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The Model Educator and the Un-Model Student

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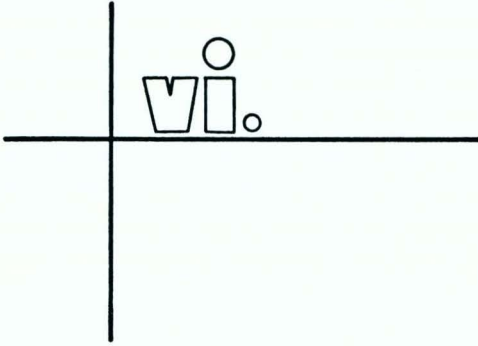
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The Model Educator and the Un-Model Student

College Curriculum and Student Protest, by Joseph J. Schwab, The University of Chicago Press, Pub. 1969. 303 pp.

The hirsute graduate on the book jacket is faceless but for a mouth that seems about to tell it like it is to his alma mater. But Professor Schwab is only briefly concerned with the verbiage and pyrotechnics of student protest; rather, he writes as a teacher for teachers at the college level. In a cultivated and sometimes biting tone, he conducts his class of readers through a tightly organized lesson plan. By his demonstration, we find our lecturer to be human, well informed, concerned for our understanding, a scholar in his studies, a gentleman in his social life, and in all, a friend with "penetrable reserve" toward his students. He enjoins us to be the same. And protest as we may that such idealism belongs in "Nowhere," "Utopia," or some "Republic" other than this one, the suspicion lingers, like the acid results of overindulgence, that the old boy is absolutely right.

The medical metaphor used as an organizational scheme is perhaps a bit too classroomish for comfort, but it is not overstressed, and the reader soon forgets the antiseptic overtones of the "prescriptive" subsections. In another sense, though, the metaphorically ailing student "body," is an apt image. The academic corpus is ill because it lacks the basic unifying cooperation of its cells. The young protest because they lack proper models, and without models for their lives, they have no grasp on the old ideals of conduct, ethics, dedication, or loyalty. Without the sense of community engendered by emulation, the young lose touch with tradition, find themselves shunted into courses that

assume goals they cannot see, face an educational process instead of concerned human educators. We must admit, our lecturer has all the evidence on his side.

But now he looks closely into our research-dimmed eyes and announces not only that we are sloppy teachers who care little for our students, but that we are not gentlemen. Before we can rise to protest tight schedules, competition, administrative necessity, and the other exigencies, he outlines a curriculum that might bridge the schism between thought and action, between rational and affective worlds. And a moment later, as we are on the point of growing weary of theorizing, the professor springs on us one of his practical applications: put our students and faculty to work solving actual problems within the petty bureaucracy of college administration. The impulse is to shout Huzzah! and collapse with laughter at the thought of a particular colleague, with three or four of his better students, puzzling over whether to install a soda bar in the ping-pong room or hire waitresses to run over from the cafeteria. But on further reflection, one decides it might be good. It might be very good, very real and solid and useful, just the antidote for cloudy theoreticians and bored intellects.

By now, our lecturer has captured our sense of possibility, and we follow as he illustrates the basic precepts of good teaching. After all, that is what Professor Schwab is doing here, telling us in detail and by example how to teach well. His illustrations of "the arts of recovery" and of the process he calls "simulated deliberation" are enviable, making us wonder if these could indeed happen in our own class rooms. We are able to overlook for the moment the impossibilities, such as reserving a "blank space" in the curriculum for senior undergraduates to exercise some of their learned skills. We dodge the occasional barbs aimed at our poor teaching and at subject matter oriented schools for narrow specialties. And we agree that perhaps the "one man—one brain" concept of education at the college level is outmoded, that perhaps it is time to be communal and cooperative in education because the real world has been that way for some time. We may even agree nervously that "characteral instruction" is necessary, that we must be models of man-and-womanhood, that "being a mere expert will not do." The existential burden of being an educator seems heavier now than when we opened the book.

Our lecturer is a man of wide sympathies. He can pause in the lesson to envisage the lonely administrator standing on his wind-swept rock, gazing out over the tumultuous academic sea, windblown but unbowed, poignant in a funny way. And we find too that our professor's plans are firmly grounded in democratic process and tradition, that he is squarely American and revolutionary at the same time. Most importantly, he forces us back, as few have done since

John Henry Newman, on our personal reserve of good character. We must walk the edge between "student lover" and academic re-
cluse; we must be model adults, perspicacious men of the world, men
of humor and warmth, concern and mental clarity, paragons for
emulation. It is, we begin to feel uncomfortably, too much. King
Arthur's oath begins to vibrate around us with extra-terrestrial har-
monics. And when our lecturer concludes by projecting his ideal col-
lege, with jolly teaching fellows and characterful model professors,
reserved but penetrable friends of their students, we begin to feel a
chill, perhaps a vague memory of "Pictures from an Institution" or
"Groves of Academe" with their fragile facades. We feel a sympathetic
joy for our professor's humanness. He has dreams too, though an
autumnal melancholy hangs about his college pastoral. Perhaps the old
hand on the shoulder, the experienced voice in the ear may have less
effect than forecast on our young emulators.

But in all, Professor Schwab has done us a valuable service. We
have always suspected that the good teacher is a model to the student
in his life style as well as in his knowledge and the weight of his
bibliography. Now we have been shown some of the possibilities, con-
cretely presented and planned, for sweeping curricular reform. And
he has laid it on the line for each of us personally: we must become
models for our students because they have no other. We cannot hide
behind our professionalism and our technology. The old challenge
is still there: be a Socrates or get out.

R. L. Stallman

