

And In This Corner...

There is currently an expression among people who are fighting to change the school system, that our minds have been 'all schooled-up'.

In school reform, it means that we continue using teaching procedures and other mechanisms that we are used to, without examining their implications. Quite simply this is because everyone has attended school and is shaped by it.

But the expression applies not only to school reform but to our way of thinking and looking at the world around us.

To be all "schooled-up" is to be rigid and thick in the head.

This becomes particularly obvious when some of the chains on our thinking are thrown off. For example, once we stop equating learning with schooling and start considering other approaches, many good ideas break through.

Well, what are some of these chains? To start off with a sacred cow, I believe that logic or more properly the evaluated status and obsession with logic can rigidify our thinking.

Logic, of course, is a very useful and effective method of organizing thought. But it has faults—mainly that logical thinking has this damned habit of immediately looking for what's wrong (illogical) in a new idea and dismissing it (instead of looking for what's good or what other ideas that proposed idea may lead to). Logic is one tool for thinking—but it has nothing to do with creating new ideas.

Belief is probably the second biggest thinking pattern. People may indeed need belief systems for their personal integrity, stability, or other reasons. But if logic can be binding by saying "no" to new ideas, and solutions, belief can be binding by fixation on one idea and saying "yes" only to it. For example, if you believe that you are the reincarnation of Napoleon and are destined to take over the world, then everything that happens can be interpreted as efforts to stop or assist you in this.

On a more common level, prejudice of any sort can prevent people from looking at things from a different perspective, from learning from their mis-

takes, from finding new understanding to their problems, and from creating solutions and ideas.

There are other chains to thinking, of course, (e.g. drug addiction, magic thinking, surface thinking, etc.) The truth is, I'm not sure how to approach these. Should they be considered methods of thinking or ways of looking at things (world views)? Anyway, for those who are interested in new ideas, a book called Po: Beyond Yes and No by Edward DeBono (Penguin Books) could be very useful and entertaining.

Mind-Set

Anyone concerned with change and political action, of necessity, must consider the blocks in people against that change. We live in a society that is increasing being dominated by social services and hence over-programming. In all sectors people adopt a certain mind-set or mentality peculiar to their occupation and often are locked into that frame of mind even when it is obviously dysfunctional or harmful—witness cops, bureaucrats, teachers, etc. This phenomena may even fit an equation: nature of man + methods of thinking + sociological influence = world view.

School plays an extremely important role in this process. I wish here to discuss how it affects our thinking and schools our imagination into a rigid mentality. Besides the previous general arguments against logic and belief, there are several influences peculiar to school—specifically, the depositing of dogma; the right-wrong judgement of ideas; and the alienation of knowledge.

The following paragraphs briefly elaborate on these.

Established ideas or ideas from the old generation pass on intact without thinking from the teacher to the taught. Depositing of a whole framework of knowledge into students seems to be the easiest way of teaching for it relieves the teacher and student of the necessity of thinking about it. Although the teacher may get great satisfaction out of the brilliance of his organization, the student is de-humanized

Your minds, they're all schooled up.

by being an object into which dead knowledge is set. This in turn becomes a further block on thinking.

The right-wrong judgement of ideas is also a powerful influence in shaping our thinking. Encouragement and approval in a student's early years are given as reward for being right. Being wrong in class is a cause for embarrassment and shame. The ego is so tied to being right that later on in life people are afraid of being wrong and most reluctant to admit this. They are defending not their ideas but their self-esteem. Furthermore this fear of being wrong paralyzes their ability to think of and propose new ideas.

Thirdly, the alienation of knowledge is a process we've all become used to by university. School is a closed and artificial world. What we learn, even those ideas which we consider most important, have their validity inside this world. Real motivation for ideas is cut off and people either stop thinking or become involved in petty arguments. Both the drunk and the academic are common at university.

But this alienation of knowledge belies a further point, so I wish to now leave this discussion on schooled thinking and very briefly pursue the further consequence of this alienation.

It is said that you can have an open heart only if you have an open mind. "Understanding" is very different from "mentality" because it is motivated by human concerns. Unlike the rigid mind-set approach, challenging problems through ethical reflection and action is a very humanizing experience.

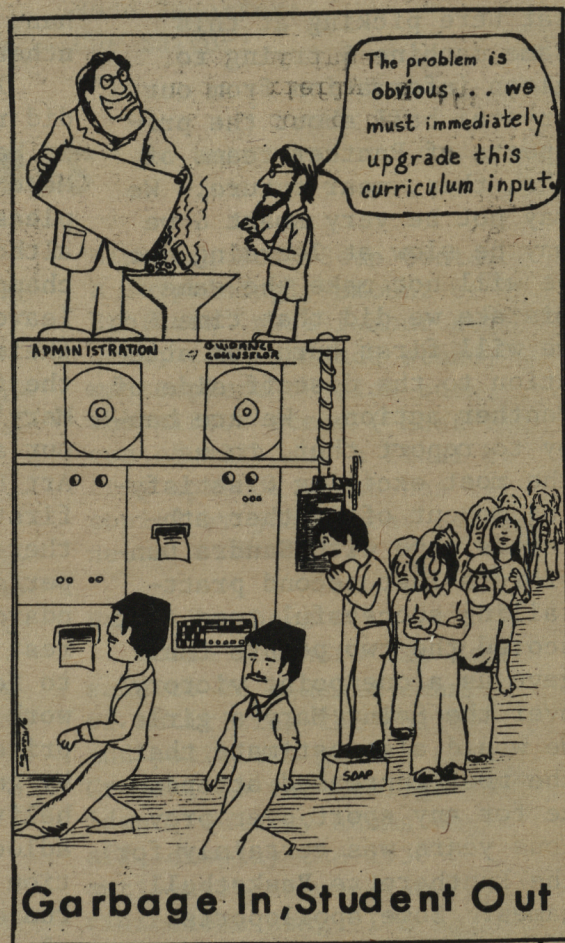
In general students miss out on this. There is an immense loss in having learning separated from the world not only for those cut off from any theoretical understanding of their world but also for students who are unable to develop any sense of priorities, ethical judgement, or ability to learn from others;

In my own experiences at

attempts toward de-schooling in Anglo Tigris, I've found the biggest lesson I've learned is to accept other persons views and proceed from that point on. At times it is a most difficult process because our schooled mentality compels us to reject what we disagree with instead of looking at what is good in that viewpoint or what other good understanding might that viewpoint lead to. It is a **terrific** experience to work in solidarity and dialogue with others but for anyone helping others it is imperative to be a **co-learner**.

Finally, since this is my last article, I wish to answer a question I was asked: what I thought the best education system could be. To put it briefly, I think that the most inherently dynamic system is the world and all of the problems it has. Reflection and action, ethical decision-making and compassion are demanded by it. This is never possible in an artificial, authoritarian or seductive, environment called school.

(Much thanks to Barry Chandler for his terrific artwork!!)



Garbage In, Student Out

BE TALKIN' TO YA AGAIN NEXT YEAR!!!
THE CADRE STAFF