Introduction

William H. Herndon asked Abraham Lincoln's cousin, Dennis Hanks, how he and Lincoln were educated.

"We learned by sight, scent and hearing," Hanks replied. "We heard all that was said, and talked over the questions heard, wore them slick, greasy, and threadbare."

Lincoln spent less than a year of his life "going to school," for attending classes in a special building and learning during prescribed hours were a rarity on the frontier. Life was unified, not divided into compartments of work, study, and play.

Albert H. Beveridge, from whose *Abraham Lincoln* the dialogue with Hanks is drawn, gives this description:

> The amusements of the people were so contrived as to get needed work done, but they were boisterous with rampant jollity. The felling of the splendid forests to make clearings left great quantities of logs that could not be used for cabins or stables; and these logs were burned. So at "log-rollings" everybody helped mightily, ate heavily, and drank much whiskey. . . . Much the same happened when neighbors came to help put up the frames of houses or build cabins, "raisings," as these events were called.
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> "Corn shuckings" were the scenes of greatest enjoyment. Men and boys were chosen by two captains and thus divided into equal groups, each strove to husk the most corn. Songs were sung, stories told, jokes cracked; "and pass the bottle around" was the order of the hour. Sugar-boiling, wool-shearing, and hog-killings were scenes of similar festivities.

"Everybody helped mightily." Participation was what was needed, expected, and enjoyed—not necessarily as a skilled expert, but as a social being, as a member of the community, as a cooperator. "Men and boys were chosen by two captains. . . ." And so they learned how to lead, how to follow, how to work with the rest of the group in a variety of ways in order to achieve a common purpose. Boys and men, too, learned not from professional teachers but from and with one another as a part of the natural process of being human. And they kept their eyes and ears open, talking over the events and questions of the day until they were worn threadbare.

Specialization was the exception in such a society—at least in individuals. The logger could butcher, the butcher could entertain, the entertainer sheared wool, men and boys acted together. It was the accepted, the normal—indeed—the obvious, thing to do. How else could the community survive, endure, propagate, and flourish? The young had to learn the ways of their community, but "learn" did not mean to memorize or to describe, for it was intimately connected with the power of the community to do something. The young had to participate in the doing; that is how they learned.

Participation in the communal life made people aware of the high degree of their interdependence, and this made life along the frontier truly democratic. Society was not stratified; men treated each other more as equals—not as if they were the same, but as equals. In the armed forces, for example, militiamen elected their own officers—Abraham Lincoln being one of those so honored.

The historic fact is that a dream of self-government (brought here by the Puritans and reflected when New England property owners assembled in town meetings) merged with the concept of equal rights enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, and together they marked a new, American, way of life. Based on the dignity of the individual, it permitted him freedom of movement. The individual was not tied down to a tract of land, a particular occupation, or a station in life. He was encouraged to push on, to expand the frontier, according to the interests and abilities that he had, and to make the wilderness his own. Such were the needs of the day.

In practice, there were notable exceptions to the principles of this new way of life. The South had slaves; only property owners could vote in the East; women could vote nowhere. But the principles were known and their splendor was recognized; it was only a question of time before what was latent became manifest, before the potential became actual. In time, the demands of a free society won out over slavery. Later, universal suffrage was established. But we are still working out the implications and applications of these principles, and, in time, perhaps we shall achieve a truly democratic society.

The most important factor at work in relation to this goal is, withou doubt, formal education. Lincoln and the children of his time and plac got along without much schooling, which did not mean, at that tim and in that place, that they were not educated. They were of the com munity, they were educated by the community, and they were educate for the community. But circumstances changed, life altered. Waves o immigrants from abroad and increased industrialization, together wit the demands of universal suffrage, brought into being new legislation Known as compulsory school-attendance laws, these were designed t implant the social qualities suitable for industrial employees, to draw children off the labor market, and to produce a citizenry literate i American English. It was to reach these goals that the unique publi education system of the United States was created, and reach them i did, with a large measure of success. There was a price, however.

First, unlike Lincoln and his cousin, the students of the public school were not of the community; they did not really belong to it, althoug the expectation was that they would when they had gone throug public school. Membership, full membership, was held to be in th future. This quickly turned into an implicit assumption that childre were not members of the community—a principle so absurd that it ha to remain implicit.

Second, the students of the public schools were not educated by th community; indeed it was thought necessary to remove them total from the community by placing them in separate facilities calle schools. This physical removal increased the control that the profes sional teachers had over the students and made it difficult for th students to do what Lincoln and his cousin did: "We learned by sigh scent and hearing." This was impossible when the learning environ ment—the school—was as drab and as all-encompassing as it was. Chil dren "heard all that was said," but only by the teachers, not by member of the community at large. If they "talked over the questions heard," i was only after classes were done. If they wore the questions "slick greasy, and threadbare," it was not in discussion with their teacher and not with any expectation that action might ensue or be the arbite of the various opinions.

Third, the students of the public schools were educated for th community in only the most limited, instrumental sense. They wer fitted for a particular role and station in the community, but not to b members of it in the ways that true democracy requires. Coming c age, they could be plumbers or doctors or clerks, but they could nc really be citizens. They never learned how.

The one-room schoolhouse became the two-room schoolhouse an then grew into the multiclass, professionally staffed and directed schoc that continues to the present day. But the students are still fitted for

particular role and station in the community. The school is still a sorting mechanism. And still the students are denied the opportunity to learn how to be citizens. They cannot learn as Lincoln learned, "by sight, scent and hearing," any more than they can talk over "the questions heard" and wear them "slick, greasy, and threadbare."

A great deal of educational thinking is still tied to the idea that the school is a kind of factory. Before dealing with the limitations and disadvantages of this view, it must be realized that when it first became prominent it was a radical innovation, devised to cope with the problem of large numbers. Democracy, immigration, and industrialization presented society with the need—and the opportunity—to educate all of its members, at least within certain narrow limits. The magnitude of the task was staggering, and, quite understandably, people turned to the one available model for dealing with large numbers—the factory. The notion was daring, and those who proposed it were the daring innovators, the radicals of their day. But it was a marked departure from the educational tradition of the whole of Western civilization, and, no matter how necessary it was, perhaps the time has come now to give up this aberration of not much more than a hundred years and to return to a far deeper conception of education.

The success of the nineteenth-century factory depended on a number of elements, one of the most important of which was the specialization of labor. Deeply impressed with the success of the factory system, early public educators borrowed the basic elements of that system and built a special building—the school—where (as in a factory or mill) schoolwork could be done. This in itself created a new dichotomy between "work" and "play." Work is serious, important, unpleasant in itself, but done for some external reward such as money, and essentially imposed from without. It is done under duress. Play, on the other hand, is trivial, unimportant, pleasant in itself, perhaps, but one should not expect to "get anything out of it," and since it is generated from within, it can hardly be expected to be socially useful. Clearly, this factory-style analysis depends on one's values.

Just like the factory, the school was a special location, a purpose-made building, equipped with all the machinery to produce learners, if not learning. The machinery was so important that it was hard to see how anyone could learn at home. That would be like supposing that the cottage industries could compete with the factories. However, when certain things had been mastered with the aid of the machinery, it was possible for the student to practice what he had learned; trivial, repetitive exercises were required, and thus homework was invented.

The educational process was broken down into a series of factory-

like steps of unvarying sequence (the work of the various grades through which the raw material (the students) had to pass. Finally each student was graded and passed or rejected like an industrial product subject to quality control. The crowning, if inevitable, folly of public educators was to reproduce in the school the social and administrative organization of the factory, with manager, overseers, foremen, and operatives masquerading under the titles of superintendent, principals, department chairmen, and teachers.

It is noteworthy that the children to be educated were not conceived structurally as part of the school's social organization. Instead, they were the raw material—transitory, to be molded by the teachers to the extent that their own imperfections would allow. It is true that flesh and blood human beings sometimes established good, friendly relationships that transcended the system which separated student from teacher—but this was exceptional. As often as not, these exceptions were found when a likely candidate for the teaching profession was encountered among the students, and it was assumed that those pupils best able to be molded were those best able to mold others. Perhaps this accounts for the general conservatism of the teaching profession.

The whole model of learning as a product has been taken from the factory and with it the belief that it is by the activity of the teacher that the student comes to learn. If learning were like the production of nuts and bolts, or like weaving, perhaps this would be true, but it is not.

Another consequence of the factory model is the firmly rooted notion that the interests of the owners and managers, on the one hand, are opposed to the interests of the workers, on the other. Management and labor are structurally opposed—an anomaly that education cannot afford—and, in addition, the students are not thought to have any interest at all. There is some possibility that they could be represented by their parents, if they, in turn, were seen to be the owners—but reality does not bear that out.

To be sure, educators and parents alike have ceased to think consciously of the school as a kind of factory, of the students as raw material, and of education as a productive art. The origins of this view lie very deep, however, and many recent developments in education merely cover up root problems that we must face today—particularly the problem of the social organization of the school. Can the social organization of the nineteenth-century factory provide for modern students the social learning that is the prerequisite for and concomitant of "academic" learning?

If there is opposition between the social organization of our schools and the job to be done, either some profound changes must take place in the system or a great deal of energy will continue to be wasted in

nonproductive opposition to the schools themselves. And opposition there is, as we all recognize, and hostility.

The British statesman Edmund Burke said that education is the cheap defense of nations. But where is the enemy? From all appearances, the enemy is within—the students are the enemy. That is the role assigned to them in the educational system: to be the enemy. The students themselves realize how they are regarded, and, in turn, come to acknowledge the system as an enemy. There is a situation of armed neutrality at best, open conflict at worst.

There will be no improvement in this hostile atmosphere, no reduction of its tensions, until it is seen that education or learning must be a cooperative venture, based on friendship and mutuality of interest. Education is not something done to children by teachers, it is something that teachers and children do together. But this "doing together" requires a social organization of a kind altogether different from what we now have in our schools. Consider the present organization, the present role of the students, and the behavior expected of them; what must a student be and do in order to learn in an "approved" fashion?

First, children must "go" to school. If learning does not take place in school, it is not really learning. School is a place, not a process; a location, not an activity.

Conceivably, a school can embrace an entire community, with all of its institutions being used for learning, for educational purposes. Yet we persist in regarding the school as a building (just like the mill or the factory) and, in our want of common sense, the community is divorced from the education of its children, while the latter, in turn, are cut off from the riches of their community.

It is an irretrievable loss, for the community cannot come to the school. The impact of the occasional visiting speaker, like the effect of current affairs bulletins, is lost, since the children know little of the "outside" world of the speakers and the bulletins except that nothing in it relates to the artificial "inside" world of the school building.

All this is no reflection on teachers and administrators. Handicapped by a specialized role that limits their participation in the other affairs of the community, teachers and administrators can do little or nothing to bring the outside and inside worlds together. The outside world is changing so fast that one has to be where the action is in order to keep abreast of it. Any attempt to capture the latest events, the current thinking, and the most recent discoveries in textbooks for children is almost fruitless—so soon are the texts out of date.

Under these circumstances, can school buildings, staffed only by full-time teachers, continue to give young people what they need?

The element of time is another important consideration, we misuse

it so. There are school days and nonschool days; school hours and nonschool hours. We are made to invest very large sums in buildings which we then use for less than half the days of the year—and for only six hours a day at that! The economics make no sense at all—and the education makes even less! Whoever thought that education begins when the student enters the school building and that it terminates when he leaves?

There is homework, of course. Instead of drawing upon life outside school, however, it intrudes on it. Instead of enriching life, it diminishes it.

Not only do we remove schoolchildren from the community and cut them off from present affairs, but also we separate them from each other, usually grouping them in classrooms according to the arbitrary standard of age. This is not because we reasoned it out and concluded that children learn little from being with older and younger students—for all the evidence is that children learn a great deal in such circumstances, as any parent of a large family knows.

It is time for a change.

But what change? What is the minimum change that would enable an educational program to help children become happy and, in their own terms, successful and law-abiding citizens?

The fundamental contention of this book is that no changes will be of any significance unless the social organization of education is totally changed. By changing the social organization of total educational systems, the social organization of schools is changed, and the roles and relations that students and faculty learn can become human, and hence educational, once again.

The miserable state of human relations in most schools and school systems is well known. Force and coercion are everywhere. The system cannot operate without them—and we are now realizing that education cannot operate with them. The usual view of teachers is that, first, you must control students and then, second, you teach them. They need to realize, however, that when you control a student, you cannot ever help him learn. You may force him to repeat what he hears or reads, and thereby pass examinations. You may succeed in modifying his outward behavior—although not necessarily its significance; you may corrupt him by bribery; you may even make him obedient. But help him learn? Never. Learning is something he must do for himself.

This is why the factory model must go. So long as the student is regarded as something to be kept under control, as raw material to be processed, he will not learn. He cannot learn, he can only be taught. His role is essentially passive, not active. He has no contribution to make to his own education. The greatest harm is done by the fact that

in no way are students ever given a clear, human, and responsible role in the organization of the school. They are not really a part of the educational system at all. They are just the material upon which it feeds. The students know it, and they respond negatively to their position of indignity. This is what must be changed.