

EDUCATION AGAIN — EDUCATION ALWAYS

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This article is not the result of arduous research, but of experience and reflection. As such, it is only a personal testimony.

Who invented school? Was it the sacred Charlemagne (as a popular French song says)? It is true that this wise, old grandfather established the bases for future years and that he introduced, through his example, a form of continuous education.

It then took a thousand years in France, as much time in England, plus a few more decades in Ontario and Quebec, for school to become mandatory. As such, the education systems, from an historical perspective, are still in the process of democratization.

The road can be long, difficult, sometimes disconcerting. At the same time, our societies are becoming more and more complex, the knowledge to be acquired more and more vast, and new theories in psychology and pedagogy are surging forth every day.

How do we fit into all this? How can we reconcile our desire for excellence with our respect for children and our nomadism?

CHOOSING AMONG EDUCATION SYSTEMS?

The term "system" of education is in itself, annoying. Is it not the objective of a system to produce, in this case to produce human beings who will function in a given society. So when we are asked to choose among systems, we are asked to choose among societies. Therefore, it is our concept of social relations and our philosophies that are under review.

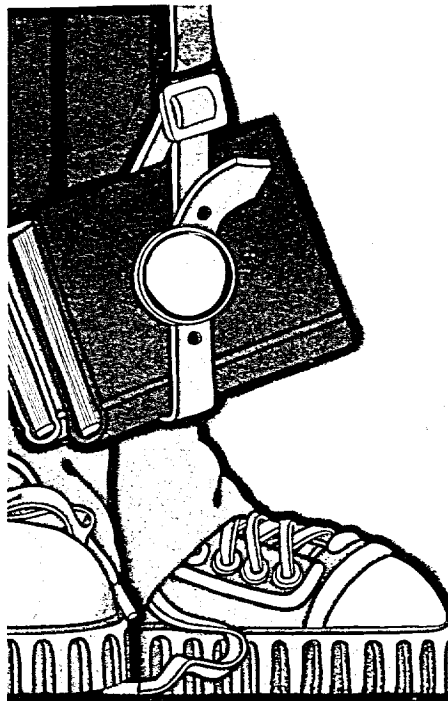
But we have to impose on our children a system to which they will be able to relate. This creates an ambiguous situation because the child has to adapt to an environment that will give him the means with which to go beyond it.

Nevertheless, it is in that same situation that we can pull out the main objective of education: to give children the means by which they will become as complete human beings as possible.

So, it is our role as parents to choose among means of formation, more commonly called school programs, in our western or westernized countries. We know the advantages and disadvantages of different programs.

If we want our children to be aware of and comprehend the formal process of knowledge, and especially logic, then we have to choose a program directed toward these goals.

If we want them to acquire as much cultural knowledge as possible, so that they



can develop good judgement, then we have to choose that program. And, if we want to ensure that one day they will be able to create and not simply imitate, in any domain, if we want them to use intuition, the other side of the process of knowledge, should not there be a complementary program? No school curriculum is perfect — such is our starting point.

Every child puts into action the process of knowledge without being conscious of it, and this begins well before going to school. The years of early childhood, most of which are spent at home, are the most important.

With regard to this, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of the Swiss system which does not permit children to start primary school before having blown out the candles of their 6th birthday cake (in some cantons their 7th); this fact, among others, surely was not irrelevant to their recent success in a test given at the primary level in three francophone countries (Belgium, France, Switzerland) and Quebec. Some children make use more of their logic, while some make use of their intuition.

Another decision to be made: Do we want to reinforce the basic nature of our children or try to assure them a certain equilibrium. In fact, we don't really have a chance when it comes to schooling — very rare are the pedagogic methods that are concerned with creative children. So it is the family that from birth on gives the child the base from which education begins.

Such is our reference point.

As for cultural knowledge, what does the word culture mean? India, France, the United States and Canada, all represent a culture. Parallel to this culture, that we could qualify as regional, exists a scientific culture which is international.

Every academic program these days transmits this knowledge. The problem for us is to choose between general knowledge programs, which could vary from school to school. Is it really a problem? It is parents who transmit their curiosity to their children.

The academic programs are generally more rigid. In a recent article Rolande Allard-Lacerte mentioned a test that was given 25 years ago, at the primary level, but still rings true today. "First question: Snow falls in..." On the dotted line, the student was supposed to write the right answer. My son wrote "in flakes". The result: zero. He should have written "in winter". 2) To cross the river you need... the answer "a boat" again zero, you needed "a bridge." (*Le Devoir*, April 1986) We all have, or will have, to cope one day or another with such experiences.

In Paris or London, our children will learn about the French or British values, but does culture not also mean understanding the values of the Far-East and of Africa?

What should we think of a program that would teach Shakespeare or Molière but would forget Pinter or Beckett; would it not fail at its task of integrating young people into contemporary society?

And a program that would ignore Marquez or Mishima, would it not fail at its task of opening the doors to the other continents?

Our greatest advantage, and that of our children, is to be able to dabble in all the streams — thanks to our nomadic life. Let us not lose our enthusiasm. We have to demand, to reinforce, to transmit. School will always be only a complement. This is my personal point of view.