, the school should be a place in which "students learn to respond to one another with compassion and understanding" (Noddings, 1993, p. 133).

Chapter IV will explore the social and educational dynamics which presently contribute to the academic attainment of todays generation of students. It will examine the impact television plays in their lives and how it serves to form their view of the world.

And, it will review the factory school system and its failure to address the students place in a society it has long refused to acknowledge. Chapter IV is a discussion of relationships-- of schools to society, of teachers to students, of students to students. But it is more. It is an examination of this author's personal journey from Consciousness II through Consciousness IV. It is a journey which reflects the fraying of the American experience and of a students struggle to find an identity among the chaos of life. Ultimately, it is a testimony of triumph, of hope, optimism and promise for a future where the American Dream might be realized by all who are provided with the opportunity to *reach for the stars*.

TABLE I

CONSCIOUSNESS LEVELS

Consciousness	Personality	Trait	Sense	Claim

Reich

I	Frontier	Possession	Individualism	I am what I make/own.
II Modern	Corporate	Function	Belonging	I am what I do.
III Modern Postmodern	Liberated	Choice	Freedom	I am.

Ellis

IV Postmodern	Consumptive	Pseudo-Choice	Malleability	I am made.
V Postmodern	Withdrawn	Apathy	Why Bother	It doesn't matter what I am.
Transition Period				
VI Interactive	Responsive	Care	Control	I am what I choose.
Path A	Passive	Stagnation	Aloneness	I am what I escape to.
Path B	Active	Growth	Community	I am what I participate in.

CHAPTER IV

STUDENTS, POPULAR CULTURE AND EDUCATION

THE POSTMODERN MOMENT IN DECLINE

Introduction

As recollection has it, I was in the fifth grade. A terrorist. It wasn't so much that my teachers feared me so much as they just kind of wished I would vaporize. Siberia might have been their preferred destination. A nice gulag.

I suppose the question in their minds was: *why doesn't Johnny learn?* And *why is he such a little shit anyway?* It was at that point that someone thought a psychologist might be able to come up with the answer. And so, one day, a Rorschach ink-blot test confronted my eyes. And, yes, I'm sure *that one* was a butterfly! A series of entertaining but seemingly loony questions followed designed, no doubt, to place the square-pegged kid in the round hole. The outcome? They found I had a genius IQ or some such thing. After all, a fifth grader from rural Nebraska (with seven kids in his class total) should not be expected to know about Keats, Shelley, Thoreau, Longfellow, Napoleon, Ghandi, De Gaulle and a whole host of other historical luminaries, facts and figures. I seem to have

confounded the powers that be. I had more than just air between my ears! But how to

tap it? That was the question which went unanswered.

I eventually graduated. And the collective sigh of relief from my teachers was

testimony to the fact that they probably passed me from grade to grade just to get rid of

me. Regardless, the deed was done. I had made it through the educational maze--a child

of Consciousness II, a rebel of Consciousness III, one more representative of so many

students past and present. *Why doesn't Johnny learn*? Why indeed?! Chapter IV will

attempt to unravel the mystery.

The Odyssey

> Almost everything in life leaves its mark on a child's character: home,
> street, language and customs of the child's world, its music; technology,
> television and radio; almost anything that happens during a child's waking
> hours, and even what happens in dreams may have consequence. To live is
> always to live under the influence of the world (van Manen, 1991, p. 80).

There is no denying that everything in one shape or form impacts the way we live.

There exists the stimulus followed by the response. It is not a new phenomenon. Early

man touched fire and discovered it burned. Many youth touch *fire* of a different nature

and discover its heat. But to this generation, the garrulous teenager, that which is *hot* is

cool, slang which implies something to be good. *Cool* is *in*. That which is *in* makes them

into who they are. They grasp it and demand that it give them the identity they so

desperately seek. And yet many get burned, singed by the disillusionment which

accompanies the consciousness that *things* do not the man or woman make. They cannot

cover the insecurities which come with adolescence. They are inbred. They gnaw at the

soul of youth yearning to be something they are not, reflected by Happy Harry Hard-On's

commentary from the movie <u>Pump Up the Volume</u> about a fellow student's suicide:

> How could he do such a terrible thing? Well, it's really quite simple
> actually--consider the life of the teenager, huh?! You have parents and
> teachers telling you what to do. You have movies, magazines and TV
> telling you what to do. But you know what you have to do, huh?! Your
> job, your purpose--is to get accepted, get a cute girlfriend and to think of
> something great to do with the rest of your life. Well, if you're confused
> and can't imagine a career, if you're funny looking you can't get a girlfriend
> no one wants to hear it. But the terrible secret is that being young is
> sometimes less fun than being dead (Risher, Stiliadis, & Stern, 1990).

Youth have been and continue to be under considerable pressure to conform to

standards not of their making. It seems as though the invisible hand of the god

Conformity comes down and grabs them by the scruff of their necks and requires

allegiance to a norm whose only existence is justified by the utterance *it's always been*

done that way. This, then, is the hypocrisy. Youth of every generation, like young colts,

pull against the reins of those who dare to break their free spirits. Inevitably they end up

losing because the cards of the Corporate State are stacked against them.

> At sixteen or seventeen, no matter how oppressive the Corporate State,
> there is still a moment when life is within their grasp. There are a few years
> when they pulse to music, know beaches and the sea, value what is
> raunchy, wear clothes that express their bodies, flare against authority, seek
> new experience, know how to play, laugh, and feel, and cherish one
> another. But it is a short, short road from Teensville to Squarestown; soon
> their senses have been dulled, their strength put under restraint, their minds
> lobotomized; bodies still young, cut off from selves, walk the windowless,
> endless corridors of the Corporate State (Reich, 1970, pp. 169-170).

Is it not strange that some grown-ups seem to forget what it was like to once be

young? At some point many adults abandon the nonconformity of their youth in favor of

toeing the line, adhering to preset standards which make them accepted in conformist

circles.

> Every society depends on the succession of generations, and adults usually
> assume that this means that their values and lifestyle should be transmitted
> to the young...When adults observe that a large proportion of youth is
> becoming threateningly unfamiliar and uncongenial there is said to be a
> youth problem, and deliberate efforts are made to induce or compel the
> young to accept and participate in the dominant culture (Friedenberg,
> 1963, pp. 8-9).

The misfits of youth on the other hand end up as refuge on the fringe of the more proper

society. They are the Beavis and Butt-heads whose unflinching devotion to hedonism is

exemplified in their attitude toward *the establishment*. They experience "a kind of

spiritual aggression" (Goffman, 1973, p. 18) in being free to play head-games with those

things others take seriously. It is an irreverence born not so much from perceptions they

have derived from their own world but in response to conformist standards being thrust

upon them from so many sectors of an *adult* world with which they simply do not identify.

And most of that which is shoveled their way they find within the school system charged

with nurturing them. "The main criticism levelled against schools nowadays is that

conditions inside are not in harmony with conditions outside" (Genzwein, 1983, p. 209).

How, then, can youth be expected to passively accept the norms of a system whose ideals

are not their own? And yet there is the question as to whether youth today even have a

firm grasp on who and what they should be.

> Today we find that far too many American children at the onset of puberty
> face an incredible smorgasbord of challenges with a deficiency in
> capabilities. Self-confidence, self-validation, self-discipline, good
> judgment, and a sense of responsibility are all lacking, and our children

find themselves incapable of carving out assets for themselves (Glenn, 1989, p. 20).

The school system may perpetuate this deficiency, but it did not create it. "The school is a brutal machine for destruction of the self, controlling it, heckling it, hassling it into a thousand busy tasks, a thousand noisy groups, never giving it a moment to establish a knowledge within" (Reich, 1970, p. 150). But if we, as educators, are not responsible for the deficiencies exemplified by the youth problem, then who is?

Alienation Of A Generation

This leads us to ask, "Who's doing the teaching? Who is instructing those little children on the things that are important in life?" In too many homes, kids are plopped in front of the "flickering blue parent" for endless hours by their busy mothers and fathers (Dobson, 1990a, p. 12).

Television has provided a blessed convenience for many moms and dads. It has been the easiest way to get hyperactive kids out of their hair. How easy it is to say *go watch TV*. But what has been the consequence when the average parent spends 14.5 minutes in daily conversation with their children who, in turn, are watching hours of television each day (Harvey, 1989, p. 6)? "Children are exposed to more fictional characters than real people during their formative years" (Liebert, & Sprafkin, 1988, p. 17). The implications of such exposure are considerable. The role models many children emulate are not those of their everyday world of human interaction. Instead, they embrace a make-believe world whose distance from their perceptions of reality is but a remote control click away. It is a reality defined by "anti-experience" (Mander, 1978, p. 132), where television passes for real experience.

For the most part, TV feeds the viewer, young and old, information that is thoroughly predigested. In most cases, little is demanded of the viewer in response or reaction--quite simply, he is not even asked to chew (Wilkins, 1982, p. 28).

While this is considered a valid observation by many, the coming interactive age will drastically alter the way men, women and children relate to their world. The change will revolutionize our terminology. It will redefine "freedom, truth, intelligence, fact, wisdom, memory, history--all words we live by" (Postman, 1992, pp. 8-9). We are at the threshold, the dawn of a new age. But, for the moment, we are left to the dull awareness of the world in which we live--the world where television has become "a mindless juggernaut...obliterating human values, and assuming dominion over the lives and minds of its subjects" (Reich, 1970, pp. 17-18).

The youth who are infected by the virus TV are stymied. Television interferes with their "search for reality through [their] own efforts, and offers instead a hodge-podge of noise and fast, incomprehensible but seductive images" (Cohen, 1989, p. 223). The lure of the seductress is sweet. It beckons the individual with its promise of sensory delight. The consequence of submitting to its will is addiction (Winn, 1977, p. 24). The craving becomes insatiable and the mind cannot help but wonder *what's on next*. But what does it matter? The "cultural rape" (Postman, 1992, p. 170) has occurred. The victim is left shredded and wanting. But like the oppressed who identifies with his/her oppressor, the distinction is obscured (Freire, 1970, pp. 30-31). Being violated is clouded by the wanton pleasure bestowed by the master manipulator. And therein lies an omen.

The primary danger of the television screen lies not so much in the behavior it produces--although there is danger there--as in the behavior it

prevents: the talks, the games, the family festivities and arguments through which much of the child's learning takes place and through which his character is formed (Winn, 1987, p. 7).

How can youth ever hope to come to terms with the real world when the world in which they live shuts off such human interaction? More to the point, where is the motivation to do anything other than remain passively glued to that which provides a nourishment perceived as unattainable from any other source? In the end,

> Television suppresses and replaces creative human imagery, encourages passivity, and trains people to accept authority. It is an instrument of transmutation, turning people into their TV images (Mander, 1978, p. 347).

For many, however, this is the pleasure. Every time they approach the cable-connected alter, they do so as empty vessels anticipating the mind-numbing saturation with which they will soon be awash. Like the Energizer Bunny they keep *going and going* in search of some mystical good life, the embodiment of the Starship Enterprise Spock's creed *live long and prosper*.

Stimulus-Response: At Home

There I was. Superman. Caped crusader for truth, justice and the American way. Ripping across the yard with a bath towel safety-pinned around my neck. Invincible. The world was mine for the taking! Another day. Another TV show. Behold, the protector of frontier towns: Wyatt Earp, Roy Rogers, Hop-A-Long Cassady, Paladin, Cheyenne and Matt Dillon rolled into one. *Bang-bang*, my cap gun smoked with resounding noise as shots rang out. The dog cowered under the porch. But such was the fear that the

Barnyard Kid instilled in both man and beast alike. But enough of this action. The dinner bell rings. Time to put up the spurs and go eat. *Campbell's Soup, M-m-m M-m-m Good!*

I knew, of course, that I really didn't possess super powers. I knew, too, that my cap gun was relatively harmless. But none of it mattered. The point was fun. The fun was the fantasy. I was in a whole other world.

I'm not so certain, in retrospect, that I was representative of every other kid. I was the fruit-loop of the bunch. The odd kid out. A hyper-active little munchkin who taxed my parents patience to the extreme. In retrospect, I feel sorry for them. But then? Ah! Each day was an adventure. I don't of course, know if television was fully to blame for my attitude but there are those who would say I was operating under the influence!

> Some children are simply overstimulated after being bombarded by all of television's sensory impressions. Restless, hyperactive, and frantic...[they] find it easier to relate to things than to people (Wilkins, 1982, p. 36).

Should this be such a big surprise? Children watch a massive amount of television. "TV has profoundly changed the way our children become human beings" (McCoy, 1981, p. 55). "Where ever they live, children who remain *typical* viewers from the age of three through seventeen will end up spending more time at television set than at school" (Safran, 1979, p.229). "By the time the average American youngster is six he will spend more time watching TV than he will spend talking to his father in a lifetime" (Dobson, 1990b, p. 205).

Children who are watching TV are not interacting with other human beings. They are having a dialog with the images which come their way from the television screen. Their whole image of *self* is derived from a host of educators who know no boundaries

between adult and child. It used to be that there was a mystique about adulthood. Parents knew lots of things their kids did not. It was their way of holding sway over the developmental progress of youngsters who did not know any better (Fiske, 1989b, p. 157). *You'll understand when you get older* was often a response given to questions prematurely asked of mothers and fathers unwilling to release that cherished knowledge. What happens with television, however, is that the dividing line between adulthood and childhood becomes obscured. (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 255). Knowledge as expressed in language and tastes is homogenized. As a result, the influence of moms, dads, and teachers as authority figures is diminished. The aura is gone (Postman, 1983, p. 14). In its place are little grown-ups whose knowledge of the basest nature of society is provided in prime-time. Television programming,

> ...systematically reveals the full panoply of *backstage* trials and tribulations to the child. As a result the child no longer interacts with one-dimensional, idealized adults, but with persons possessing complex private lives, doubt-filled and vulnerable. In turn, parents no longer confront the comfortably naive child of yesteryear, but one whose awe is diminished and whose insights may be acute (Gergen, 1991, p. 64).

There is little doubt that children have a broad knowledge base. What we need to keep in mind, however, is that knowledge and understanding are two different things (Lowenfeld, & Brittain, 1982, p. 16). Much of what children *know* is largely verbal. They may sound and behave like adults but they still feel and think like children. Their emotional state is still subject to unreasonable outbursts despite their projected "pseudo-sophistication" (Elkind, 1981a, p. 75).

I remember one Saturday, Dad was headed to town. I was to get a haircut. I was

forced to accompany him right in the middle of a Johnny Weismuller Tarzan movie! I

bawled. I begged. But, in the end, it did me no good. Tarzan no doubt saved the day for

Jane and Cheetah while I could only imagine the outcome. The barber gave me a nickel

for being a *good boy*. He didn't know. It was little compensation for the vine-swinging

adventure I'd missed. Life was sometimes simply the pits.

Television, of course, has its other facets. It has become such a dominant

influence in the life of so many families that many parents no longer seem in control of

their own home environment (Bloom, 1987, pp. 57-58). Author Marie Winn's candid

observation reflects the relational redefinition:

> Before television, parents had to make sure that their kids could be relied
> upon to *mind* when necessary, not to interrupt adult conversation, not to
> demand attention when the parent was busy or instant gratification of their
> every wish; otherwise nothing would ever get done around the house, and
> the parents would go crazy. It was crucial for parents who had to live in
> close proximity with children, to eat with them at the same table, to sit with
> them in the same living room, that the children learn early how to behave in
> acceptable, disciplined ways. Television, however, provided an easy
> alternative to parental discipline. Instead of having to establish rules and
> limits, an arduous and often frustrating job, instead of having to work at
> socializing children in order to make them more agreeable to live with,
> parents could solve all these problems by resorting to the television set. *Go
> watch TV* were the magic words. Now mothers could cook dinner in
> peace, or prepare their briefs for the next day's case, or whatever. No need
> to work on training the children to play quietly while mothers and fathers
> discussed a family matter without interruption (1983, p. 45).

Television! It provides many parents with massive relief from the responsibilities of child

rearing. And therein lies the paradox. How many would be willing to relinquish their

reigns of parental influence to a total stranger right in their own home day after day? And,

yet, that is what happens.

> Television is a teacher. Many families choose the best possible school
> district for their children...Parents constantly quiz friends and neighbors
> about teachers...But these very same parents seem curiously unaware that
> when their children are not in school, many are learning from a host of
> anonymous teachers on television who are teaching a curriculum [which]
> covers every aspect of life, from the values children will follow to the jeans
> they will wear (Wilkins, 1982, p. 13).

Stimulus-Response: At School

If we accept the premise that television viewing often subverts parental control,

what happens when the youngster enters school? All of a sudden the student is thrust into

a system which requires adherence to a rigid set of rules and procedures more demanding

than any he or she may have experienced at home (Hansen, 1979, p. 71). The battle

begins in earnest.

> Children come to school having been deeply conditioned by the biases of
> television. There, they encounter the world of the printed word. A sort of
> psychic battle takes place, and there are many casualties--children who
> can't learn to read or won't, children who cannot organize their thought
> into logical structure even in a simple paragraph, children who cannot
> attend to lectures or oral explanations for more than a few minutes at a
> time. They are failures, but not because they are stupid. They are failures
> because there is a media war going on, and they are on the wrong side
> (Postman, 1993, pp. 16-17).

Why is it children seem to do so poorly from the outset? First of all, television

conveys that "things are gotten easily, with little effort, that information can be absorbed

passively" (Biagi, 1989, p. 232). The result is that the step-by-step process of tedious

school work is far too exhausting and involved" (Wilkins, 1982, p. 75). Many students

simply do not have the wherewithal to exert the effort. They want it served up and spoon fed to them. Secondly, they are easily bored "because they have few inner resources on which to draw" (Cohen, 1989, p. 223). Television has provided the basis for their reality. And now they are asked to adopt a new set of guidelines for the definition of their existence.

Okay, Johnny, unroll your rug. I can almost hear the teachers words. *Nap time.* Nap time?! When did I have an orchestrated nap time at home? Why did I have to lay down in the middle of the day along with all the other kids and rest? I wasn't tired. I wanted to do something and it sure the heck wasn't to listen to the teacher drone on about seeing Spot run. *Run Spot run!* This was really boring stuff after last nights shootout on TV. Yeach! Welcome to the world of kindergarten. I hated it. A world of the *time-clock.*

> School is the only universal institution, the only one not requiring a person
> to be ill, criminal, insane or possessive of some other deviant trait in order
> to be institutionalized. Schools exist to socialize young people, to train
> them to accept a certain type of ordered existence (Schrank, 1977, pp.
> 144-145).

Clock in. Reading. Recess. 'Riting. Lunch. Nap time. 'Rithmetic. Recess. Clock out. Routinization. Standing in line. Being counted. Categorized. Advance a grade. Please do not fold, spindle or mutilate. Students on board.

As I look back on my school *daze* (or days, if you prefer), I realize the horror of it all. Here you have a group of students. Some--very, very bright. Some (like me)--very, very disruptive. All are thrown together in one great big pot. All are expected to progress reasonably at the same pace. Not all do, of course. The bright ones wait for the

slower ones to catch up. Some of the slower ones never do. The lessons follow lessons.

Grades are assigned. Johnny gets another *D*. Or was it an *F*? And that was in

citizenship. Citizenship?! Yeah. The measure of a students behavior. I had no doubt

Santa would leave me a lump of coal.

> Schools are designed on the assumption that there is a secret to everything
> in life; that the quality of life depends on knowing that secret; that secrets
> can be known only in orderly successions; and that only teachers can
> properly reveal these secrets. An individual with a schooled mind
> conceives of the world as a pyramid of classified packages accessible only
> to those who carry the proper tags (Illich, 1970, p. 76).

I had always wondered why my tags said *Left Field*. I guess it was where my teachers

always thought I was. *Johnny's a daydreamer*. What they didn't know, though, is that I

knew the secrets. Ha! I'd been with Jules Verne 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. I'd

travelled with Orson Wells in The Time Machine. But what did they care? Run Spot run!

I was getting it. They just didn't know. Like Ira Shor in his comment to Paulo Freire,

> We were much smarter than school allowed us to be. We were being
> treated like morons and turned into robots and I rebelled against the
> stupidity (1987, p. 18).

> Sixth grade. I remember turning in the poem. The teacher read it. She inquired

where I had *copied* it from. I told her it was mine. She said I couldn't possibly have

written it. She was wrong.

> We see many students in schools today not writing or working to please
> themselves, but to follow a model. They write to produce a product which
> follows the model of a perfect product (Reynolds, 1989, p. 144).

Obviously I wasn't following the prescribed level of attainment expected of a sixth grader.

My product was *too* perfect. The poem ended up in the trash.

> If young children are constantly subjected to manipulation, reward-punishment systems, they could be limited or crippled intellectually and emotionally, resulting in limited human potential and thus condemned to a life of immaturity (Dobson, Dobson, & Koetting, 1984b, p. 22).

That was the year I was allowed the honor of repeating sixth grade. There was, I think,

the hope that I would somehow miraculously grow up and conform more to the standards

exercised by everyone else.

> Schools select for each successive level those who have, at earlier stages in the game, proved themselves good risks for the established order (Illich, 1970, p. 34).

> I'd blown it and hadn't even made it to junior high school yet. But perhaps that

was it. I was, by that time, *pegged.* Categorized as a *slow learner* or maybe just a *holy*

terror. I don't know. What I was aware of, however, was that at that specific point I

wasn't particularly pleased with the state of my world.

> A student is frustrated because a series of low marks makes [them] feel like a failure...When one feels betrayed or disappointed with someone, one's relation to this person is no longer whole (van Manen, 1991, p. 166).

Who ever said it was whole to begin with? Okay. I'd played the game, albeit a lot by my

own rules, up to a point. But that was it. Two years in sixth grade. I was insulted! But,

what choice did I have? Compliance was the order of the day. And it didn't matter how I

felt.

> If one met a man at a party, and the man said, "I'd pronounce you approximately a B-minus individual," one would recognize how violent the act of grading or judging really is (Reich, 1970, p. 148).

> Did anyone really care that I was confined to repeating the same dull and mundane

material yet again? Perhaps the teacher who may have dreaded putting up with me yet

another year. But such was life. I was destined to be a *D* and *F* student. That's who I

was. That's who they made me out to be.

> [Such students] internalize the negative identities and become exactly what
> they are expected to become. Were these identities just idiosyncratic
> constructs accorded by individual teachers, students might overcome their
> effects in other educational contexts. Because such evaluations become
> permanent information in school records, however, and because they result
> from cultural disjunction as much as from the personal insensitivity of a
> particular teacher, they can become self-perpetuating social identities in the
> course of the student's school career (Hansen, 1979, p. 72).

Deviancy

That I made it through junior high school and high school at all is a small miracle.

I figured it out though. Years later. I was reading a dissertation on the erosion of

childhood by Valerie Suransky:

> The child who is docile and obedient depicts functional adaptation; the
> child who is creative, lively, energetic and rebellious becomes maladaptive
> (1977, p. 269).

So *that* was it! I had been a misfit. I knew there had to be an explanation. I just had

trouble getting along.

> Getting along means supporting the teacher, doing what one is told,
> socializing with the other children, and performing according to teacher's
> expectations (Selakovich, 1984, pp. 145-146).

Junior high. The bird chirped. It was during choir. It chirped again. I had it

carefully hidden in my shirt. Everyone knew it was there. Except the teacher. Chirp.

Laughter. *All right. What's so funny?* she asked. Silence. Chirp. More laughter.

Singing-interruptus. All eyes turned to me. The traitors. Chirp. Out with the bird. Out

with me. I'd done it again! The principal and I were on a first name basis.

> The child that does not "fit" the school structure becomes a deviant; the child who moves <u>beyond</u> the planned deposits of the "narrating teacher" and restructures an activity frequently encounters reprimand and <u>re-training</u>. The curious inventive mind of the child is actively socialized into docility and passivity by the school staff who thus emerge as oppressors of the childs freedom to develop his being (Suransky, 1977, p. 267).

Okay. I admit. The bird was going just a bit far. But listen. I was just a farm kid. What did I know? I did my chores. I went to school. I came home from school. I did my chores. I watched TV. Hey! What else was there? Books. Oh yeah. I read. But TV. Now *that* was something else! Ever wonder how Wilie Coyote blew up the Road Runner?

> Television experiences will serve to dehumanize, to mechanize, to make less real the realities and relationships [the student] encounters in life. For him, real events will always carry subtle echoes of the television world (Winn, 1977, p. 11).

High school. I was probably the only student in the history of the class to be excused from taking chemistry. I'm not so certain it was due to a concern over my possibly failing yet another course so much as it was a concern about the keen interest I was taking in how to make explosives. I had the formulas! Now, where were the ingredients? And school was just getting to be interesting!

Nazis, Communists And God

> A child turns on the TV and flips through the channels looking for something to watch. [They] see a talk show with a guest panel of cross-dressers; a made-for-TV movie about a child-molesting priest; a music video with misogynist lyrics; and a show hosted by neo-Nazis...In the past, you could choose whether or not to visit a carnival freak show. Today, by simply turning on your television, you invite that freak show into your living room (Granfield, 1994, p. 98).

The Nazi arm-bands, <u>Stormtrooper</u> magazines and propaganda arrived in the mail.

I headed it off at the post office. Mom and Dad would never understand. *Cool stuff.*

Courtesy of the American Nazi Party. Oh yeah. They really existed. George Lincoln

Rockwell, commandant. The whole works. I learned about them from some news

program on TV. I had read Hitler's <u>Mein Kampf.</u> But not to worry. I'd read Marx's <u>The</u>

<u>Communist Manifesto</u> as well. And just for good measure <u>The Holy Bible</u>. I didn't

discriminate. But my teachers would never know. They didn't ask questions over such

heady material in school. So. I brought the cool stuff to class. It didn't last long though.

Word gets around pretty fast when there are only seven kids in your entire grade. The

fourth reich at Holmesville High fell fairly quickly.

> Instead of conformity, some youngsters choose to rebel against the schools
> standards of behavior. These youngsters are well known to counselors,
> teachers, and principals and often are labeled as trouble-makers, truants,
> underachievers, and nonconformists (Dobson, Dobson, & Koetting, 1984b,
> p. 23).

It was beginning to dawn on me that somewhere along the line I'd been made.

They figured it out. *This guy is going to consistently goof up.* That is why I was the only

kid who wasn't allowed to participate in the junior-senior play. They just assumed I'd

screw it up somehow. They wouldn't even allow me to pull the curtain. There was some

concern I might drop it in the middle of an act. Who *me?* Never! There was good news,

however. I was getting closer to graduating!

> Teachers and administrators often explain such [deviant or disruptive]
> behaviors...as "he merely wants attention" and *dismissed* as that. Often
> punishing these children is unsuccessful in that the disruptive is repeated.
> However, from one point of view, the behavior is successful. The child is

at least acknowledged and his existence is confirmed, even if negatively (Pinar, 1975d, p. 379).

There was, I think, some perverse pleasure derived from driving my teachers nuts. Take my English teacher. Upon his leaving the room I was instructed to *collect the papers* from the other students and deposit them in the trash. Fine. A stack of papers placed vertically into a trash receptacle fits nicely. Creative insanity, however, possessed me. I took each sheet and wadded it into a nice round ball. And placed them one-by-one into an ever over-flowing can. Teacher returns. Oh-oh. Outside to the hallway. I'm grabbed by the shirt, bounced up against the wall and given a verbal lashing for being a royal-pain-in-the-ass. Gee. *That* was fun. Human silly putty. The things one learns!

I really didn't think much about it at the time. But it was just possible that I was slightly more sane than the whole loony bunch. Really. I mean. Look at the other students. What did *they* do? They played the game.

> In schools, particularly in secondary ones...one notes countless "persons" playing at being students...playing at being some *thing* other than themselves. They are not themselves; quite literally, they are out of their minds; they are mad (Pinar, 1975d, p. 365).

This is quite a dramatic statement for any educator to make. But why? Consider for a moment that students, despite being raised by the "flickering blue parent" (Dobson, 1990a, p. 12) are "born as curious, inquisitive, enterprising, cooperative, communicative and compassionate human beings" (Reynolds, 1993, p. 3). What happens when they enter the school system for the first time? According to Reich,

> School is intensely concerned with training students to stop thinking and start obeying...Public school is "obedience school;" the student is taught to accept authority without question, to respect authority simply because of

its position, to obey not merely in the area of school regulations but in the area of facts and ideas as well (1970, p. 143).

We had to line up after recess. By grade. We little guys to the front. The big guys to the back. Everyone accounted for? Okay. Single file now. March. To the water fountain. And? Potty break. Now...back to the classroom. Time for more mind expansion. *Run spot run*. Oh, this is great stuff!

Is this the madness of which Pinar speaks? Obviously. After all, "children have given up their actual identities and assumed acceptable group modes of thinking and doing" (Dobson, Dobson, & Koetting, 1984b, pp. 22-23). The school therefore creates the "deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying the rules to particular people and labeling them" (Becker, 1966, p. 9).

Johnny doesn't pay attention. Johnny fails to follow instructions. Johnny does not conform. Johnny... I was beginning to get the picture. Yes. *This* was what was expected of me. So, why should I be any different? Hm-m-m-m.

The school "is more firmly convinced than ever that its job is to teach youngsters to respond to other people's expectations" (Friedenberg, 1963, p. 66). If the expectation is placed in a negative light, wherein is there ever the motivation to excel? Failure becomes the expected norm.

That is not to say that the teachers do not try. There is *positive reinforcement*, even if some have to struggle to create it. There is even *constructive criticism*. But sometimes, it is just no use. The process of trying to get students to adapt to prescribed school norms often leaves them "dissatisfied with themselves" (Pinar, 1976, p. 6).

Schools, simply, end up alienating students from learning and they, in turn, find little reward in the academic process (Illich, 1974, p. 40).

I wasn't particularly a *happy camper* in school. Each day was a battle. Each morning I'd put on my invisible suit of armor and prepare to duel with teachers who inevitably failed in their attempts to mold me into something I obviously was not. Ah-h-h, *conformity*. I never did quite get the hang of that word. Too bad. The school years reminded me of something else. *Yes warden*.

> The schools are places of confinement. They are places of confusion and obscurity, hence they are deep dark vaults...It is no surprise that there is mediocrity. In the darkness of the vault and its confining influence, who can gain commitment to any project other than escape (Reynolds, 1989, p. 132)?

What was the problem? How was it that so many teachers could try so hard to educate and yet students, like myself, perceived themselves as prisoners (Schrank, 1977, p. 146)?

> Classroom attendance removes children from the everyday world of Western culture and plunges them into an environment far more primitive, magical, and deadly serious. Schools could not create such an enclave within which the rules of ordinary reality are suspended unless it physically incarcerated the young during many successive years on sacred territory (Illich, 1970, p. 32).

What the student encounters when he or she leaves their *outside* culture behind and enters the portals of the academic environment is far from familiar. "What once was an essence of being a child , is invalidated by the merciless march of mechanistic programs and the continual onslaught of prescribed pathways" (Reynolds, 1993, p. 5). And, in the end, what many encounter is akin to a sensory assault of the most torturous kind:

> The dull droning of meaningless repetition, the regurgitation of undigested facts, the monotony of endless drill is really cruel, but, unfortunately, not unusual punishment of the children who go hopefully to school (Stein, 1979, p. 109).

Trapped. What was one to do? The raspy-voiced staccato of the teachers lecture captivated my attention. It wasn't so much what she was saying that was interesting. Rather, it was wonderment at how she could talk like that without taking a breath. Very deep lungs I thought. Oh-oh. Did she just say my name? *Johnny!* The sound was razor sharp. A ruler banged down on a desk has a tendency to make one alert. *Yes ma'am.* You're not paying attention. *But I am.* Good. Then you'll be so kind as to tell the class what I just said. *You said, you're not paying attention (class laughter).* And so it went. Just one more instance of life inside the classroom.

> The school defines what is legitimate knowledge, what the appropriate strategies for gaining it are, how decisions should be made within the school itself and so on...As a student, you can either accept it and remain relatively bored a good deal of the time. Or you can find the cracks in the organizational control and exploit them to maintain some sense of power over your daily life (Apple, 1982c, p. 520).

I made an academic career out of exploiting the cracks. And, occasionally, I could take credit for creating them.

> [Some students] spend a large amount of their time goofing off and recreating cultural forms that give them some degree of power in the school setting. While these students do not totally reject the formal curriculum, they give the school only the barest minimum work required and try to minimize even those requirements (Apple, 1992b, p. 27).

What was it about school I found so tedious? Was I so preconditioned by television viewing that I could not possibly grasp the concept of *concentration*? Or was

the material as presented just plain boring? Or was it the realization that what the teachers

were telling us just wasn't like the real world after all?

> The statements of objectives are often...derived from so vulgar a
> conception of what life will demand of its students as to be indefensible
> (Friedenberg, 1963, p. 39).

What did the teachers expect? *And what do you want to be when you grow up*

Johnny? They ask this stuff almost from the moment you walk in the door. Um...

> It will not take him long to discover that "I want to be a horse" is not an
> answer that satisfies adults. They want to know what men plan to do, what
> job, profession, occupation we have decided to follow at five years of age!
> Boys are taught early that they are what they do (Keen, 1991, p. 51).

So that was it? Be *somebody*! But who? Outside of school, I knew who I was (I think).

But boy-oh-boy, the teachers, it seemed, were trying to make me into something else.

Let's see. What was the word they used? Oh yes! I was to be a *model citizen*! Now,

what exactly did *that* mean?

> This "self" is a thing, an image such as "good student," "intellectual," "hard
> worker," in any case a *role*, but not a subjective being. The internalization
> of this role, this thing, objectifies the self, rendering it more or less stable
> but quite dead. As objects, as "things," the oppressed "have no purposes
> except those their oppressors prescribe for them (Freire, 1970, p. 46).

That was it, of course. I was to be a product of the school. But I wasn't. I was

the kid who had the Roy Rogers six-shooter. I was the kid who wore the Davey Crocket

imitation coonskin cap. I was *king of the wild frontier*. Couldn't they see that? I guess

not.

> Schooling is a place that disconfirms rather than confirms their histories,
> experiences, and dreams. In part, this alienation is expressed in...the
> refusal of many students to take seriously the academic demands and social
> practices of schools (Arnowitz, & Giroux, 1985, p. 202).

I'm not exactly certain what I expected of school. I may actually have looked forward to it some days. But the truth is, I really didn't relish being a jerk-off. But it was who I had become. It was my role. It was expected of me.

> So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything--that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive--that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness (Freire, 1970, p. 49).

How could I possibly disappoint everyone? How could I disappoint myself? Secretly, I envied those students who had the teachers admiration. I wanted deep down to be like them. But, at best, I was the mongrel of the bunch left with no meat on his bone. And so, like the bad dog of the house, I stained the carpet of the master who fed me.

Who was I? An enigma perhaps to both myself and others. In the quiet of my bedroom I read all the Hardy Boy mysteries, Treasure Island, Edgar Allen Poes collected works, Moby Dick, Oliver Twist, Ivanhoe, Last of the Mohicans, All Quiet On the Western Front, and more. My life was one of stealth, intrigue, quick wittedness, survival of the fittest, and triumph of man over nature and his fellow man. My life was not the life of the school. Yet no one suspected.

> With no true self to discover, a more promising moral project becomes 'self creation' and 'self-enlargement' rather than 'self-knowledge' and 'purification' (Cohen, & Taylor, 1992, p. 23).

If I could not be like other kids, then it seemed logical that I should create for myself a persona all my own. It may not have been to my liking, but it did provide an identity. And so it was that I sought to embrace words, actions and cultural forms which others found peculiar, revolting and vulgar.

They wouldn't let me pierce my ear. Good grief! What was I thinking of? Just

because it was the sixties didn't mean you got to do everything you wanted. And, no, you

may not pierce either your nipple or navel. Think! Don't you know it would hurt? Right.

Let's try something else.

There was the *black* period. That was when I defined myself by wearing all black:

shoes, socks, trousers and turtle neck. My parents and teachers must have chalked it up

to yet another phase. But there I was. *Cool?* Not really. Until...I added the studded

black leather jacket with the ball and chain emblazoned on the back. The self-styled Hells

Angel of Holmesville High! That got 'em. Dress codes! *What* dress codes? It was

nothing more than a form of "oppositional culture" (Stevenson, & Ellsworth, 1993,

p. 269) which happened to provide an identity. The problem was maintaining continuity

of presence. It wasn't always easy.

> The strategies of escape may be subtle and devious--we lose ourselves in
> sensation, pleasure...but these strategies fail in the end, they collapse in
> despair, and we come back to the humble self that we are and that we
> cannot escape. We have to be who we are, however we may seek
> eventually to transform ourselves (Barrett, 1979, p. 125).

Materialism

I suppose in one form or another I had always tried to define myself through

possessions. Remember the cap gun and the imitation coonskin cap? They were symbols.

They made me into someone else just as the leather jacket did. And then there was the

Beatle memorabilia. You remember. Beatlemania? The fab four? John, Paul, Ringo and

George? Yeah. Those guys. One kid in my class came to school with a bunch of Beatle

bubble-gum collectible cards. He rubbed me wrong. So, I went out and blew a wad on

the Beatles: boxes of cards, magazines, albums, the works. And, yes, I actually liked

them. But that wasn't the point. The point was not to be outdone by *the other guy*. I'd

out Beatled him and that was all that mattered.

Things. *Things* were important. The problem was, many of the things I

surrounded myself with were often totally misrepresentative of who I really was.

> Advertising encourages materialism and the need to consume, that *things*
> are made more important than *people*, and that advertising does not teach
> rational consumer decision-making but depicts instead vanity and flashiness
> as a reason for choosing one product over another (Liebert, 1979, p. 45).

You just had to have the right combination of *stuff* to be *in*. It started with

kindergarten. So? Whose picture do you have on your lunch-box? Mighty Mouse? All

rig-g-g-ght! That's *cool*! And, then, the school survival kit was important--let's see:

plastic ruler, #2 pencils, eraser, Indian Chief lined-tablet. Hey. This was the stuff that

went in your desk you know. The one with the ink-well where the lid lifts up. Third row,

third one back. Not for long, though. Let's move Johnny to the front of the room. We

can keep an eye on him better plus, he won't bother the person sitting in front of him.

Rats. Corralled again!

> As any mother can tell you, television is good at inspiring one form of
> activity: requesting toys, drinks, cereals, candy--more television
> programs...Adults condemn children as hedonistic and believe that
> television...[has] produced children gravely lacking in self restraint (Seiter,
> 1993, pp. 37-38).

I just had to have the super-secret decoder ring. You send in so many box tops ya

see and then via special express just-to-you-only mail I'd receive the cryptic key which

would unlock the mysteries of the universe. But Malt-O-Meal? Why couldn't it at least

have been a Rice Crispies promotion? Heck. Sugar Smacks would have been even better.

But, grin and bear it as they say. Yummie. Pass the sugar. And send for the ring. I'd

soon be in the know. Not bad for a third grader who wasn't so sure he ever wanted to

grow up. But time does have a way of playing funny tricks on you biologically, if not

mentally. I got older and still hadn't learned any secrets. Pooh.

> Adherence to externals is evidenced by social conformity. By the time
> children reach junior high school, they have lost touch with themselves and
> with each other to the point that they must mimic each other's speech, dress
> and habits in order to feel human and close (Pinar, 1975d, p. 373).

Bell bottoms. Ridiculously striped. Flared at the bottom. That's what everyone

was wearing, myself included. I was trapped into adhering to the social norm. After all,

they'd taken away my ball-and-chain jacket. So much for odd-man-out attire. Now I had

wide collared shirts and sideburns which flared at the ear-lobes. A walking-talking

travesty. But such was what the sixties wrought. I was miserable. The high-top zip-up-

the-side big-heeled boots hurt my feet.

> Among many other things, the affluent society has produced the historically
> novel type of teenager, with whole industries catering to his tastes, and
> tending to make him not an endearing type (Muller, 1970, p. 97).

So, right along with the hoards (all seven of the dwarfs), I discovered a self

consciousness about how I looked, dressed, and appeared to others (Lowenfeld, &

Brittain, 1982, p. 356). If it wasn't bell-bottoms, it was the latest fashion trend. There

was, however, logic in my surrender to such cultural enticements. After all, I'd discovered

g-i-r-l-s.

> Artifice, like art, belongs to the realm of the imaginary. It is not only that girdle, brassiere, hair-dye, make-up disguise body and face; but that the least sophisticated of women, once she is "dressed,"...is [a reflection of someone else]. It is this identification with [someone] unreal, fixed, perfect...that gratifies her; she strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendor (De Beauvoir, 1953, p. 533).

Hubba-hubba-root-toot-a-toot! Yes-s-s-s-s! Make up. Perfume. And those tight fitting jeans. It made the girl/woman into some other creature. Somewhere along the line, I had opened my eyes. Whatever happened to the pig-tailed tom-boys I used to tease on the play-ground? My gosh! They'd grown up into something quite unrecognizable. Yet, along with other young bucks, I smelled the scent. And, who could concentrate on school work while walking advertisements for the latest in sensual wear and apparel prowled the corridors?

They were live and in living color and provided great diversionary entertainment. Thank you Calvin Klein! Much of how I viewed the world, I think, I owed to the likes of designer and ad-man Cal and his contemporaries.

> His model stands locked at the knees, flexed in a paroxysm of ecstasy. She too assumes the Grecian Bend; a moment of submission, captured for you, by a pair of pants. She purrs; she growls--restrained by the cloth, caressed by the seams. Calvin Klein has done this for her. He will do it for you (Ewen, 1982, p. 110).

Naturally, I had to rid myself of my Osh-Kosh-By-Gosh baggy-in-the-seat down home denims and get britches which would do my rear-end justice. After all, other ads emphasized the look for men too. And if my jeans were to attract her *genes*, then something had to be right.

> Wearing designer jeans is an act of distinction, of using a socially locatable
> accent to speak a common language...Ads for designer jeans consistently
> stress how they will fit YOU; the physicality of the body is more than a
> sign of nature, vigor, and sexuality, it becomes a sign of individuality
> (Fiske, 1989b, pp. 6-7).

I don't think I was ever fully cognizant of the mass media's influence of my view of

anything. Who ever thinks television might be influencing their perspective when it comes

to romantic inclinations? But, I'd certainly watched enough television by that time to be

under the influence.

> Commercials are about products only in the sense that the story of Jonah is
> about the anatomy of whales. Miller beer commercials are not really about
> beer; they're about male bonding, they're about attitudes toward work and
> attitudes toward women (Postman, 1985a, p. 59).

It was, of course, obvious. To be a stud-muffin you had to be able to enjoy the brew too.

It didn't take long to learn the formula. *Britches, beer and babes.* Who needed the *3 R's*

when one had the *3 B's?*

> Advertisements that target young people use the image angle to the hilt,
> selling the attractiveness of a lifestyle rather than the functions of a product
> (Still, 1990, p. 15).

Lifestyle heck. We're talking about sex here. Pure, unadulterated s-e-x. That's

function! Names like *Trojan, Shiek,* and *Ramses* were common denominators with guys.

Condoms. Sh-h-h-h. Don't say the word too loud. Just carry one in your wallet. You know.

Just in case. Mine yellowed with age. But it was a status symbol nonetheless. So much

for britches and beer. The tight fitting jeans weren't much good for tossing hay bales on

the farm and too much 3.2 beer made you sick. And the babes? They just giggled. They

looked grown up but...some just hadn't made it to square one. Back to the basics. I'd

have to wait.

> An insidious form of premature sexual awakening is stealing our kids youth
> (Overbeck, 1993, p. 21).

Too bad I didn't notice anyone stealing mine. I was left to watch more TV where I

learned that if I wanted to *Double my pleasure/double my fun* all I'd have to do is chew

Doublemint gum.

> If you have problems with your sexuality or sociality you can't solve
> problems like that just by buying gum, which is what commercials tell you
> (Robinson, 1985, p. 36).

I guess an extra stick of gum in my mouth wasn't going to help either. And all I wanted

was a magical fix to my dilemma. I just didn't know how to get it.

> If one creates a desire for sex, status, and excitement, and then sells a man
> an automobile, the desires are likely to remain unsatisfied. The wants
> created are real enough, but the satisfactions are unreal (Reich, 1970,
> p. 210).

It was slowly starting to dawn on me. What I wanted versus the reality of my

adolescence were two different things. And so, I continued to watch TV for lack of

anything constructive (or destructive) to do and, in part, because it kept telling me: "we'll

be right back, stay where you are" (Wilkins, 1982, p. 62), "buy something, and tune in

tomorrow" (Mander, 1978, p. 169). How could I refuse? Television watching was kind

of "like eating peanuts or pretzels or chocolate-chip cookies. You quickly lose count of

what you have consumed" (Wilkins, 1982, p. 51). So I was a glutton. Besides, TV

provided an escape from the disappointments which lay outside the door.

> The great American dream is a bitter illusion for the millions who are not
> enjoying its promised prosperity, who do not control their own lives and do
> not experience the satisfaction of being successful (Fiske, 1989b, p. 116).

Actually I liked TV. A lot. There's much I learned from it. "School became irrelevant, and therefore boring" (Glenn, 1989, p. 17). Like so many others, I wanted immediate gratification and yet wasn't finding it.

> For millions, classroom education is death and educators are deadheads
> while...television...beats out the lively pulse of life. In contrast to dull
> appearing teachers of artificial subjects, [television] content seems
> sparklingly alive...the ways of "civilization" as seen through [TV] are not
> those of the educator and the idealist, but rather, are those of the merchant
> and the materialist (Stein, 1979, p. 54).

Obviously, I wasn't going to get everything I wanted. I couldn't change who I was with britches and beer. I knew what was expected of me. So, with the decision made, I returned to TV, the one friend which provided information and entertainment without critique or criticism, who didn't try to make me into someone I was not. It provided much of what I could not discover elsewhere, particularly in school.

> If it isn't fun, cute, or packaged in a ten-second sound bite, then forget it.
> If it can't be presented with a smiling, cheerful, sexy face, then it ain't worth
> attending to (Mitroff, & Bennis, 1989, p. 7).

At least I looked forward to being "sufficiently adventurous, clean, well traveled, well read, low in cholesterol, slim, friendly, odor-free, and coiffed" (Gergen, 1991, p. 76). Like media guru Ben Logan, "my identity and reality [could] never again be fully separated from the myths and facts of the television universe" (1989, p. 8).

> I [was] beguiled by a romantic never-never land where today's behavior
> had no tomorrow consequences and where things/products from this
> Aladdin's lamp reached out to me, promising to make me sexier, happier,
> wiser, pain free, and more successful at everything from being a great lover

> to keeping my barber from ever seeing a ring around my collar. Television all too easily became my modern fairy tale book and I a child again when I viewed it, disappearing into nothing, looking for happy times, easy solutions and wanting them to come from outside myself and save me from myself, do my thinking for me, tell me who I was and what I was supposed to do (Logan, 1989a, p. 8).

As a youth, I had my hang-ups, my problems and concerns. It seems as though I was always searching for something more. I came into a school system filled with hope and promise, anticipating a world of wonderment and delight. What I discovered, however, was a system bent on breaking my spirit. Rules, regulations, time schedules, and rigid formats, forced me into a regimen so alien, I rebelled. It seems the harder they tried to force me to conform, the more I resisted.

The teachers had set the stage and I was the actor. I had a role to play. And play it well I did. All through school. I had lost touch with my self just as others in my class had lost touch with themselves. The difference was one of adherence. My classmates elected to play the game, to play their roles, to give up their identities in exchange for gold stars and *attaboys*. I did not.

> Schools teach students to work for the sake of grades...They teach that performance and competence, what you do rather than who you are, are the basis of rewards and status (Apple, 1982a, p. 56).

It did not mean that I was dumber. It simply meant that I refused to take part in something I perceived was stupid. Stupid rules in a stupid environment attempting to shovel worthless bits of information down my throat which I was certain to forget by summers end. There had to be more to life. After all, I had seen it on television, if not in school. And, therein, is the essence of this whole chapter.

Summary

> Schooling produces hollow men, obedient automatons programmed to
> make the correct computations, strangers to themselves and to others, but
> madmen to the few who escape, half-crazed, to search for what has been
> stolen from them (Pinar, 1975d, p. 375).

In reacting to the educational process, I managed to create considerable anxiety for

teachers, bemusement for fellow students, frustration for administrators and, ultimately,

concern for my parents. Perhaps I was, indeed, *half-crazed*, searching for something else

while my classmates, as *obedient automatons* remained trained but institutionalized

madmen.

Their shortcomings along with my rebellion evolved, in part, because the system

was too operatively constrained.

> School has no prison bars, or locked doors like an insane asylum, but the
> student is no more free to leave it than a prisoner is free to leave the
> penitentiary (Reich, 1970, p. 149).

As a result, public rebuke, chastisement, and constructive criticism were often the bitter

harvest for this self-styled freedom-fighter while the other inmates obediently participated

in the group folly skillfully playing their roles.

> Beginning with childhood, he learns that he must trim his sails, be prudent,
> please those in authority, avoid experimentation and trouble, and try to
> force his individuality into the rigid mold of "good character" prescribed
> for the State (Reich, 1970, p. 158).

As an "alienated youth" (Arnowitz, & Giroux, 1991, p. 3), I felt locked in a system

where the constraints made little sense. My individual potential was squashed from the

outset because I refused to play *pull the switch*.

Okay children. I'm the teacher. This is the switch. When the switch is pulled, the electric current of knowledge travels from my lips to your sensory system and right into your brain cells. Isn't that just peachy-keen? So! I trust you'll act accordingly.

> The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students (Freire, 1970, p. 57).

Electrocution by worthless knowledge. It was every kids nightmare. But there was no escaping the jaws of the teacher. They clamped down on you and pulled you screaming and kicking to your inevitable end: graduation.

> The cumulative effect of the schooling experience is devastating. We graduate credentialed but crazed, erudite but fragmented shells of human possibility (Pinar, 1975d, p. 381).

> No wonder television was more entertaining. A world-in-the-box. Television, offered a "universal curriculum" (Maddux, 1986, p. 85).

> One does not have to be taught how to watch television...[it] requires no analogue to the McGuffey Reader, requires no prerequisites, requires no mastery of unnatural and abstract symbols; does not even require, as does reading, special habits of mind such as self control, logical organization and critical response (Postman, 1981, p. 68).

I learned a lot from television. I discovered what being a bonified root vegetable is all about. It requires just the right distance, the right reclining posture, and the ability to let your mind relax and absorb, like a dry sponge in water, whatever happens to be on at the moment. I was good at it. It was, I think, my first love. Names like Red Skelton, Jackie Gleason, Ed Sullivan, Matt/Kitty/Doc and Festus, Andy/Opie/Aunt Bea and Barney, were very much a part of my life--more than school ever could be.

I suppose, in a way, I was fortunate. I grew up in an age where shows like *Leave It To Beaver, My Three Sons, Make Room For Daddy,* and *The Adventures Of Ozzie And Harriet* were the dominant influence for my outlook of the world. Happy endings were the expectation. And even in the westerns, the good guy always won. Somewhere along the line, though, all of that changed.

Today, television is rife with pictures of a decaying society.

> Television presents children with overt illustrations of crime, drug abuse, violence and sexuality. Additionally, it exposes children to all of the larger world's ills: war, famine, pollution, political corruption and so on. All this is rich fare for young people--a heavy information overload--powerfully pressuring them to abandon all vestiges of childhood (Elkind, 1981a, pp. 70-71).

Kids today grow up, it seems, before they ever see the portals of the school. That is why, when many encounter the regimented life of the classroom, they rebel.

> Through television news and entertainment, children learn too much about the nature of the *real life* to believe the ideals their teachers try to teach them. The result is not only that they grow up fast, but that they grow up having an image of society and roles that differs markedly from that held by children of earlier generations (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 255).

I wasn't the first and certainly not the last lone warrior in the quest for personal freedom in an institutionalized society whose goal is to squash any hope for liberated learning. At least I was presented with some semblance of decency in the role models television proffered. Today, however, it's a whole different story.

> Not so long ago parents could rely on popular TV shows like *Leave It To Beaver* to provide admirable role models. Now they worry that their children might be inspired to emulate dubious heroes like the underachieving Bart Simpson or, worse yet, the deviant duo Beavis and Butt-head (Granfield, 1994, p. 99).

The reality, of course, is that kids today do, indeed, latch on to the words and actions of such anti-establishment characters. They touch a chord. And the discontent wells up and spills over into the roles many of these students are forced to play in their day-to-day lives. The passive chaos ensues when the teacher has little choice but to contend with the rabble who dare them to teach anything.

> Sometimes young children feel their knowledge and mastery of consumer culture to be a kind of power; something they know, but of which [teachers] are ridiculously ignorant (Seiter, 1993, p. 8).

Theirs is a jaded culture where passions are tied to the artifice of things rather than people. They surround themselves with the trappings of an imitation world represented, to a large extent, by the likes of MTV--the channel where Beavis and Butt-head reside and where the instruction they receive centers around what's *cool* and what *sucks*. Music TV may have many detractors among the adult population but for many youth it is one of the best curriculums going. But what is it teaching?

> [Music television] relies heavily on the breakdown of objective reality...Rock videos also revel in their challenge to authority--often celebrating life within youth culture or various minority or oppressed groups, attacking the economic class system, or revealing the foibles of parents and policy makers. But most pertinently, rock videos represent a full breakdown in the sense of a rationally coherent world (Gergen, 1991, p. 133).

However, it is *their* world, the students cultural point of reference. And it is a postmodern culture which is not being addressed in todays schools incessantly bound by some antiquated yet obsessive need to create for the student a substitute-self:

> ...one that will get the maximum approval and rewards from the State, a self that will get along better than the real self, the self that might have been (Reich, 1970, p. 143).

The ensuing clash between the MTV world of youth and the established order of

the school creates a hellish nightmare for many teachers unable to relate to their students.

> How are you going to interest students in history and geography when they
> can watch MTV and see a lot of sex? "When did the Vietnam war end?
> Who cares? Yesterday I saw Madonna mostly naked" (Grizzard, 1990).

These kids, then, "don't relate to anyone because no one has adequately related to them"

(Clinton, 1993, p. 10). There is, in their lives, a perceived absence of caring.

> It is undoubtedly true that for many...[television] relationships provide the
> most emotionally wrenching experiences of the average week...so powerful
> in their well-wrought portrayals that their realities become more compelling
> than those furnished by common experience (Gergen, 1991, p. 57).

Yet, "at the center of the self lies a passionate self concern" (Barrett, 1986, p. 123).

Caring is a fundamental human need. "We all need to be cared for by other human beings"

(Noddings, 1992, p. xi). The problem, however, is that,

> In American schools, one goes unnoticed, unloved and if one is not to feel
> *de trop*, one must interfere with the lives of others. In our death throes, we
> mangle each other, leaving scarred fragments of what we might have been
> (Pinar, 1975d, p. 379).

That is what it is like for so many in todays classrooms. That is what it was like

for me. Nothing changes. One thing perpetuates another. Like a school of pirhana in a

feeding frenzy, such youth devour all that is prescribed as normative. And, in the end,

they leave little of the carcass of intelligible knowledge which might have been. They

simply have not learned how to relate to an unresponsive educational system which fails to

recognize their needs.

> The school endorses and supports the values and patterns of behavior of
> certain segments of the population, providing their members with the
> credentials and shibboleths needed for the next stages of their journey,

while instilling in others a sense of inferiority and warning the rest of
society against them as troublesome and untrustworthy (Friedenberg, 1963,
p. 49).

What choice is left for the designated misfits but to attempt to carve out their own

niche in a hostile world? For some, like myself, the definition is provided by a stubborn

refusal to bend to rules perceived as nonsensical. For others, it comes through passive

withdrawal (Shor, 1986, p. 15). But almost all share a proclivity to adopt *things* of the

popular culture. These students seek pleasure through *stuff* while holding their teachers

and peers in bemused or bitter disdain (Seiter, 1993, p. 39).

> They feel alienated from their school work, separated from the adults who
> try to teach them, and adrift in a world perceived as baffling and hostile
> (Noddings, 1992, p. 2).

It is ironic that so many students today present a facade which has their definition

of the "good life" (Maddux, 1986, p. 16) written all over it. Extrinsics define their being.

But the internal reality of their world holds many back through a hidden curriculum not of

their choosing.

> Surrounded by a depressed job market, a decaying public sector, a shabby
> school building, and a bare curriculum, [how] could students think
> education counted in this society (Shor, 1986, p. 29)?

Pretending to care about education in such an environment is ludicrous, especially while

television, at the same time, presents the bright and the beautiful as the lifestyle of choice.

For some students, the everyday world is not one of freshly scrubbed faces and

pearly white smiles. It is, instead, one where a metal detector rather than a teacher greets

them at the school door (Adler, Ladowsky, & Liu, 1993, p. 51).

> In these schools there are security guards and rigid rules about entering and leaving the campus. Students need passes to use restrooms and, once inside, they may be accosted physically or verbally, while outside someone may be timing their stay to prevent loitering (Noddings, 1992, p. 2).

Is this what education has come to? In many urban school systems, yes. It is not a pretty picture. What we see

> ...is a portrait of a generation living in fear. The security of their parents generation, and the optimistic view of the future, is no longer taken for granted by today's young people. For them...the American Dream may be dying (Adler, Ladowsky, & Liu, 1993, p. 52).

But along with all the turmoil confronting youth of this generation, these factors cannot be overlooked when addressing critical pedagogy and the curriculum reform which will be discussed in Chapter V.

"Something precious has gone out of American culture, and we don't know how to get it back" (Adler, Ladowsky, & Liu, 1993, p. 43). There is no magical wand, no mystical potion, no miracle cure. We look in society's mirror and what we see staring back at us is a reality we would prefer not to acknowledge. Instead of the vitality and vigor to which all youth should be entitled, we see a generation forced to grow up too fast (Elkind, 1981a, p. 73).

We must change the way we do business as educators if we are to address the needs of todays students. We can no longer settle for a status quo which results from an infernal tug-of-war between popular culture's pervasive influence and the school's adherence to a curriculum of containment in a postmodern world.

There have, of course, been many proposals presented for educational reform. Many have merit. Some have found success in scattered test cases. But one thing is certain. Universal changes need to be made in nearly every public school system. Otherwise, the words to Billy Joel's *Allentown* will surely haunt the hallowed hallways:

> We're waiting...for the promises our teachers gave, if we worked hard, if we behaved. So, the graduations hang on the wall. But they never really helped us at all. No. They never taught us what was real. Iron and coal, chromite and steel (1987).

Many educators agree with Kozol that *education has gone to hell in a handcart*. But, it is going to take a concerted effort on the part of all of society's sectors to turn it around. It will not be easy but it can and must be done. Until we do, many secondary students will continue to identify with Happy Harry Hard-On's observation:

> High school is the bottom. Being a teenager sucks. But, that's the point. Surviving--it's the whole point (Risher, Stilladis, & Cappe, 1990).

I learned through my own perilous journey through the school system. Had it not been for parents and teachers who cared, I might have been ignored as just another student not worth the effort. Whatever the reason, I was one of the lucky ones. I was pushed, cajoled, and propelled through an education system which I fought against. But, along the way, I learned and grew. The outward manifestation of my sense of self may not have left many teachers with an endearing memory of my presence in their lives. Let this writing, however, be testimony that infinite patience and perseverance can pay off; that each student, imbued with individual gifts and talents, is worth the investment.

A lesson in all of this may be that not always are these individual gifts and talents viewed as being those of the dominant culture. Nonetheless, they offer a potential which,

A lesson in all of this may be that not always are these individual gifts and talents viewed as being those of the dominant culture. Nonetheless, they offer a potential which, if unlocked by a caring teacher, can provide a constructive contribution to the educational process.

Each student is special and unique. Each has the ability to succeed. It is our job as educators to provide them the opportunity. In a society on the verge of a technological explosion, to think that we can do so in an education system as it is currently structured is pure folly. Society has been and is changing. The way we do business in the education of our youth also needs to change. Otherwise, the electronic super-highway will leave many sitting by the shoulder of the road, out of gas and in need of repair. We can do better by our youth. They are, after all, the future. And *surviving*--that's the whole point.

CHAPTER V

CURRICULUM CHANGE

A RECONCEPTUALIST VIEW

Introduction

Unless it is curtailed in the near future, illiteracy in the United States will
cease to be merely a national shame. It has all the possibilities of becoming
the key factor in our global decline. A high-tech economy cannot flourish
without a high-tech work force to support it (Green, 1991, p. 121).

A Nation At Risk published by the National Commission on Excellence in

Education in 1983, sounded the alarm:

Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and
technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the
world...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 (cited in Shor, 1986, pp. 104-105).

Many agree that little has changed in the way schools educate students. America today is

little better off than when A Nation At Risk was published. It does not mean that any

number of innovative concepts have not been tried. The problem is, "too many educators

are still wedded to the modernist view of progress and its outmoded tools" (Noddings,

1992, p. 173). As a result, "Mastery Learning, Competency Based Education, Outcomes

Based Education, and the deluge of other quick-fix programs we've had over the years

simply do not work" (Horne, 1994, p. 26).

Schools seek the excitement of continual curriculum novelty. The plethora of programs from teacher effectiveness to outcomes based education is the search for novelty, the search for a "quick-fix", the search for the newest bandwagon that will take us to a more efficient and controlled school--the promised land of the modernist paradigm. This inauthentic curriculum of curiosity blends perfectly with our McDonaldized society. A society where the fascination with the trendy, the fad, the hip is pervasive (Reynolds, 1993, p. 6).

There must be something more to the educational process than just a curriculum of curiosity. The question is *what?* Chapter V does not pretend to prescribe a universal antidote to the malaise which has gripped American education from Consciousness II onward. There is more to the problem, afterall, than one simple take-all capsule can cure.

To suggest that one factor is responsible is much like saying one snowflake causes an avalanche or that one grain of sand tips the balance on a scale. So we begin to look for contributing factors (Glenn, 1989, p. 9).

This chapter does, however, look at a number of propositions that others have made, the collective common sense of which leaves one to wonder what insanity possesses the Consciousness V educator that he has failed to embrace them in light of the intensive onslaught of Consciousness VI with which he is confronted. One rationale, of course, is that "the movement in education is slow because of a technical mentality" (Huebner, 1975, p. 279) representative of the factory-model public education system.

It was not designed, as many of us were taught, to be the great social and economic equalizer and the promoter of our democratic values. It was designed first and foremost to be the Great American Academic and Social Sorting Factory...to separate the wheat from the chaff--to select, shape, fashion, and build a few students (the academically successful winners in the competitive school race) for their role in life (Clinch, 1993, p. 606).

The way this is done is a matter of expedient division. Students are required to acquire measurable academic skills in a specific sequence within a given time frame.

Further, students are "ranked relative to one another and relative to their presumed ability" (Hansen, 1979, p. 189). Grade levels and individual grade reports, in turn, contribute to the students sense of self worth within the academic setting, their label as either a success or failure or *a student who shows promise but...*

It is precisely because of this sequencing that the factory-model of schooling as we know it needs to go the way of the dinosaur. Its function is no longer relative to the world in which it exists.

> The schools of the 1990s are the schools of the 1890s with a fresh coat of paint. They are pony express institutions trying to make it in a high-tech world. Technology, instantaneous worldwide communications, and improved transportation have revolutionized almost every aspect of our lives, except for what happens in schools. Low standards, too little time, anemic content, and irrelevant tests make for a dull system these days. We cling tightly to arcane structures and practices, despite the fact that American education is choking on mediocrity (Murphy, 1993, p. 642).

In 1992, the U.S. Census Bureau found that more than one third of high school students had either dropped behind in their class level or dropped out of school entirely (Kominski, 1992). These figures translate into grave concern within the American work-place. A 1993 U.S. Department of Education report confirmed business leaders and educators worst fears:

> American workers...appear ill equipped to compete globally, and high schools are hardly helping by awarding degrees to students barely able to read or write (Kaplan, Wingert, & Chideya, 1993, p. 44).

The potential impact of these facts is staggering, given a functional illiteracy which seems to be spreading in epidemic proportion.

> A secret affliction [which] affects one in five American adults--an estimated 27 million people of every race, nationality, income level and age group.

Its victims can't follow a map or fill out a job application. They can't vote or figure the dosage on their prescriptions. They can't even lull their children to sleep with a storybook. They are functionally illiterate, unable to read, write or comprehend simple mathematics well enough to function fully in modern society (Chazin, 1992, pp. 130-131).

There simply is no choice left for the American educator. The disease which afflicts our public schools cannot be cured by *kissing the boo-boo* or applying a cartoon-character Band-Aid.

The imperatives are clear. If our schools are to provide us with a modern work force prepared to excel in a post-industrial, knowledge-based society, we must transform the design and structure of education; we must make a fundamental change that strikes at the core of present operations (Murphy, 1993, p. 642).

Boredom

Drone. Drone. Drone. The teacher's monotonous delivery bored me to tears.

This was the third time she had gone over the material. Not everyone got it the first time.

Not everyone got it the second. Hopefully, the third time would be the charm. She was, I

learned much later in life, required to keep the whole class in a fairly tight formation as far

as academic digestion was concerned. *Okay. Everybody got that?* Time to find out.

Great. Another test to measure Johnny's academic attainment! But first, another paper

airplane. Zoom! Yep. She saw that one. A British De Havilland Moth light biplane,

circa 1925.

It is not surprising that the combination of narrowly stated learning objectives and pat, routine lessons induces boredom. And boredom leads to something educators call "random behavior." This is behavior that is not directed to the task at hand. Educators are also fond of talking about "off-task" behavior. Both ways of talking assume that students who are not

tuned in to the teacher's goals and tasks have no goals or tasks of their own
(Noddings, 1992, p. 9).

You see, the problem was, I'd gotten it the first time. Of course, the teacher never knew

this. Why should I let her think she was doing well. I knew better. And I wasn't alone.

They're the best and the brightest--and they're bored. That's the conclusion
of the federal government's first assessment in 20 years of education for the
nation's smartest students. Some gifted students...spend wasted hours in
regular classrooms where teachers go over work that these students have
already mastered (Kantrowitz, & Wingert, 1993, p. 67).

Rigor

It wouldn't have been so bad, I suppose, if the expectation was greater but the

whole focus on the educational process seemed to be on memorizing mundane and useless

facts and figures which could be regurgitated back on a test. *What is the capitol of*

Paraguay? Who the heck knew. And who cared...unless you worked for the State

Department.

We park our car for three days at the airport and carefully remember that it
is at K-14 when we return, but then we forget that bit of information. If
kids learn things for a specific test, might not the same thing happen? If the
item or skill learned is one that will be practiced over and over again in
future learning, the problem of forgetting may not be so great, but teachers
and curriculum makers would have to engage in some analysis to ensure
that skills learned for an immediate purpose (the test) are actually embedded in
future lessons. This has rarely been done (Noddings, 1992, p. 5).

I was ready for a field trip to Montevideo. That would have been *cool*. But no.

Rote memorization made learning a pain. Argentina: *Buenos Aires*. Chile: *Santiago*.

Peru: *Lima*... Things could have been different. Things should have been different.

Things weren't.

The point is, school should be more academically rigorous. As it is, "knowledge is flat and highly controlled...demanding passivity in its face in order to pass" (Weis, 1990, p. 92). If the school demanded more of its students, then lethargy would not be as prevalent. Ira Shor, in response to Paulo Freire defined it this way:

> Rigor is a desire to know, a search for an answer, a critical method of learning. Maybe rigor is also a communication which challenges the other to take part, or includes the other in an active search. Perhaps this is why so much formal education in classrooms fails to motivate students. The students are not included in the search in the activity of rigor. They are told the answers to memorize. Knowledge is handed to them like a corpse of information--a dead body of knowledge--not a living connection to their reality. Hour after deadly hour and year after dull year, learning is just a chore imposed on students by the droning voice of the official syllabus (Shor, & Freire, 1987, p. 4).

In reflection, I often think that had I been challenged more, I might have exhibited signs of life other than the catastrophic bedevilment I mastered. But school then, as now, had a map to follow. It said that in order to get from kindergarten to senior high you had to go through a prescribed curriculum which included mandatory absorption of the frivolous information presented. The problem was, a lot of this information was so shallow as to be meaningless in the scheme of daily living.

> Most students haven't learned very much because we haven't expected very much. It's high time to push youngsters hard and ask them to master a body of knowledge and skills that they will need if they are going to make it in the new world order (Murphy, 1993, p. 642).

It is time to adopt a curriculum of rigor by demanding higher academic attainment standards from our students.

Grading

Assigning quantitative value to human thought was more or less a new

phenomenon. But what an idea--"constructing a mathematical concept of reality"

(Postman, 1992, p. 13). Forget the fact that schools would become adept at

manufacturing unreality. Students could now be categorized, sorted, stapled, spindled and

assigned a slot, each according to his or her merit within the proper order of society. The

teacher had factored my statistical ranking and it often fell below 70!

A lot of students I knew became exceedingly talented at manipulating the grading

structure. The learning curve dictated what it took to get an *A*. Most students simply did

as much as it took to get by and make the grade. It didn't matter what the subject was--

geography, history, English. Passing was the thing.

> Extrinsic rewards should be minimized whenever possible, and students
> should be given the opportunity to experience roles that will enable them to
> direct the learning process independently of the behavior usually associated
> with an emphasis on grades as rewards...Grades become in many cases the
> ultimate discipline instruments by which the teacher imposes his or her
> desired values, behavior patterns, and beliefs upon the students (Giroux, &
> Penna, 1981, p. 224).

What should be and ought to be and really *is* are two different things. The reality

of my world as a student was one where the implied threat often was between getting a *D*

and failing altogether. And, at that point, it really didn't matter. I was never going to be

an *A* student. So, my solitary effort became one of endurance. I just wanted to get out

the door at the end of the day without being held after school.

> The monotony of the journey...happens when teachers predetermine the
> direction of the body, choreograph its trajectory, [and] keep it on track
> without deviation...Grades are not lived as plateaus; they become the

imprisonment of a letter. This stills the body needlessly. Its life is lost
(Jagodzinski, 1992, p. 161).

Should we do away with grading? If educators eliminate the extrinsic rewards which label

and separate students the fetters of the letter grade would be unshackled and free them

from a tyranny which heretofore has designated them serf or nobleman. While a radical

thought, if individual performance could be recognized without the assignment of a

numeric value, students might rise to a level of attainment heretofore achieved. It

certainly is an idea worth exploring. Unshackling the fetters of the letter grade would free

them from a tyranny which heretofore has designated them serf or nobleman.

Autonomy In The Classroom

Students are motivated out of the learning process when the course fully
pre-exists in the mind of the teacher in the syllabus or reading list or state
requirements. Do you see the corpse here? The learning has already
happened someplace else. The teacher merely implements a curriculum
built elsewhere, merely reports conclusions reached someplace else. The
student is supposed to memorize the report (Shor, & Freire, 1987, p. 7).

If only I could have gotten my hands on the instructors manual with the true/false-

multiple choice test questions, I would have been sitting just dandy. Daydreams of the

underachiever.

True/false and multiple choice tests were my best bet at passing. I may not have

known the material. But I always figured I had a pretty good chance of getting it right

with an *educated guess*! And sometimes I actually did. I'd get a *C*! And the teacher

hadn't thought I'd score so high. Why should she? I hadn't exhibited signs of life before.

They call it *education*. The class, as a whole, passes the test. Some receive *As*, some *Cs* and a few barely cut the mustard. Everyone placed into their individual slot allows the teacher to proceed with the lesson plan because in some form or fashion the students *got it*. But *if* we forgot about grading--eliminated it altogether--what then?

In a move deemed essential, education would see an end to the current K-12 grade levels. Johnny would no longer be labeled a first grader, a fifth grader and so forth. The graduated progression which is the hallmark of the factory-model would be dismantled and sent to the scrap heap. Students would be free, at last, to progress at their own pace.

> Let's be honest, grades and classrooms are the way we keep track of students; they are an administrative convenience embraced for the sake of the grownups in the system. The practice creates a mirage of homogeneity and allows teachers to develop a single lesson plan. But if we value learning above all else, the current structure of grades segregated by age with 25 children per classroom must go. We need a system that can accommodate the fact that individual students learn some subjects quickly and others slowly and that there are some days when information comes more quickly than others. This means that we will have to break the arbitrary age/grade link, let go of the traditional 12 grades of school, and allow students to advance as they master the material, without regard to age (Murphy, 1993, pp. 643-644).

There is nothing wrong with a seven year old and a ten year old teaming up for the acquisition of knowledge. There is nothing wrong with the best and the brightest going beyond high school offerings at an earlier age. Let the school system be the laboratory where knowledge bubbles in the beakers and the student is free to experiment with the mixture. Autonomy allows the student to explore in depth and excel at his or her own rate, held back only by their own desire to know and do more.

> Teachers who value autonomy provide opportunities for children to make their own rules, collaborate with others, choose from a variety of

possibilities, experiment with new ideas of interest, and various other situations which foster autonomy. Students of autonomous teachers are encouraged to pose questions, problem solve and think critically about what truly interests them...The learner should dominate the learning experience because only the learner can construct his or her own knowledge (Ethridge, 1993, p. 1).

Johnny, tell us what you've learned. What have you been studying? *When Mao Tse-Tung's forces marched across the Chinese continent forcing Sun Yat-sen's kuominteng to retreat to the island nation of Taiwan...the historical implications..impacting global economies...the manufacture of cupie-dolls we win at the fair....*

The teacher's role is not abrogated; it is rather restructured and resituated from being external to the student's situation to being one with that situation. The authority, too, moves into the situation. Questions of procedure, methodology, and values are not decided in the abstract, away from the practicalities of life, but are always local decision involving students [and] teachers (Doll, 1993, p. 167).

This whole process, of course, does not mean to do away with the teacher as guide. Instead, it places the teacher and student more on the same level, allowing them to explore the potential together. Students and teachers are free to "negotiate which courses, if any, are to be required" (Arnowitz, 1991, p. 21). The course selection, content and sequencing is determined by mutual consent. And what evolves is a situation where students are no longer shuttled from one class to another but are allowed to "study deeply in one or two areas of knowledge for an entire year" (Arnowitz, 1991, p. 21). Ivan Illich in DeSchooling Society adds this personal insight:

I believe that only actual participation constitutes socially valuable learning, a participation by the learner in every stage of the learning process, including not only a free choice of what is to be learned and how it is to be

learned but also a free determination by each learner of his own reason for living and learning--the part that his knowledge is to play in his life (1974, p. 44).

Students need a curriculum which is tailored to their individual capacities and interests. Certainly, there are skills which should be mastered, such as competancy in reading, writing and basic math. Any number of innovative programs have been instituted to generate student interest in these areas. They are, afterall, vital to students escaping the functionally illiterate label. Classroom autonomy, however, is a different way of going about the learning process. If students have the opportunity to progress at their own speed, select those areas of interest which intrigue and motivate them most and have a hand in a learning process which does not label them by an arcane grading procedure, their natural inquisitiveness just might unleash an untapped reservoir of potential. Educator and author Nel Noddings views it this way:

> I am convinced that no matter how fine the teaching, there will be considerable differences between what is achieved in, say, geometry by students most and least interested in mathematics. I suspect also that there are some, perhaps many, who will never understand the logic of mathematical proof or the power and generality of its greatest products. These students should have educational opportunities that credit and enhance their talents, and they should not be regarded as inferior to the mathematically talented. After all, there are also many people who will never understand the techniques of impressionist painting, the structure of a musical fugue, or the fine points of theology (1992, p. 29).

I was never gifted in the sciences or in math. They were my worst subjects. I had difficulty dealing with abstractions. The concrete, for me, was my security. I found history and literature to be of greater interest and I excelled at each. Privately, of course. But, then, what did the teacher expect? *Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492.*

We must stop fabricating universal solutions for individual problems and
realize that children will learn on their own--if they are allowed to learn,
rather than stifled to the point that their natural curiosity succumbs to the
dull and repetitious educational design they are forced to endure (Horne,
1993, p. 26).

Regardless of the time frame, students need the opportunity to progress at a rate

which, for them, is comfortable. Some students are able to absorb and assimilate massive

amounts of material which allow them to clip right along through the educational process.

Others require more time to deal with the complexities of the subject at hand. But,

unrestrained by group progress and competitive grading, they will be able to find answers

to their own questions at their own speed.

Modified self-pacing allows students to work alone or with other students
at a comfortable pace within reasonable bounds mutually agreed upon by
teachers and students. Under this format, the clock ceases to shape the
pace and character of the class, and the tyranny of a rigid time schedule
gives way to a schedule governed by reciprocal exchanges. Moreover,
since students have a measure of control over their work grades, and time,
this eliminates pitting students against one another and reinforces the
notion that learning is essentially a shared phenomenon (Giroux, & Penna,
1981, p. 226).

If students are no longer bound by the rigidity of grades and grade levels, we see

students progressing at various ages. In such a system, the teacher no longer dominates

the class through lecture, assignment and quiz. Instead, students work together to

facilitate the learning process for, "it is not the [teachers] answer but the childs striving

toward his own answer that is critical (Lowenfeld, & Brittain, 1982, p. 11). "It is through

the child's process of self-discovery, of understanding through doing...that forms the basis

for thought" (Suransky, 1977, p. 268).

In such a system, those who have mastered the material early are empowered to provide instruction for those who desire to know and require such guidance. A form of peer tutoring develops, then, where students work with other students in sharing their knowledge base and exploring new areas of mutual interest.

> At their worst, schools gather classmates into the same room and subject them to the same sequence of treatment in math, citizenship, and spelling. At their best, they permit each student to choose one of a limited number of courses. In any case, groups of peers form around the goals of the teachers. A desirable educational system would let each person specify the activity for which he sought a peer (Illich, 1970, pp. 91-92).

People helping people is what it all boils down to. And, it should start in the school system. If students are instilled with a sense of pride through accomplishment, then it has the potential to become a life-long attribute. As such, perhaps the divisions which now separate so many, would be narrowed, enabling this country to once again discover what caring is all about.

Students And Teacher

In many classrooms across America a single teacher is often responsible for the education of twenty to thirty students. It has long been held, however, that the smaller the student-teacher ratio, the greater opportunity for individual academic growth. But the factory-model which evolved in Consciousness II remain, with a focus on economic expediency which has precluded this from occurring. The result? "Schools...have a difficult time responding quickly and flexibly to problems that are associated with student failure" (Bell, 1993, p. 597).

What happens is obvious. The teacher is unable to devote the time necessary to cultivating each students potential. The student, deeply craving any morsel of personal recognition, has to share the teachers attention with so many others. The result often seems to be superficial. The teacher appears quite cognizant of the students presence but simply is not afforded the opportunity to truly get to know them. Working with smaller groups of students--a dozen or so--would enable the teacher to truly become the mentor an educator can be. But lowering the student-teacher ratio alone may not address all the problems. The instability students experience as they progress through the academic maze, especially as they graduate to the middle school, deserves equal attention.

Upon entering the school system, students usually have one teacher with whom they identify. Their first grade teacher. Their second grade teacher. And so on. However, when they hit junior high, it becomes a different story.

> With this transition, the student relinquishes the former security of membership in one stable classroom and is faced with the task of negotiating six or seven changes of teachers and classes each day with no group support. This raises threats of failure in the face of vastly greater requirements for autonomy (Hamburg, 1982, p. 2).

A possible solution, of course, is keeping students together under the same master teacher for years at a time. This would provide continuity in the learning process, enabling the student to explore those areas of greatest interest and experience the optimum in personal growth.

> Trust suggests that students and teachers should stay together for more than the usual one year. One of the great strengths of many independent schools is exactly this--that teachers do follow their students over a period of years and take considerable responsibility for their full growth. Ideally, the choice to remain together should be mutual, for dislike of a teacher is

unlikely to be transformed into trust by forced association (Noddings, 1993, p. 138).

If we are not comfortable with our doctor, we change physicians. If we are not happy with our lawyer, we find one better suited to our needs. Education should be no different. With a lower student-teacher ratio, most students would have the opportunity to work with a teacher to whom they respond the best (Noddings, 1992, p. 68). This is not an attempt to turn teaching into a popularity contest. It is, instead, an observation of a basic fact of life. Some students simply are *in tune* with certain teachers more than others.

Teacher As Professional

If teaching is treated as a profession which attracts the best and the brightest, those who are now gravitating to higher paying industry jobs might reconsider education as a vocation.

> The working lives of teachers...are drab, difficult, often demeaning. Punch a clock. Sign in and out of the building. Thirty minutes for lunch. Scheduled bathroom breaks. No access to the school building unless the students are there. No private offices. No phones for private calls. No time to confer with colleagues. Bus duty, corridor duty, cafeteria duty, and playground duty. Imagine asking lawyers, doctors, or even college professors to put up with such conditions for one week let alone a life time (Murphy, 1993, p. 645).

Rewriting the job descriptions for teachers could be a starting point! Imagine doing away with all the routine mickey-mouse rigmarole with which teachers now contend. What would happen if they were invested with a sense of professionalism other vocations enjoy? Teaching might just become a more prestigious and rewarding career.

By the year 2000 we should strive to make the American teacher the
highest paid in the world. Here is where we should emulate the Japanese.
We should pay our teachers what they pay theirs. This would mean our
teachers would earn ten percent more than whatever the top-level civil
servant earns in the service of the government. This would purchase and
keep the talent needed to give our students the best schooling in the world
(Berlinger, 1992, p. 58).

A salary scale which awards merit is another consideration. What would happen

all of a sudden if it become worthwhile to rise above and beyond the call of duty?

"Establish meritocratic ranks in the teaching profession to provide incentives" (Shor,

1986, p. 117). The opportunity and incentive to excel can provide most anyone with

increased motivation to realize his or her best potential.

Text Books

Many eachers and administrators are not empowered to select which text books to

adopt. They are the ones best suited to know what ought to work best with those

students under their care. Instructors in higher education have the privilege. Should it not

be extended across all academic lines? Perhaps this would force text book publishers to

be more attentive to the curriculum suggested in this writing. As it is now, many books

...try to cover more topics than they could possibly cover well, and so,
rather than organize information coherently around powerful ideas, they
present a parade of isolated facts in an effort to make children culturally
literate...The texts place no emphasis on constructing knowledge, justifying
answers, encouraging divergent solution strategies, or helping students
understand (Bracey, 1993, pp. 654-655).

It all comes down to changing the way in which our students learn.

Year-Round Learning

A concept which may take some getting used to because it challenges a concept firmly rooted in the history of American education is making school a year-round activity. There is no logical reason why schools should close down and take an extended summer holiday.

I always looked forward to summer vacations. For a country kid, it was a great time. Helping dad with the work on the farm was always a rewarding activity. But for millions of urban kids, there is nothing to look forward to. There are no rushing creeks to go splashing in, no woods to explore, no open pasture to go horse-back riding in. Instead, there's the hot asphalt, few job opportunities and nothing to do except perhaps dodge the bullets of the drive-by shooters. These factors, in and of themselves, however, are not the reason for proposing that school be a year-round process. It has to do with *learning*.

I remember successfully completing one grade and going on to another. It was a great feeling, even if my academic attainment wasn't so hot. The point is, I was given three months to forget the information which was prerequisite to my continuing education. Fourth grade math required that you had a grasp on third grade math. But I didn't always remember the formulas upon returning from a three month vacation. That's it. My brain had been on vacation too. If we were to look at the brain as a muscle, then you know it's going to gain in strength as it's exercised. But, if you stop the process for nearly one quarter of the entire year, then all the work you've put in to its development is going to deflate like a balloon with the air let out. Mine did with the greatest of regularity.

> Year-round schooling provides for shorter holidays, spaced more evenly
> throughout the year. As a result, learning become a seamless process,
> buoyed by the momentum of continuous instruction: the shorter the breaks,
> the more children remember of what they learned before. One caveat is
> necessary: a longer school year that translates into more of the same will be
> a curse, not a blessing. More of something bad doesn't make it good. We
> need to fix what we have first (Murphy, 1993, p. 644).

School At Any Age

Why should youngsters five years of age and under be relegated to nursery schools

that are barely more than baby-sitters? What would be wrong with allowing children to

start school as early as their parents and the school system deem them ready?

> A school program for four-year-olds...would begin the education process
> at a point before they have become "vidiots" by filling their hours with
> experiences more salutary than television viewing (Winn, 1985, p. 19).

Kids today are very much in touch with the world around them at an earlier age. We can

continue to warehouse them in smiley-the-clown day care centers or we can allow them to

enter the school where they might have a chance to be challenged to discover their own

capacity to excel in an environment designed to nurture and bring out their best.

School And Popular Culture

If teachers do not know who their students are, their backgrounds and their

affiliative needs, then the teacher cannot pretend to be in-touch with the educational

process. "Teachers need to have some sense of what it is that children bring with them,

what defines their present understandings, mood, emotional state, and readiness to deal

with the subject matter and the world of the school" (van Manen, 1991, p. 7). Without a

firm grasp of these issues, the battle for the mind of the student is lost before it is even

engaged.

> Speaking a language of possibility entails speaking about the cultural
> experience of students as if their knowledge of rock and television and
> other electronically mediated popular forms was a type of reliable
> knowledge...to claim a rock and television aesthetic commensurate with,
> say, literature and classical music (Arnowitz, 1989, p. 216).

Ignoring popular culture forms within the education process is professionally

irresponsible. Imagine how much the teachers would have been one up on little Johnny

terror had they read Mad and Cracked magazines and watched the *junk* I did. Maybe it's a

good thing they didn't.

> In other words, the job of the teacher is to legitimate mass audience culture
> in order to criticize and transcend it, or to discover whether genuine
> expressive forms are repressed within it. For those teachers who claim
> their personal indifference to these forms and refuse to validate their
> investigation, one can only reply that such a stance may be tantamount to
> abandoning their students (Arnowitz, & Giroux, 1985, p. 52).

It is important that teachers familiarize themselves with their students mind habitat

outside the classroom. This is not a suggestion that the teacher watch Beavis and Butt-

head week after week. But *not* to watch one or more episodes of a program which

provides such degenerative role models for his or her students is morally reprehensible.

In this vein, then, perhaps television should be treated as an object of inquiry. The

study of television and other popular culture mediums might allow the teacher to enter

into a meaningful dialogue with his or her students and cut through the perceived garbage

which seems to dominate so many of their minds.

> Popular culture [needs to] be seen as a legitimate aspect of the everyday
> life of students, and be analyzed as a primary force in shaping the various
> and often contradictory subject positions that students take up...popular
> culture needs to become a serious object of study in the official curriculum
> (Arnowitz, & Giroux, 1991, p. 120).

Teachers, while being responsive to the popular culture their students adopt,

however, should not ignore those areas which some students find less appealing.

Educator and author Neil Postman puts it into perspective:

> I'm also suggesting that no school should ever sponsor a rock concert, if
> the children have not yet heard the music of Mozart, Bach or Beethoven.
> Rock music is abundantly available, whereas the other is not. The school
> constantly has to provide the children with what the rest of the culture is
> not providing them (Robinson, 1985, p. 339).

Students who are allowed the autonomy to pursue their own avenues of inquiry,

can only do so if they are cognizant of all the educational options. The student, provided

insight into the history and essence of subjects such as music, literature and science, might

discover a greater desire to pursue further investigation into subjects of interest. In this

way, they just may develop into renaissance scholars capable of dealing with the

complexities which the electronic super-highway will bring.

> This approach is consistent with the dominant doctrine, rarely practiced in
> schools, of pluralism. It would not deny the validity of literature or film, or
> what is called classical music, but would demand that the repertoire of
> acceptable cultural objects be expanded. Further, this approach might
> claim that beginning from student experience, validating what students
> already know is just good pedagogy that can influence the process of
> language acquisition, written expression--in short, the learning that is
> currently grouped under the rubric of literacy (Arnowitz, & Giroux, 1991,
> p. 182).

TV: The Good, The Bad And Ugly

Finally, it should be pointed out that not all cultural fare is bad. Not all educational

attempts are failures. And not all television offerings have a negative impact, even if

viewed in significant portions. I always looked forward to *Captain Kangaroo* and his

side-kick Mr. Greenjeans. More recently, popular programs like *Sesame Street* and *Mister*

Roger's Neighborhood have provided countless hours of substantive educational fare for a

new generation.

Students are going to watch television, especially with the advent of

Consciousness VI. Period. And what they watch will continue to influence their lives. It

is the teachers responsibility to channel that propensity toward meaningful viewing,

keeping in mind that quite a few students embrace the likes of Beavis and Butt-head.

To their credit, a number of television producers now seem to be on the right

track. If you have an MTV generation, then you may as well cater to their whacked-out

tastes. One example is *Beakman's World*, an educationally focused science show which

employs surrealistic graphics, thousands of sound effects and wild and zany stunts in each

episode.

> Beakman, assisted by an incorrigible lab rat named Lester, performs homey
> experiments to illustrate such phenomena as air pressure, electricity and
> gravity. The show also knows what most fascinates moppets is their own
> bodies. So a demonstration of what induces vomiting (using a blender, a
> plastic bag and tubing) became an illuminating study of the digestive
> system. Beakman's most heroic such effort found him creeping up a
> mammoth nasal passage awash in imitation mucus--just to answer the
> question "What is snot?" (Waters, 1993, p. 62).

If children delight in being *grossed out* with things most adults find repulsive, then Beakman seems to have their attention. And that is exactly why many teachers need to be *cool* by encouraging students to watch it and other programs of its ilk. A key factor, however, always must be content accuracy. Since children appear to have a built-in tendency to believe much of what they see, it is the teachers job to separate out the fiction whenever possible.

As for those who continue to be concerned about the negative impact of too much television viewing, a comment made by UCLA professor Gordon Berry provides a sound solution:

> Frequently I am asked by parents, "I have a 6-year-old son or daughter and all he or she does is watch television all the time. What should I do?" I don't want to sound too smug, but my reply is always--why don't you turn it off? (Hastings, 1990, p. 35).

Back To The First Basic

I liked watching television. I did it all the time. Not just a little. A lot. Great big huge chunks. Whole mornings. Entire afternoons. Evenings. I absorbed all that it had to offer. It is, however, to my mothers credit she used to read to me when I was little. There was Mother Goose, Aesop, Hans Christian Anderson and more. To this day, I remember some of them well...like Toot, the little train whose tenacious positive perspective ultimately brought him success. Perhaps I identify with him the most at this point in life. It was something my parents made certain they instilled in me, regardless of my on-going academic performance: *believe in yourself.*

One of Mom and Dads best purchases for me as a kid were the set of encyclopedias. They opened the world to me. And time after time, I would drag one or more of them to school for some sort of show and tell. Reading. How I loved it. It was something I took to readily. Greedily. I would devour massive quantities of books brought excitedly home from the public library, a place my parents gladly allowed me to explore. Ah-h-h, the musty smell of old books!

Many kids today don't share my fascination with the printed word. "Children between the ages of two and five spend very little time staring at words and sentences in a book, but over the last few years, they have spent an average of 25 hours a week watching television" (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 241). The only thing many children do more than watch TV is sleep (Liebert, & Sprafkin, 1988, p. 17). Should this trend change if the school is to be the cutting edge for tomorrows Consciousness VI leaders?

> If the school is to survive, it must maintain a "knowledge edge." The school must continue to give students the feeling that because of the school they are *in the know*. The school must adapt to the new information environment. And it must do so by doing more than merely grudgingly accepting what children learn outside of school. The school must teach them more than they can learn elsewhere...Reading remains the schools trump card. After all, even if reading is no longer the only means of gaining access to indirect experience, literacy is still the gateway to the worlds of philosophy, science, and poetry--and reading and writing offer a unique way of thinking and knowing (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 257).

The studies are in. "Students who reported more frequent reading outside of school had higher average proficiency...Students who reported watching more television had lower average reading achievement" (Foertsch, 1992, pp. 5-6). It should be noted, though, that the reading of dry and uninspiring material is not the focus here. Therefore,

teachers who feel they are achieving in-roads through heavy reliance on workbooks and

textbooks may be missing the point. A National Assessment of Educational Progress

report concludes the following:

> In contrast to the heavy reliance on workbooks and textbooks consistently
> reported in NAEP assessment, research about effective reading
> achievement suggests that discussion, writing, and projects about reading
> would be more effective in helping students understand what they read.
> There is also evidence that reading more often and reading a greater variety
> of texts helps students increase their understanding of what they read (Foertsch,
> 1992, p. 18).

These steps seem essential for the educator to take because "those children who have

difficulty with reading are even more likely to combat boredom by turning to television"

(Winn, 1977, p. 66). There has to be more in it for the student. And, it just may be to the

school to see to it that students are equipped to live up to the task.

> "They don't read any good books any more because they spend all their
> time watching TV" is the standard view. In truth, it's just the other way
> around. The kids haven't been taught to read fluently and so they use their
> leisure hours watching TV. Reading for them is a painful chore. How can
> anyone expect them to turn to leisure reading voluntarily? They're
> astronomically far away from the stage of reading a book because it's
> enjoyable (Flesch, 1981, p. 161).

There is little doubt that reading continues to offer windows to the world not

afforded the student by television. Reading "develops the ability to think and to imagine,

and that leads to the accumulation of that large stock-pot of shared ideas and illuminations

upon which the quality of a nation's future political and cultural life depends" (Winn, 1985,

p. 18).

> If you think of what you view as a literate person...it's someone who is well
> read, and that means reading challenging materials, materials that expand
> your horizons, it means reaching the top of your potential, not the bottom

of your potential which often the term "literacy" implies. We need to change our definitions and we need to raise our expectations for those students which we don't serve very well right now (Farstrup, 1992).

Being taught how to read well serves to liberate the student from the cloud of

nonachievement which can haunt them the rest of their lives.

It has been pointed out that texts alone will not inspire the student to read. Even

leisure reading becomes a difficult proposition when so many can just rent the video

instead of reading the book. The challenge, then, becomes one of how to tap into the

students popular culture.

> This schooling world where we read words that relate less and less to our concrete experiences outside has become more and more specialized in the bad sense of this word. In reading words, school becomes a special place that teaches us to read only school-words, not reality-words. The other world, the world of facts, the world of life, the world in which events are very alive, the world of struggles, the world of discrimination and economic crisis (all these things are there!) do not make contact with students in school through the words that school asks students to read. You can think of this dichotomy as one kind of 'culture of silence' imposed on students. School reading is silent about the world of experience and the world of experience is silenced without its own critical texts (Shor, & Freire, 1987, p. 135).

Paying For It All

Whether new buildings, new texts, or new computers, it all takes money. Any

discussion of a new way of doing business would be remiss without taking into

consideration one very important factor: funding.

> Back in the 1640s, when the current method of financing public schools was developed, if a man had money, he put it into his land. There were not IRAs or Social Security. With property the best gauge of wealth, it made sense to pay for public schooling out of property taxes. Nor did anyone wonder about the wisdom of yoking schools to local real estate values; if

nothing else, taxpayers knew exactly how their money was being spent (van Biema, 1994, p. 31).

What has happened is well known to educators everywhere. The richest school districts in the most affluent areas are able to provide their students with the best in educational software, hardware and programs. Those in ghetto districts are much worse off. In these schools, the paint is peeling, the buildings physical plant is lucky if the heat works and teachers scramble to find supplemental materials. The problem, however, goes even deeper.

> This shrinking tax base has contributed to massive teacher layoffs, the closing of schools, the growing shortage of curriculum materials, and the elimination of many school programs (Arnowitz, & Giroux, 1985, p. 201).

New ways must be found to fund Americas schools so that the quality of education a student receives in the poorest of districts is essentially equal in quality to that in the richest. Fundamental fairness in this sense is more than just important--it is critical to this nation and its future.

Students are not dumb. They are aware of the inequalities which surround them in school as well as in life. They also know that they are powerless to effect change. And many are perplexed as to how the richest nation on earth can relegate them to a third-world status.

> Most adolescents in the poorest neighborhoods learn very soon that they are getting less than children in the wealthier school districts. They see suburban schools on television and they see them when they travel for athletic competitions. About injustice, most poor children in America cannot be fooled...Children, of course, don't understand at first that they are being cheated. They come to school with a degree of faith and optimism, and they often seem to thrive during the first few years. It is sometimes not until the third grade that their teachers start to see the

warning signs of failure. By the fourth grade many children see it too...By
fifth or sixth grade, many children demonstrate their loss of faith by staying
out of school (Kozol, 1992, p. 57).

The current structure of funding for American education appears to breed not only

inequality but failure as well. Yet, it is out of the hands of educators who can do little

with what is not there to begin with. Change, however, can occur. It might require

getting legislators to wake up and see what is happening around them. If lawmakers take

the first bold step, they might just discover new and innovative ways of funding public

education. Whether this is through federal aid, local sales taxes, business involvement, a

combination or any number of other innovative programs, the message is clear.

Something needs to be done.

The Urban Blight

I was one of the fortunate ones. There were seven kids in my class through my

sophomore year. Consolidation with a one room school house saw the number increase to

fourteen my junior year. And my senior year, with yet another consolidation, there were

fifty-two kids in my graduating class. My senior year was less than enjoyable. I was lost

amid the numbers--just another kid left to wander aimlessly down a hallway populated by

other kids who I wasn't even certain were in the same grade.

The majority of America's school age children are found in urban centers. The

numbers of students in any given grade in any given school often numbers in the hundreds

and even the thousands. In such a system, it is difficult for the student to find any sort of

identity or self worth.

"Frequently, says a teacher at another crowded high school in New York, "
a student may be in the wrong class for a term and never know it." With
only one counselor to 700 students system-wide in New York City, there is
little help available to those who feel confused. It is not surprising, says the
teacher, "that many find the experience so cold, impersonal and
disheartening that they decide to stay home by the sad warmth of the TV
set" (Kozol, 1992, p. 112).

There is only one solution to the dilemma. While schools in these urban centers evolved

due to the geographic and economic expediency of Consciousness II's factory-model,

whittling them down into manageable learning environments might provide a start. The

implementation of this concept might enable schools to adequately prepare students to

meet the upcoming demands of Consciousness VI.

Enormous school systems struggle with the sheer weight of numbers in
their attempts to foster parent and community ownership of their schools.
We must break the huge inner-city school systems into smaller units, and
the massive secondary schools must be downsized...It is futile for us to
continue to complain about the ineffectiveness of our huge inner-city
schools while we fail to counter the problems caused simply by vast size
(Bell, 1993, p. 597).

The problems are enormous. And frightening. While my teachers had to contend

with paper airplanes, gum chewing, and talking out of turn in class, many of todays

teachers have to contend with drug-infested schools, students with guns and knives and

living in fear if they offend the wrong kid. A Time magazine report presents a stark

picture of the plague which infects many inner-city schools:

During a single week last month in the District of Columbia public schools,
two high school students were shot and seriously wounded, another
student was stabbed by a sixth grade girl, an assistant principal was
punched in the face, and a policeman was assaulted by students. Mayor
Sharon Pratt Kelly responded to the mayhem as big-city mayors often do:
she announced plans to post 60 more cops on campus (Ostling, 1994,
p. 60).

The horror is that this trend is not new. Jonathan Kozol in his book <u>Savage</u> <u>Inequalities</u> provided even earlier insight: "Two years ago...New York City's Office of School Safety started buying handcuffs. Some 2,300 pairs were purchased for a system that contains almost 1,000 schools--an average of two pairs of handcuffs for each school" (1992, p. 118). Police officers and handcuffs?! These cannot be systems in which learning is fully the focus. Instead, they appear to represent an environment where control and institutionalization reigns. In such schools, the business of education seems eclipsed by the simple act of surviving.

It appears more, however, than just a problem of the schools. Kozol brought it it to light with this observation of his journey to the inner-city:

> It was, simply the impression that these urban schools were, by and large, extraordinarily unhappy places. With few exceptions, they reminded me of "garrisons" or "outposts" in a foreign nation. Housing projects bleak and tall, surrounded by perimeter walls lined with barbed wire, often stood adjacent to the schools I visited. The schools were surrounded frequently by signs that indicated DRUG-FREE ZONE. Their doors were guarded. Police sometimes patrolled the halls. The windows of the schools were often covered with steel grates. Taxi drivers flatly refused to take me to some of these schools and would deposit me a dozen blocks away, in border areas beyond which they refused to go. (1992, pp. 4-5).

How can schools effectively educate its students when many must operate much like a prison? How can students effectively learn when they are forced to attempt to learn in such an environment? The problem appears to be a social one of considerable magnitude.

Social Ills

Many of todays students must also confront other obstacles to learning:

> ...increased poverty and homelessness, the collapse of the inner cities and the creation of drug-ridden urban killing zones, the continued racism and sexism...the spread of unemployment and economic and social despair (Clinch, 1993, p. 611).

This presents a most perplexing dilemma. How can we hope to educate children when they are surrounded by such decay? Look at the facts:

> In 1993 more than 23% of America's children were living below the poverty line and thus were at risk of failing to fulfill their physical and mental promise. This is one of the highest youth poverty rates in the "developed" world and has shown little inclination to decline (Hodgkinson, 1993, p. 620).

> At least three million U.S. households occupy structures that are considered deficient under federal guidelines. Such housing may, for example, lack ample heat and hot water or pose lead and electrical hazards. Children in these households experience severely crowded conditions; they also grow up in neighborhoods in which their sleep may be disrupted by neighbors quarrels, their safety may be threatened by gangs and drug dealers, and their peace of mind may be disturbed by gunfire. Children frequently exposed to violence are preoccupied during the day and have difficulty sleeping at night (Crosby, 1993, p. 604).

Changing the nature of education while such factors impact the students life seems a difficult proposition. After all, "it is hard to know if a decision to drop out of school, no matter how much we discourage it, is not, in fact, a logical decision" (Kozol, 1992, p. 59).

Many students simply seem to no longer know how to care. And, many schools weighted down by the problems created by sheer numbers, appears to have forgotten how to care. And, society, decaying from the inside out, looks also to have forgotten how to care. If there is no *care*--then, what is left?

Concern, Compassion And Care

> What is happening in our society? It is as if we are allowing a school bus
> full of screaming children to slide out of control down an icy hill...these
> children are a sign alerting us that the slide will be fatal to the economic,
> cultural, scientific, and educational progress of the nation...In the land of
> the free and the home of the brave, it is astounding that we do not have
> courage enough to do what we need to do. Ten years after <u>A Nation At
> Risk</u>, we still lack the will and the commitment to reduce the risks that
> imperil our children (Corsby, 1993, p. 604).

As a teacher, what can one do when confronted by children who come to school dirty because they live where there is no hot water, who wear the same few clothes over and over because they have no others, who come to school sick and physically ravaged because there is no money for adequate medical care? Kozol provides a description of but one such observation:

> I have seen children in New York with teeth that look like brownish,
> broken sticks. I have also seen teen-agers who were missing half their
> teeth. But to me, most shocking is to see a child with an abscess that has
> been inflamed for weeks and that he has simply lived with and accepts as
> part of the routine of life. Many teachers in the urban schools have seen
> this. It is almost common place (1992, p. 21).

It is easy to have concern for such children. We give them a smidgen of extra attention if we can in the hope that somehow it might help relieve the burden of the stark reality of living. But after the last bell rings, we send them on their way. They return to that *other world*, a world where hiding under the covers will not keep the monster from devouring what little of their souls they have left.

And so we return to Happy Harry Hard-On who, in conversation with a listener to his pirate radio broadcast has the following exchange:

> Listener: *What are we going to do about all of this?* Harry: *I don't know.*
> *That's the big question isn't it, huh?* Listener: *I guess nobody knows, huh?*
> *Life is tough* (Risher, Stiliadis, & Cappe, 1990).

Life is tough. That about sums it up. The American crisis "seems clearly related to an

inability to act" (Reich, 1970, p. 9). But educators surely cannot continue to ignore *life*.

Something has to be done to correct the social injustices which impact so many of our

students ability to learn. It would be ludicrous to suggest that the school can do it alone.

Many of the problems are so severe as to be almost unmanageable. But, schools possibly

should take an active role in helping to correct the social ills which plague society. It may

require a team approach, schools and government, schools and industry, working in

tandem. But there is no excuse for children in the richest nation on earth to come to

school hungry, with few changes of clothes, with teeth which are rotting. Schools have

the ability to become the lightening rod that strikes at the problem. If f they do not, then

who is there?

> School administrators or teachers who try to avoid problems and
> difficulties at all cost are pedagogically unrealistic. To live as a young
> person is to live with difficulty. To be alive is to be in difficulty (van
> Manen, 1991, p. 58).

It is all a matter of definition. What is the problem? How can it be overcome? It

is up to educators to lead the way through a curriculum of compassion.

> Compassion is something we do...It is strong, in the sense that it will take
> responsibility for the world and for the children and act to alleviate
> problems that burrow down to the heart of human existence...[Schools]
> should be places where we will care for our children instead of molding our
> children...This compassionate responsibility leaves us no choice but to
> create an atmosphere of care and concern...[for] real human beings who
> have thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Not names and numbers on seating

charts, test scores and behavior modification plans--people who hurt, who
care, who are connected to all of us (Reynolds, 1993, pp. 8-12).

Compassion requires action. Compassion necessitates that the school get involved in

alleviating the hunger of their children, providing clothing, medical care and, ultimately,

contributing to the creation of a home environment where escaping to the fantasy world of

television or hiding in the dark is no longer the only path of survival.

> We must understand that the school, like the family, is a multi-purpose
> institution. It cannot concentrate only on academic goals any more than a
> family can restrict its responsibilities to, say, feeding and housing its
> children. The single-purpose view is not only morally mistaken, it is
> practically and technically wrong as well, because schools cannot
> accomplish their academic goals without attending to the fundamental
> needs of students for continuity and care (Noddings, 1992, pp. 63-64).

It is not the intent of this writing to outline solutions. They are as varied and as

complex as the underlying social problems themselves. Each community is beset by a

different combination of concerns. And no one solution can pretend to provide an answer.

But, as educators, with a responsibility for the care and nurturing of young people, the

imperative is clear. Action needs to be taken in those areas over which something can be

done if compassion is to be the focal point of the school.

> Educators must now speak up. It is time for us to inform the politicians
> and business leaders of America that we cannot solve all the problems that
> they are creating. We will no longer take the blame for their actions. All
> of us in this nation must find ways to help each family live with dignity, so
> those families can give their children hope. Education is irrelevant to those
> without hope, and succeeds, remarkably well for those who have it
> (Berlinger, 1992, p. 12).

Such care can instill hope in students where hope has been nonexistent. Students need to feel cared about. They need to sense that while their intellectual development is important, it is not the first priority of the school (Noddings, 1992, p. 10).

> What hope gives us is the simple avowal: "I will not give up on you. I know that you can make a life for yourself." Thus hope refers to that which gives us patience and tolerance, belief and trust in the possibilities of our children. Children who experience our trust are thereby encouraged to have trust in themselves. Trust enables (van Manen, 1991, p. 68).

This, then, appears to be the goal of the educator. If a student at least feels as though there is a way out of the dark vault which holds him or her captive, then the potential for salvaging a life doomed to mediocrity exists. Hope conquers despair by giving a purpose to life. Hope deals a blow to the loneliness which otherwise inhabits the self, for "when there is no purpose or meaning to life, ones existence becomes directionless, empty, lifeless" (Jagodzinski, 1992, p. 162). One has to have hope. "Without hope, the capacity to imagine social alternatives is a head-game, lacking force and true self-engagement" (Wexler, 1988, p. 219). Students would be left to the harsh reality of their world and the escapism provided through a shallow popular culture propagated by the media. Inevitably, their illusionary hope would be no more than that provided by television which many watch with a sort of "immobile, pornographic vicariousness" (Jardine, 1992, p. 123).

Life is not so "clear and neatly packaged" (Schrank, 1977, p. 25) as students view it hour after hour. And yet it appears to present them with their only hope of achieving the *good life* they see, while the school seemingly does not. If schools could supplant the students popular culture with a genuine sense that all is not lost, the realization that there is hope after all might prevail. And teachers might just find within themselves a

connection between their students and their world and provide for them a glimpse of all

that can be. In the end, all teachers could possibly achieve:

> ...a sense of vocation, love of and caring for children, a deep sense of
> responsibility, moral intuitiveness, self-critical openness, thoughtful
> maturity, tactful sensitivity toward the child's subjectivity, an interpretive
> intelligence, a pedagogical understanding of the child's needs, improvisation
> resoluteness in dealing with young people, a passion for knowing and
> learning the mysteries of the world, the moral fibre to stand up for
> something, a certain understanding of the world, active hope in the face of
> prevailing crisis, and, not the least, humor and vitality (van Manen, 1991,
> p. 8).

Ultimately, the teacher can provide the student with concern, compassion and care.

Only then, can hope have the potential to be something which becomes less an idealized

concept and more the reality of everyday living.

Morality

> Modern secular education is failing not because it doesn't teach who Ginger
> Rogers, Norman Mailer, and a thousand other people are but because it has
> no moral, social, or intellectual center (Postman, 1992, p. 186).

When I was in grade school things were different. For one thing, the notion that

we were *one nation under God* served as a fairly secure foundation for the schools

mission. Somewhere along the line, however, things got muddled. The separation of

church and state made many educators hesitant to mention G-o-d in any context for fear

of being perceived as attempting to indoctrinate the young. And that simply could not be

allowed. As a result, God was put in the attic where He collected dust along with Fanny

Hill.

It seemed to me that when God was around, there was a greater distinction between right and wrong. Morality was something you learned early in life and the school served to reinforce it. A little boy just could not go around the play ground lifting up the skirts of little girls and getting in fights with other boys. Why? Because *God was watching*, not to mention teacher. Yet, in schools across the country today many students just don't give a damn. The words *morality, respect* and *common decency* mean little.

Perhaps, then, it is time to invite God back down from the attic. This is not a proposal to reintroduce prayer or meditation to the school. Instead, it is a suggestion that the discussion of moral, ethical and spiritual issues in the classroom have merit which deserve consideration because of the standards they represent.

> As human beings, we care what happens to us. We wonder whether there
> is life after death, whether there is a deity who cares about us, whether we
> are loved by those we love, whether we belong anywhere; we wonder what
> we will become who we are, how much control we have over our own fate.
> For adolescents these are among the most pressing questions: Who am I?
> What kind of person will I be? Who will love me? How do others see me?
> Yet schools spend more time on the quadratic formula than on any of
> these existential questions (Noddings, 1992, p. 20).

If schools were to teach these themes, which are the essence of nearly all world religions, then perhaps students would discover not only what is good in man and the society in which they live but, more importantly, in themselves. Perhaps they would discover that a credo of "what's in it for me" (Winn, 1985, p. 14) is less a vital concern than how their actions impact the lives of others. "Education for intelligent belief or unbelief [then] is as much education of the heart as it is education of the mind" (Noddings, 1992, p. xiv). We should therefore, as educators, embrace a curriculum of the heart. For only through such

concern, compassion and care, can we truly realize the individual potential within each student as a unique being.

Summary

While I have covered a number of significant areas in this writing, I did not attempt to deal with all the issues. Many more require exploring. Those which are presented, however, do provide a broad outline of what could be and, in my opinion, should be if we are to prepare students to meet the demands placed on them by an increasingly technological Consciousness VI world.

There is no longer any doubt that functional illiteracy poses a serious problem for many in todays society. Surely we cannot allow the numbers to continue their upward spiral. An inability to function in this society relegates many to menial jobs. Upward mobility for them is not a realistic expectation. Yet, they see a good life on TV to which they aspire. And their inability only breeds contempt. Contempt breeds violence. And violence tears at the soul of the nation.

Too few students seem challenged in todays schools. Their potential is limitless. Yet, many teachers come to accept a certain level of mediocrity as the highest standard of attainment, thus, keeping the whole class in line as the progression of knowledge continues. Adopting a curriculum of rigor might avoid the complacency and boredom which afflicts so many students.

Students can be labeled successes or failures by virtue of the grades they receive. Yet, not all students have an aptitude for all subjects. Education is not served well by

delineating who students are by quantitative values which do not always reflect the true scope and depth of a students ability. Eliminating grading would eliminate grade levels. Many students have the ability to progress at a faster pace than others. By unshackling the structure which hobbles them, students would be free to progress at a rate of learning which meets their individual needs.

Autonomy in the classroom enables the teacher and student to work together to structure a learning environment best suited to each students interests and abilities. The student is free to pursue areas of inquiry which interest them for whatever length of time they wish to explore the subject. The teacher, thus, becomes more of a mentor than a dictator of knowledge absorption.

The student-teacher ratio needs to be brought down to a manageable level. Twenty to thirty students in a classroom are too great for the teaching-learning process to achieve its maximum effectiveness. Students would receive more attention of significantly greater quality. Education might actually have a chance to occur.

If teachers receive greater reward for their chosen vocation along with greater autonomy and incentives for continued professional growth and attainment, the best and the brightest might find the profession worth consideration.

Teachers, empowered with the ability to select which texts would have the wherewithal to select those texts which could best serve to meet their students needs. Teachers with the freedom to change ineffective texts with each academic year, might force text book publishers to distribute more substantive texts than many of those currently in use.

Year-round schooling could possibly provide continuity of learning and, in so doing, enhance the students retention level. Peripherally, it would relieve a burden placed on many who have to contend with unsupervised children at home during extended summer vacation.

If a student is ready at the age of three or four, it just makes sense to allow them to enter school. Real education could become the teacher of children rather than television which now seems to dominate the majority of the students learning activity.

Teachers who are cognizant of the popular culture which influences their students lives seem to be able to speak the language and understand the meaning it provides students.

There appears to be ample evidence to suggest that learning to read well should be a priority in schools. This does not underscore the importance of being able to express oneself through writing or learning how to balance a check book and other math applications. Simply, it means that a well read person is a literate person.

Funding is a major concern. As it is currently structured, it appears to foster inequality. Students in all geographic regions, of all socio-economic levels, deserve to have the same educational opportunities. Funds generated from other sources could serve as a first step in insuring this reality.

Many of Americas inner-cities appear to be in decay. Students must contend with schools that are little more than garrisons in crime ridden, drug infested, run down neighborhoods. Surely children cannot possibly realize their full potential in such an environment. Change is imperative.

By getting involved in the lives of their students outside the classroom, the school could serve as a socializing as well as an educating agent. No student should have to come to school hungry, sick, or dressed in inadequate apparel. It seems possible that the school can alter the course of such human existence by being in the business of transmitting information while transforming the individual.

Concern, compassion and care need to be the first priority of the school. Only through a sense of being cared about can the student hope to realize his or her potential. Teachers in their concern must exercise compassion. Compassion is action in practice. Care and hope are the result.

Finally, if the student learns about the moral self, a spiritual self in whatever realm that might dwell, it would go a long way toward eliminating the mpoverishment of the spirit so many youth seem now to have. As such, it could help answer the students question of *who am I* and *how do I fit in to the scheme of life*. The result just might be a greater curriculum of the heart.

Here, then is a starting point. These concepts could serve as the basis for a new way of doing business. Schools can be the pathway to a better tomorrow. We just need to point the way and let students follow the yellow-brick road of discovery. The urgency, however, is in the here and now and not *somewhere over the rainbow*.

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VITA 2

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