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How public education cripples our children, and why I taught for 30 years in the most manhattan and best schools, and during that time I became an expert on boredom. Boredom was everywhere in my world, and if you asked children, as I often did, why they felt so bored, they always gave the same answers: They said the job was stupid, that it didn't make any sense, that they already knew it. They said they wanted to do something real, not just sit down. They said teachers don't seem to know much about their subjects and clearly weren't interested in learning more. And the children were right: their teachers were just as bored as they were. Boredom is a common condition for teachers, and anyone who has spent time in the teachers' lounge can guarantee the low energy there, the whining, the despised attitudes. When teachers are asked why they are bored, they tend to blame children, as you might expect. Who wouldn't get tired of teaching students who are rude and only interested in grades? If that's all. Teachers themselves, of course, are products of the same 12-year compulsory school programmes that bored their pupils so thoroughly, and as school staff they are trapped in structures that are even stiffer than those imposed on children. Then who's guilty? We all are. My grandfather taught me that. One afternoon, when I was seven, I complained to him about boredom, and he hit me the head. He said I must never use that term again in his presence, that if I got bored, it was mine and no one else's. The duty to amuse and instruct myself was entirely mine, and people who did not know that they were childish people should be avoided if possible. I'm really not trustworthy. That episode healed me from boredom forever, and here and there over the years I was able to pass on a lesson to some prominent students. For the most part, however, I found it pointless to question the official notion that boredom and childishness were a natural state of thought in the classroom. Often I had to defy manners and even bend the law to help children break out of this trap. The Empire struck back, of course; childish adults are regularly disloyal. I once returned from sick leave to find that all the evidence that I had been granted leave had been deliberately destroyed, that my work had been terminated and that I no longer even had a teaching licence. After nine months of tormented trouble, I was able to get a driver's license when the school secretary testified that he was witnessing the plot unfolding. Meanwhile, my family suffered more than I want to remember. When I finally retired in 1991, I had more than enough reason to think about our schools - their long-term, forced reinserment of both pupils and teachers - as virtual factories. virtual factories. But I really didn't see why they had to be so. My own experience had revealed to me what many other teachers have to learn along the way, but to keep to themselves for fear of reprisals: if we wanted to, we could easily and cheaply abandon old, stupid structures and help children take an education instead of just getting a school. We could encourage the best qualities of youth - curiosity, adventure, resilience, the ability to surprising insight - simply by being more flexible in terms of time, texts and tests, introducing children to truly qualified adults and giving every student what autonomy he needs to take a risk then. But we don't. And the more I asked why not, and I was actually thinking about the problem of engineering school, the more I missed it: What if there's no problem in our schools? What if they are the way they are, so expensively flying common sense and long experience of how children learn things, not because they do something wrong, but because they do something right? Is it possible that George W. Bush was accidentally telling the truth when he said we weren't leaving any children behind? Could it be that our school is designed so that none of them ever grow up? Do we really need school? I am not talking about education, just forced training: six classes a day, five days a week, nine months a year, 12 years. Is this deadly routine really necessary? And if so, why? Don't hide behind reading, writing and arithmetic as justification, because 2 million happy home schools have certainly put that banal legitimacy to an end. Even if they weren't, many well-known Americans never experienced the 12 years of torque that our children were going through at the moment, and they turned out well. George Washington. Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Jefferson. Abraham Lincoln? I'm sure someone taught them, but they weren't products of the school system, and none of them ever graduated in middle school. For most of American history, children did not usually go to high school, but the uneducated rose to become admirals, like Farragut; inventors such as Edison; industry captains such as Carnegie and Rockefeller; writers such as Melville, Twain and Conrad; And even scientists like Margaret Mead. In fact, until quite recently, people who reached 13 years were not considered children at all. Ariel Durant, who co-wrote with her husband Will a huge and very good multicultural history of the world, was happily married at 15, and who could reasonably claim that Ariel Durant was an uneducated person? Maybe uneducated, but not uneducated. We have been taught (i.e. trained) in this country to think of success as synonym or dependent on going to school, but that is not true in an intellectual or economic sense. And many people around the world today find a way to educate themselves without resorting to compulsory secondary schools that all too often resemble prisons. Why, then, are americans confusing education with just such a system? What exactly is the purpose of our public schools? The compulsory mass school really got its teeth in the United States between 1905 and 1915, although it was planned much earlier and promoted for most of the 19th century. Roughly three-pronance was the cause of the huge upheaval in family life and cultural traditions: 1) Getting good people. 2) Having good citizens. 3) Make each person for their own good. These objectives are still regularly achieved and are accepted in one form or another by most of us as a proper definition of the role of public education, even though short schools do indeed fall to achieving them. But we're totally wrong. Our mistake is compounded by the fact that there are numerous and surprisingly consistent statements in national literature about the true purpose of compulsory education. For example, we have the great H. L. Mencken, who wrote in The American Mercury in April 1924 that the goal of public education is not to fill the young people of the species with knowledge and awaken their intelligence... Nothing could be further from the truth. Aim... is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to raise and educate a standardised citizen, to end dissent and originality. This is its goal in the United States . . . and that's its goal everywhere else. Because of mencken's reputation for satire, we might feel tempted to ignore this passage as a bit of hyperbolic sarcasm. However, his article continues to trace the model of our own education system to the now lost, though never forgettable, Pruss military state. And while he was certainly aware of the irony that we had recently been at war with Germany, the heir to Prussian thought and culture, Mencken was absolutely serious here. Our education system is indeed Prussian, and that is really worrying. The strange fact of Prussian origin for our schools appears again and again when you know to look for it. William James referred to it many times at the turn of the century. Orestes Brownson, hero of Christopher Lasch's 1991 book The True and Only Heaven, publicly denounced the pruss of American schools in the 1840s. The fact that Prussian culture was great in America is not surprising given the early utopian state. Prussian was a Washington aide during the Revolutionary War, and so many German-speaking people had settled here by 1795 that Congress was considering publishing a German edition of federal laws. Our shock, however, is that we should have so enthusiastically embraced one of the worst aspects of Prussian culture: an education system deliberately designed to produce mediocre intelligence, hinder inner life, deny students seeming leadership skills, and ensure aundars and imperfect citizens - all to make the people manageable. James Bryant Conant - President of Harvard for 20 years, Poison Gas Expert of World War II, Director of World War II in the Atomic Bomb Project, U.S. Zone High Commissioner in Germany after World War II, and truly one of the most influential figures of the 20th century - first got wind of the true purposes of the American school. Without Conant, we probably wouldn't have the same style and standardized testing rate as we do today, and we wouldn't be blessed with giant high schools that store 2,000 to 4,000 students at a time, like the famous Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Shortly after I retired from teaching, I picked up Conant's 1959 book-length essay The Child the Parent and the State and was more than a little interested in seeing him mention in passing that the modern schools we attend were the result of a revolution planned between 1905 and 1930. Revolution? He refuses to elaborate, but he guides the curious and ignorant to Alexander Inglis's 1918 book The Principles of Secondary Education, which saw this revolution through the eyes of a revolutionary, Inglis, to whom a Harvard teaching lesson has been named, makes it abundantly clear that compulsory education on this continent was meant to be exactly what it had been for Prussian in the 1820s: the fifth column of a growing democratic movement that threatened to give peasants and proletariats a voice at the negotiating table. The modern, industrialised, compulsory schooling was to make some kind of surgical incision in the possible unity of these underclassmans. Share children by subject, age rating, constant placements of tests and many other more subtle means, and it was unlikely that the ignorant mass of humanity separated in childhood would ever re-root as a dangerous experience. Inglis divides the purpose of the modern school - the actual purpose - into six basic functions, any of which is enough to curl the hair of those who are so innocent that they believe in the three traditional goals previously listed: 1) Adjustable or adaptive function. Schools are to create ways of responding to authority. This, of course, completely excludes critical judgment. It also destroys the idea that useful or interesting interesting should be taught, because you can't test reflexive obedience until you know if you can get kids to learn and do stupid and boring things. 2) Integrative function. This could well be called the conformity function, as it aims to make children as similar as possible. People who adapt are predictable, and this will be of great benefit to those who want to harness and manipulate a large workforce. (3) Diagnostic and directive function. The school is supposed to determine the correct social role of each student. This is done by mathematically and anecdotally recording the evidence in cumulative records. Like your permanent record. Yes, you have one. 4) Separation function. Once their social role has been diagnosed, children must be sorted by role and trained only as far as their destination in the social machinery deserves - and not a step further. So much for making kids their personal best. 5) Selective function. This does not refer to human choice at all, but to Darwin's theory of natural selection, which applies to so-called popular breeds. In short, the idea is to help things by consciously trying to improve the breeding stock. Schools are supposed to label the unfit - with poor grades, corrective placement and other punishments - so clearly that their peers accept them as inferior and are practically prevented from reproductive values. That's how all those little humiliations from first grade onwards were meant to be done: wash the dirt in the sewer. 6) Propaedeutic function. According to these rules, the social system requires an elite group of carers. To do this, a small number of children are quietly taught how to manage this ongoing project, how to control and control a population that is deliberately stupidized and banned so that the government can proceed unadswered and companies may never want obedient work. Unfortunately, this is the purpose of compulsory public education in this country. And in order not to take Inglis into isolation too cynically for a training effort, you should know that he was hardly alone in defending these ideas. Conant himself campaigned tirelessly in line with Horace Mann's and other ideas for a similarly designed American school system. Men like George Peabody, who funded compulsory schooling throughout the South, certainly understood that the Prussian system was useful not only for creating a harmless electorate and a humble workforce, but also for creating a virtually mindless consumer mix. In due course, many industrial titans came to recognise the huge profits of cultivating and caring for just such livestock through public education, including Andrew And John D. Rockefeller. That's it, that's it. Now you know. We don't need Karl Marx's idea of major warfare. Warfare, the classes see that it is in the interests of complex, economic or political leadership, stupid people, discourage them, separate them and abandon them if they do not comply with them. The class can frame the proposal, as then-Princeton University President Woodrow Wilson said to the New York City School Teachers Association in 1909: We want one class of people to have a free education, and we want another class, a very much larger class, to be necessary, in every society, to give up the privileges of free education, and to suit themselves for special difficult manual tasks. But the motives based on these repugnant decisions must not be class-based at all. They can be purely due to fear or the already familiar belief that efficiency is the most important virtue instead of love, freedom, laughter or hope. Above all, they can be caused by simple greed. After all, there were large fortunes in the mass-produced economy, organised to favour a large company and not a small business or family farm. But mass production required mass consumption, and at the turn of the 20th century, most Americans found it both unnatural and uncontested to buy things they don't really need. Mandatory schooling was sky blue. The school didn't have to educate children in any direct sense to think they should consume nonstop because it did something even better: it encouraged them not to think at all. And that left them with targets for another great invention of the modern era - marketing. Now you don't have to study marketing to know that there are two groups of people who can always be convinced to spend more than they need to: addicts and children. The school has done a pretty good job: it turned our children into a drug addict, but it has done a fantastic job of turned our children into children. This isn't an accident either. Theorists from Plato to Rousseau and Dr. Inglis knew that if children could be cloaked with other children, deprived of responsibility and independence, encouraged to develop only dismissive feelings of greed, envy, jealousy and fear, they would grow old, but never really grow up. In his 1934 book Public Education in the United States, Ellwood P. Cubberley detailed and praised the way in which the strategy of successive school expansions had extended childhood by two to six years, and forced education was still quite new at that point. This same Cubberley - who was dean of Stanford's School of Education, textbook editor at Houghton Mifflin and conant's friend and correspondent at Harvard - had written his book Public School Administration in 1922: Our Schools Are . . . factories with raw materials shall be formulated and . . . And the school's job is to build its students according to the prescribed specifications. It is quite clear from our modern society what that information was. Maturity has already been banished from almost everyone in the part of our lives. Easy divorce laws have eliminated the need to work in relationships; easy credit has eliminated the need for fiscal self-control; easy entertainment has eliminated the need to learn how to entertain yourself; easy answers have eliminated the need to ask questions. We have become a nation of children, happy to hand over our judgment and will to political igrings and commercial tasteless people who would offend real adults. We buy TVs and tv. We buy computers and then things we see on the computer. We buy \$150 sneakers, whether we need them or not, and when they break too soon, we buy another pair. We drive in repentants and believe in the lie that they form a kind of life insurance policy, even if we are upside down in them. And worst of all, we don't blink an eye when Ari Fleischer tells us to watch out for what you're saying, even though we remember being told at some school that America is the land of the free. We're just going to buy it. Our schooling, as intended, has done it. Now for the good news. Once you understand the logic of modern schoolwork, its tricks and traps are quite easy to avoid. The school trains children to be employees and consumers; Teach yours to be leaders and adventurers. The school trains children to obey reflexively; teach your own people to think critically and independently. Well-educated children have a low threshold for boredom; Help yours develop an inner life so they never get bored. Invite them to receive serious material, adult material, history, literature, philosophy, music, art, economy, theology - all things teachers know well enough to avoid. Challenge your child with plenty of loneliness so they can learn to enjoy their own company, engage in internal dialogues. Well-educated people are conditioned to fear being alone, and they seek constant camaraderie through television, computer, mobile phone and low friendships quickly acquired and quickly abandoned. Your children should have a more meaningful life, and they can. First, however, we need to wake up to what our schools really are: the minds of young people, the drilling centres that relate to the demands of corporate society for habits and attitudes. Compulsory education serves children only by the way. Its real purpose is to make them servants. Don't let your own childhood get anyer for a day. If David Farragut could take command as the ancestor of the imprisoned British war business, if Thomas Edison could publish broadsheet at the age of 12, if Ben Franklin could himself A printer of the same age (then putting himself on a study course that would strangle a Yale parent today), there's nothing to know what your own kids could do. After a long life and 30 years in the trenches of schools, I have come to the conclusion that brilliance is as common as dirt. We will only suppress our genius because we have not yet figured out how to manage the population of educated men and women. I think the solution is simple and brilliant. Let them control themselves. Yourself.

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