

PERSPECTIVES

Elementary education*Interest in learning replaced by apathy as students progress in school*

Children ask the greatest questions. They are forever wondering how things work, why something is or what things mean. And eventually, every child pops the mother of all questions: "Where do babies come from?" But something sad happens between the days of diapers to the days of diplomas. As we grow older, our inquisitiveness and childlike curiosity deteriorate. Children ask questions such as, "How do telephones work?" College students ask questions such as, "Is this going to be on the test?"

You know how it is. On the school playground, you might have heard statements like "I can make the biggest sandcastle ever."

But at Barnes and Noble during a test week, you overhear exclamations more along the lines of "I can make a 46 on this test and still get a C in the course as long as I make a 99 on the second test and an 87 on the final exam and attend every class except for lectures that fall on calendar dates that are prime numbers or sea-

sonal equinoxes."

The attitude towards learning changes dramatically between elementary school and college. For too many students, education becomes the pursuit of the passing grade instead of the pursuit of knowledge.

In their classic work, *How to Read a Book* (yes, there really is such a book), Mortimer J. Adler and Charles van Doren write, "Human inquisitiveness is never killed; but it is soon debased to the sort of questions asked by college students." Not the most flattering assessment of "higher" education.

"The child," they write, "is a natural questioner." Unfortunately, though, college students are not as interested in the questions as they are in getting the answers. "They want to know whether something is so, not why." Sad, but true.

As long as we think of education as a chore, it will be one. But if we begin to cultivate an insatiable curiosity about the subjects we are studying, if we start to genuinely love learning, education will be a joy. Stop snickering. Yes, education can actually be a joy. Really.

But to restore the love of learning to our college experience, we have to return to our childhood experiments. Education should begin in wonder. Yes, wonder. Instead of just memorizing the energy pathways in cellular respiration, wonder about how it works. Rather than simply learning

a list of the major turning points in the Civil War, wonder about why they were turning points. Instead of learning the rules of logic, wonder about why they are the rules. J.B.S. Haldane, the famous geneticist and mathematician, was right. He said, "The world will not perish for want of wonders, but for want of wonder."

There is no end to the amount of wonderful things in the world. Unfortunately, we seldom take the time to contemplate them and appreciate them. To the college student, knowledge too often becomes a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, and the almighty GPR takes priority over the desire to discover.

You are snickering again. An interesting education is too idealistic, you say. Graduate schools care about my grades, not my "wonder quotient," you say. The curiosity of children is all good, you say, but we are adults here. We must be realistic.

Maybe you are right. But every once in a while, it would not hurt to step away from all the blue books and scantrons and think about the big picture. Don't be afraid to ask the big questions, because Adler and Van Doren are right — "A mind not agitated by good questions cannot appreciate the significance of even the best answers."

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WORLD ORDER

Aid to Mexican government shows money-driven policy

In the Chiapas region in Mexico, a grass-roots organization known as the Zapatistas are currently waging a revolution for democracy. The demands from the Zapatistas are simple: work, food, housing, health care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace. However, these demands are not so simple for the corrupt government of Mexico to meet. The Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI is the dominant political power in Mexico and receives support from the United States.

The United States seems to be more concerned with profit than with democracy in Mexico. It has repeatedly aided the corrupt Mexican government, turned its head at the sight of injustice, and has allowed its own corporations to go in and plunder Mexico. The United States realizes a truly democratic Mexico would mean the election of a party left of the United States which would rebuke their sovereignty in the region, as well as possibly cost the businesses money. The United States would not allow that.

In December 1997, 45 men, women and children were massacred in the village of Acteal. Their only "crime" was being sympathetic to the Zapatista movement. Recently, many Mayan peasants have been driven from their small farms and villages at gunpoint.

In a *Houston Chronicle* article, the Mexican federal government claims this act of violence and displacement stems from disputes between the Zapatistas and local organizations, not the Mexican Army. However, government investigations into the massacre in Acteal seem to suggest a link between the paramilitary groups, the PRI and the Mexican army.

Since the Zapatista movement began in 1994 over 400 civilian casualties have been reported. These crimes are mostly committed by paramilitary groups of rich landowners which are unofficially supported by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which is the ruling party of Mexico.

Chiapas has an abundance of natural resources, including coffee, cattle, lumber, and oil reserves. However, despite the rich resources it possesses, this region has an extremely high poverty rate and lacks the mechanisms (such as hospitals, schools and sanitation) necessary for people there to be prosperous. The Zapatistas are based in Chiapas, and the violence that began in 1994 took hundreds of years to develop. The Zapatistas are supported largely by the Mayan and poor farmers

in the region.

Since colonial times, wealthy land owners have gotten richer while the peasants have lost their land and the means to provide for themselves. Most of the rich landowners trace their lineage to Spanish colonists, the peasants of Mayan Indian and Mestizo (mixed-blood) descent.

Even now, large landowners and their private armies are responsible for most of the current genocide. These landowners support and receive support from the PRI. Many see these attacks as a concerted effort on the part of ruling party loyalists to diminish Zapatista support.

The fighting has also pitted Indians loyal to the PRI against others loyal to the Zapatistas. Many Zapatistas are not armed, and since they object to the concept of inter-Indian violence, they usually choose to retreat when threatened by paramilitary violence.

The two main political contenders for Mexican voters are the PRI and the Democratic Revolutionary Party, or DRP. The PRI receives support from the United States, while the DRP is left of center, and has loose support from the Zapatistas.

The DRP has won some local-level elections, including the Mexico City Mayoral Elections. However, loyalists to this party have been known to settle disputes with the PRI through shoot-outs.

The United States opposes the DRP for fear large advances by this party may challenge the dominance of the United States. The Pentagon's strategy paper at the September 1994 Latin America Development Workshop said, "A democratic opening in Mexico could test that special relationship by bringing into office a government willing to challenge the United States on an economic and national grounds."

The Monroe Doctrine states the United States has the ability to intervene in the economic and political affairs of Central American countries under the guise of promoting democracy and protection from foreign foes. The United States has abused this doctrine to ensure its own economic profit.

In 1995, the United States lent \$40 billion to bail out the faltering Mexican economy. In high-profile installments to make the Clinton administration look good, the money was repaid. Mexico's economy did not recover enough to pay back the loans; they borrowed the money from other countries.

Additionally, due to the lack of environmental laws and the amount of control the PRI has over the labor unions, many United States companies have gone south to exploit the people and desecrate the land.

Along with money, the United States also has given military aid to the Mexican government. Helicopters, light personnel carriers and small

arms are given to Mexico to combat the "drug war." Most of these weapons find a use in quelling Indian uprisings, including the Zapatistas. Mexican Army personnel are also receiving instruction at the School of the Americas for Counterinsurgency Training at Fort Benning, Ga. to combat groups such as the Zapatistas.

The Clinton administration pushed the Anti-Terrorism Act, which made direct aid to the Zapatistas illegal. Along with the United States government, several corporations, specifically the Chase Bank, are in opposition to the Zapatistas.

In a report written in January 1995, Riordan Roett of Chase Manhattan, called for the elimination of the Zapatistas, stating, "the [Mexican] government will need to eliminate the Zapatistas to demonstrate their effective control of the national territory and of security policy." When this memo was leaked to the public, Chase Bank denied the memo, in an Associated Press release titled "Chase Bank Denies Urging Elimination of Rebels," and did its best to distance itself from Roett.

True democracy would almost certainly mean a win for the DRP. This party would more than likely challenge the United States and our corporations making it more expensive for them to set up in Mexico. This could easily amount to a loss of profit and Mexico becoming less friendly to big business. However, it seems "unAmerican" for the United States to not abide by the will of those seeking democracy, no matter what the cost.

The United States should not be in the business of propping up governments. These actions raise the issue of which is more important: dollars or democracy. Additionally, this de-facto military support and putting down this left-wing paramilitary group sounds similar to what got the United States into Vietnam.

President Ernesto Zedillo warned humanitarian groups against involvement in the dispute in Chiapas, saying, "It is unacceptable that people violate our laws and become directly involved in the conflict in Chiapas... they would be better to repair the injustices in their own countries." Ironically, the situation in Mexico is a result of the United States becoming directly involved.

The PRI being in power is a result of the fact we endorse a government that seems to condone genocide is an injustice of our country and the fact that we seem to value the profit of our corporations over human life is an injustice of our country, and these are injustices that the United States Government and the Clinton Administration need to address.

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PERSPECTIVES

Growing up as a product of 2 differing cultures enriches life

Hello, my name is Manisha and I am a mutt.

That is correct, I am a cultural mutt. Indian by origin, American by birth, and one hundred percent confused.

In the great gumbo melting pot of America, I am not the heat or the rice or even the broth. I am the little bit of seasoning that gets stuck to the spatula and eventually just ends up sticking to the bottom of the pot.

Like countless others, I am a first-generation American. Our parents are immigrants who grew up in a culture worlds different from the one that we have been brought up in. And that has been hard for us. For parents, it has been a process of letting go of some traditions and hopes for me. For children, it has been a process of finding a balance between the two worlds we grew up in.

As a little girl, it was easy for me. I was the kid with the name substitute teachers

had the most trouble with. I was the little girl who's parents had funny accents that my friends all laughed at. I was the little girl who got scolded by my teacher for eating with my fingers, even though that was how my family ate dinner every single night.

And I hated it. But I was not alone at that time. There were plenty of other kids in the same situation and there was a type of safety in numbers. Together we could laugh off questions about whether our families worshipped cows and whether that dot on our mothers' foreheads were tattoos.

It got harder as I got older and more American customs clashed with Indian ones.

A normal rite of passage for the American teenager is dating. Teenage girls look forward eagerly to their first date and their first kiss.

As an American teen, I also looked forward to my first date. As an Indian teen, dating was simply out of the question.

My parents did not date each other before they got married. Their marriage was arranged by relatives and had the blessing of everyone in their families. That is the typical Indian way.

But I was not the typical Indian girl.

My parents learned to accept the fact that their child would not be following the centuries-old courtship traditions. And they even accepted the fact that their child constantly dated boys who were not Indian.

But much of the Indian support structure was not so forgiving. And I was very quickly tried in the court of Indian public opinion and found guilty of betraying my heritage.

The irony of the whole situation was, of course, that the same fine, traditional Indian children the Indian parents were so proud were the same children sneaking around and dating behind their parents' backs.

The problem is that many immigrant parents come to America and expect to raise their children as they were back in the old country. And that is just not possible. Forcing a child to choose between the culture of their country and the culture of their family is cruel. It is like asking a child to choose which parent he likes best, the mother who gives him life or the father who helps him grow.

I, however, chose to be an American teenager. I went out with my American friends on the weekends, and I went to American dances, and spoke the American language. My friends joked that I had to be adopted; there was no way I was Indian.

I took the comment as a compliment, as proof that I had become a true American teenager.

But in the process, I threw away the pieces of my priceless heritage.

College has made me realize how foolish I was to deny my family in order to accept my country. I miss the Indian foods, customs, and language that I tried so hard to get away from in high school.

And even though I am trying to recapture some of the culture I have lost, I know that some of it is gone forever. I am not so much an Indian as I am an American.

My Indian peers from high school have also lost something: the American experience. There is a freedom to truly experiencing America that does not come with following the Indian traditions. A piece of that freedom is gone forever. They are not so much American as they are Indian.

I do not regret being raised an Indian in America. I am proud of my country and I am proud of my family. But I do wish that I had found balance earlier in life.

Better late than never.

My name is Manisha. And I am proud to be a mutt.

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