

- At what stage is the rearing and education of the youth should start for more effective results?

THE INCREASING RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOLS

I think the most striking changes that have taken place in our lifetime have been the increased amount of knowledge available to us and the corresponding increase in the complexity of life. At the time of the American Revolution (or about 100 years ago) an intelligent man could be a classical Greek scholar, an engineer, a historian and a farmer all at the same time. Today engineering is divided into a number of sub-specialties and it takes years and years of study to be an expert in even in a *part* of one of the sub-specialties. In the last 10 years the world's cache of facts has doubled. The amount of knowledge accumulated in the last decade equals the amount gathered in all the years of written history! This proliferation of knowledge along with the associated

amplification of the complexity of the environment that man has now to adjust to, has exploded many of the simplistic beliefs once held regarding the functioning of our universe.

These changes have produced feelings of inadequacy and incompetency in increasing numbers of parents, so much so that in many areas they have abdicated their traditional responsibilities and insisted that other institutions assume some of the burden.

The school, operating as it does as a captive social agency, has been one of the institutions most prevailed upon to step into the breach. Schools have been asked to prepare students for college, or for a vocation, to teach driver education, to institute a lunch program, to take the responsibility for after school recreation, to teach

home economics, family planning and now sex education. And then parents wonder why they can't understand how their children develop the attitudes they hold.

I wonder if this transfer of responsibility hasn't at times resulted in repercussions beyond what either the family or school anticipated. The school is saddled with assignments it is ill-equipped to carry out, the family has found its taxes increased and its children with attitudes the antithesis of what they had expected. I have often wondered whether such a transfer of responsibility is even possible. To me education is a mutual, cooperative endeavor. If a child gets a good education it is not only because he has gone through a good school system but also because he came from a home where learning and education were valued.

Our clinical experience with children at the Menninger Foundation indicates that until children receive parental permission to discuss sex, they cannot; and furthermore they cannot

"hear" what the therapist has to say on the subject. For this reason a child-therapist will seldom introduce this topic into the out-patient treatment for a child — despite the child's interest and readiness — until the patient has the approval of the home and even more, the assurance that the parents are willing to continue the discussion at home if the child so wishes. Otherwise, the children feel guilty or inhibited or both and the entire effort becomes futile.

If it is true that children cannot "learn" about sex without active parental involvement, the question would then become not who shall take the responsibility in this area, but rather how can the home and school enter into an effective dialogue in this area so that an articulated program can be developed?

There is another areas of educational activity which if it eventuates will have even greater repercussions on the family than any existing practice and that is what is now called preschool education. Although this is not

yet a reality except for a limited number of our disenfranchised population, it is quite likely that in the foreseeable future mandatory public school education will be the law of the land for children from there on.

Research has demonstrated that by the time some disadvantaged six-year-old children enter the first grade the sensory and intellectual deprivation they have suffered has been so great, one can predict with a high degree of accuracy which ones will be high school dropouts! And this, mind you, is prior to their first academic contact. Surely if some come destined to complete failure there must be hundreds of thousands more who enter school with limited disabilities. Obviously from an educational point of view, for these children it may be essential and imperative that the school entrance age be lowered. I feel confident that the more affluent segment of our society will soon demand the same opportunity for their offsprings.

Although it will be difficult to contest the intellec-

tual and academic value of this experience, society will need to consider the effect of such an experience on the total development of the child. The prevailing psychological theory which guides our clinical operations with child and adult patients suggests that the major portion of the individual's personality is established prior to the onset of school. It is, of course, common knowledge that preschool children are extremely impressionable and malleable. However, we have discovered that what they have encountered in their childhood in terms of attitudes and experiences often establishes lasting, and sometimes immutable behavioral patterns. This is not to say that change does not take place after six; of course it does, but rather the change occurs within broad but predetermined boundaries.

Now, lowering the starting age will mean that the charge to the school will be not only to impart knowledge or transmit culture, but implicitly to take part in the rearing of our children. If this eventuates, the

school will help establish values, attitudes, behavior traits and so forth. Although the ostensible function will be to educate our youngsters, they will in fact be assuming the responsibility for a share of the child's basic personality development, a function which in the past has been almost exclusively the domain of the family.

I am not suggesting whether this will be a wholesome, beneficial move or a debilitating and disastrous one. This question cannot be answered at this juncture, certainly not without knowledge of how this will be programmatically accomplished. We do know from

past experience that the results will be disastrous if this is considered just another responsibility of the school undertaken without constructive change in teacher training programs utilizing the knowledge and skills of psychoanalytically oriented mental health specialists.

There seems to me no question that the increasing complexity of our world will demand changes in the family, its functioning and sphere of influence. The questions we need to ponder, discuss and argue are what kind of change, for what purpose, and by whom? By *Marvin Ack, Ph.D.*, Science Digest, March 1969.

THE REAL REVOLUTIONS . . .

soon re-creates an inequality of possessions and privileges, and raises to power a new minority with essentially the same instincts as in the old. The only real revolution is in the enlightenment of the mind and the improvement of character, the only real emancipation is individual, and the only real revolutionists are philosophers and saints. — *From The Lessons of History by Will and Ariel Durant.*