

## Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Schaefer, William D. (1990). *Education Without Compromise: From Chaos to Coherence in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1990. Pp. i-xx; 1-153. Price: \$19.95 U.S. Reviewed by Kenneth H. Post, Executive Assistant to the President, McMaster University.

Dr. Schaefer argues in this book that the undergraduate curriculum has become an incoherent hodgepodge of courses yielding neither a common education nor educated persons in even the simplest sense. This may be accounted for, he says, by the emphasis in universities on research among the faculty and on vocation among the students. Both reasons, on examination, are types of vocationalism. The solution he pleads is to establish clear and coherent objectives which transcend all others, most particularly the vocational, and to establish curriculum on this new basis. By purging undergraduate education of vocationalism and re-establishing liberal education as the central purpose of undergraduate education, chaos will be reduced. Liberal education should have as its principal foci two activities: the inculcation of communication skills at all levels of undergraduate education and "recovering the past as a means of discovering and shaping the future." This liberal arts education can become even more coherent by limiting course selection severely in the first two years.

It is refreshing to read an account of higher education which does not guide itself by reference to our "knowledge based economy" but which regards that compass as not merely misleading but inimical to the success of the enterprise. It is even more encouraging when it comes from the Chief Executive Officer of UCLA who occupied this position until 1988. We are entitled, however, in the face of an almost universal agreement to the contrary, to a very careful defence of this opinion.

There have been some significant developments in the activities of universities since 1852 when Cardinal Newman, in *The Idea of the University*, one of Dr. Schaefer's sources, proposed that universities had no business in research or vocational training. Newman said, for example, "its object is...the diffusion...of knowledge rather than the advancement" (Preface, p. 1). Universities have become educators of about 25% of 18-24 year olds instead of

fewer than 1% as it was in Newman's day. A relatively refined ability to read and write is required by most people in society rather than just by a small elite.

With this change in the development of university into a mass phenomenon has come a change in the perception of the Humanities and Social Sciences stated most authoritatively by Heidegger: they will be "transmogrified into a pedagogical tool for inculcating a 'political worldview'" (*Nietzsche*, Vol. 2, p. 16). The sense of unity which a liberally educated mind could perceive through a university education has been splintered and the institution which now reflects that state of knowledge was described by Clark Kerr as the "multiversity" (*Harper's*, Nov. 1963).

*Education without Compromise* begins with a careful outline of the contents of the book and an autobiographical note and then proceeds to a criticism of the undergraduate curriculum. It notes that most curricula are an incoherent collection of course titles each reflecting a faculty member's peculiar research interest which has itself been developed often for no better reason than to publish and therefore remain as a teacher of the chaotic and mind-numbing curriculum. Another source of the incoherency of the curriculum is a pressure to make education relevant to vocational concerns. The consequence is that liberal arts education, the proper purpose of which is not tied to vocation, is increasingly marginalized or confused with the idea of giving every undergraduate a few courses outside of the "discipline".

Dr. Schaefer therefore lists, in order to anchor liberal arts education, a set of seven purposes. Why these purposes are appropriate or should command the allegiance of those who funnel hundreds of billions annually into this enterprise is not stated in each case. It is difficult to argue against the view that students being able to read, write and converse in English is important for Americans and Canadians whose mother tongues are English. But who in our universities could be described as being "fully aware of the historical development of humanity - roots, traditions, major shifts in civilization - both East and West?" (p. 25). It is pleasant to see these two purposes listed among the seven purposes of liberal education, but one seriously doubts that many could be persuaded that the second is really a fundamental purpose to which large numbers of students and faculty should be devoted. In fairness, Dr. Schaefer does not seem to think it can be argued either. He never takes up the discussion of this purpose again.

He is at his strongest in explaining the first purpose, however. He argues very persuasively that faculty largely ignore the continuing need to teach students to read and write. One reason for this, to which he gently alludes, is that faculty themselves may not have acquired facility, grace and clarity of expression in

their writing. He notes then that the development of these abilities is central to the entire educational process. To make it explicitly so requires upper level courses in subjects such as composition. The logic of this concern leads inevitably to the view that the Humanities should be central to a proper undergraduate education.

For someone who has attempted to defend the disinterested pursuit of knowledge by our undergraduates against the demands posed by the publication of books such as *Job Market Reality for Postsecondary Graduates*, finding a like-minded educator is a pleasure. Yet one would wish that the foundation laid in his book were sufficient to withstand the shocks and tremors that such a view now encounters almost daily. Unfortunately, the sources of these tremors seem not to have been recognized.

Bloom's attempt to argue against the Heideggerian account of the modern university - the account which most justifies the abandonment of liberal education for one in which the service of technology is its only purpose - is not even grasped for what it is, a fundamental theoretical justification (even if it is incorrect in some respects) for the centrality of the Humanities and Social Sciences to education.

The mass phenomenon which higher education has become, and about which Canada's George Grant devoted so much of his thought, is not recognized as signifying a fundamentally different object and, hence, set of problems than that addressed by Cardinal Newman. The most mundane - yet not insignificant - of these problems is indicated by the fact that universities drain a huge proportion of national wealth and enormous quantities of time and talent from other pursuits. The funding they need has not been sufficient for fifteen years. Yet no one has come up with any substantially new ideas on how to deliver what most agree would be desirable: students who read and write with facility and insight, at a price that can be afforded. How many parents in Canada can afford to pay the cost of the liberal arts education provided by those elite liberal arts colleges where something like Dr. Schaefer's curriculum may be found? Average tuition and fees at top colleges such as Bennington are over U.S. \$17,000 per year in addition to room and board. *The Chronicle* "Almanac" reports 72 U.S. private colleges with tuition in excess of \$13,000 per year (Sept. 5, 1990, p. 25).

The relation between wealth and liberal education, first noted by Plato, may continue to be true. Given that relationship, however, liberal education must lie outside of the discourse about higher education carried on in public in North America. Such education is inconceivable in the developing world where over half the people live on less than \$400 per year.

Finally, the impact of technology on education is hardly noticed by Dr. Schaefer except for a brief nod to the computer, an invention the impact of which has been acknowledged by virtually everyone. Less-acknowledged developments, such as television and VCR's, are not even recognized as part of the contemporary landscape. Yet here is where most North Americans obtain daily education about human relations, politics and meaning ("liberal education" as Dr. Schaefer calls it) that used to come from daily reading of the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*. While everyone is embedded in this medium, few even among the elite liberal arts graduates have received the training they need to deal critically with it. And few have paused in Canada to wonder what contribution they and other new telecommunications developments might make to university education in Canada.

Geoffrey Squires. (1990). *First Degree: The Undergraduate Curriculum*. England and USA: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press. Reviewed by Robert G. Wyant, The University of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Education Centre.

Curriculum reform is, in most North American universities, a matter for constant discussion, periodic study and occasional action - usually very conservative action. The current economic and political situation is forcing universities to make some difficult decisions. Operating budgets that have, in terms of real dollars, been decreasing have led most universities to forego any curriculum expansion in favour of "hanging on" until the economic climate changes. But the political pressures on universities to move in the direction of short-term vocational and professional job training can only be expected to increase in a time of recession and growing unemployment. We may be faced with the need for curriculum change which will not be viewed by most academics as "reform," but will be unavoidable for many institutions. If so, we shall be reassessing the undergraduate curriculum in some very sobering ways. Geoffrey Squires has written a book about the undergraduate degree in Britain that may be of some help to Canadian university faculty members and administrators not because the British experience is directly transferable to Canadian institutions, but because it may provide us with a different perspective from an individual who has obviously thought a great deal about the matter.

Squires summarizes his book as follows: "This is a book about what is taught to undergraduates during the three or four years that lead to their first degree in