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THE DYNAMICS OF SELF-DECEPTION.

BY- SHAPIRO, ELLIOT

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*SUPERVISORY ACTIVITIES, FEAR, NEUROSIS, EDUCATIONAL
PRACTICE, DEMOCRATIC VALUES, CREATIVE TEACHING, SUPERVISORS,

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS OFTEN CONCEAL THE TRUE
NATURE OF A SCHOOL BECAUSE THEY FEAR THE JUDGMENTS OF THEIR
SUPERVISORS. THIS CONSCIOUS DECEPTION BECOMES AN UNCONSCIOUS
SELF-DECEPTION, WHICH IS GENERATED IN THE SAME WAY THAT
NEUROTIC DEFENSES ARE DEVELOPED. WHEN TEACHERS MUST TEACH
FEARING THAT THEIR CAREERS ARE IN JEOPARDY, CREATIVE AND
DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES ARE DESTROYED. THIS ARTICLE WAS
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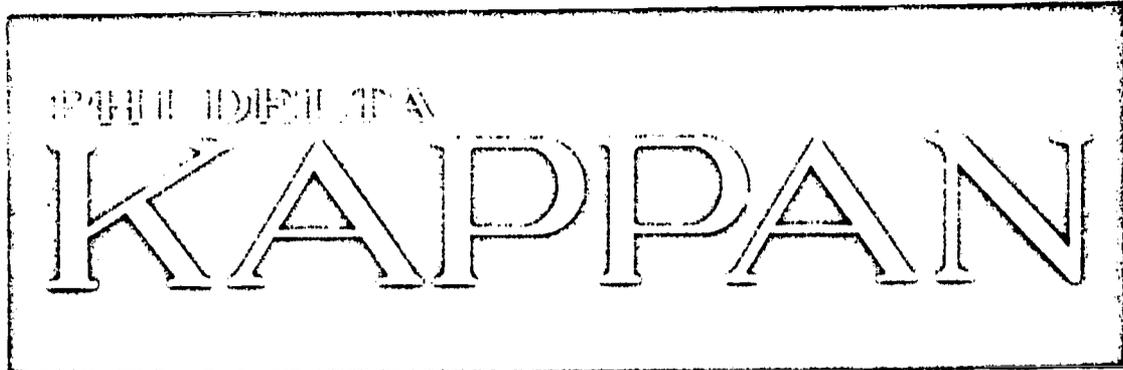
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COVER PHOTO This scene was photographed last summer in a Head Start class at Toledo, Ohio. Our thanks to Richard Allen Huston, director of Head Start for the Toledo Board of Education, for the excellent photograph.—The Editors

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The Dynamics of Self-deception

By ELLIOTT SHAPIRO

IT MAY well be the occupational hazard of our profession that we tend to deal so carefully with certain minutiae—busywork—that we fail almost entirely to confront and to interact with reality. This has been said less laboriously before: We fail to see the forest for the trees.

While a charge of this nature should be supported by scientific documentation, may I indicate that an analysis of certain of our own experiences may serve, for the time being, as eloquent empirical testimony.

All of us have attended conferences — many conferences — conferences without end. If the agenda are still available, look at them. Look back, if you will, beyond this year or last when poverty, civil rights, Negro heritage or inner-city reading retardation became fashionable for “discussion.” Look back, say, to 1940, to 1945, or 1950. Look back even to the convention held in 1966 at Atlantic City. Look back to all of these and you may agree with the criticism of that convention by the education editor of the *New York Times*: “Virtually nothing that was germane to the Ameri-

can scene was included on the agenda.”

The poor and the discriminated-against have always been with us. But the agenda of all these meetings do not indicate their presence.

The importance of this omission cannot be sufficiently stressed. All of these conferences, so often producing tedium, should have been the central learning experiences, the nourishment for our thinking, the recharging of our batteries. But look back again: Count the times that you have found nourishment—real food for thought—at these assemblies.

This testing of experience need not stop with conventions, conferences, and meetings. Let us examine the common one that may be termed the Experience of the Staff Bulletin.

A study of these bulletins may be more rewarding than the original perusal. Randomly select eight or 10 issues that were published, say, in 1962. Read them very carefully, with an eye for the portrayal of the problems that were endemic in your city or area. Reading retardation? Large classes? Lack of specialized services? Segregated edu-

cation? Inner-city distrust? Teacher shortage? Obsolete curricula?

Have they been ignored? Or, if the existence of these problems has been indicated have they not been mentioned in so positive or affirmative a manner that they have had to be inferred?

“TWO HUNDRED TEACHERS FIND POSITIONS IN CITY'S SCHOOLS.”

How wonderful!

This style is usual. **“REMEDIAL READING TEACHERS TO BE ASSIGNED.”** Not mentioned is that the number is too few, or that remedial (or corrective) reading teachers are hardly an answer to a ghetto area problem when the *median* reading grade is two years below the norm in the sixth grade.

Another headline may be examined: **“TEACHERS TO BE TRAINED IN THE NEW MATH.”** Four workshops will be held for a number of designated teachers who will be responsible for “training” the many who were not permitted time off to learn the new math . . . in four workshops.

The examples can be multiplied almost without end:

“SCHOOLS LEAD IN INTE-

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GRATED READING MATERIALS."

"UPWARD STRIVING SCHOOLS TO ADD CONSULTANTS."

"THREE APPOINTED TO PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES."

Thus we move from success to success, from achievement to new achievement, basking in the aura of a job well done. That we are not so successful as we pretend to be is kept from our consciousness, probably through some sophisticated defense mechanism that fends off the anxieties that reality testing would certainly induce. We finally believe our own confabulations.

In some ways, the school supervisors of the highest echelons—say the superintendents of schools or even the district superintendents in the very largest cities—are much like Catherine the Great, who accepted cardboard villages as reality on her trips to the farthest reaches of her empire.

Educators can hardly claim so pristine an innocence. Or claiming innocence, do they not admit to inefficiency, or at least to a naïveté unbecoming their age and position? Is it enough to say that superintendents see what they wish to see?

But where or when does consciousness of reality disappear? Perhaps a clue may be found when this concealment of reality is quite deliberate. Let us look at a familiar example.

The district superintendent visits a school. He may drop in unexpectedly or he may indicate the date of his visit some days or weeks prior to it. In either case, we can easily agree on what will happen in that school.

If prior knowledge of the visit is given, the school will make every possible preparation to appear proficient, as proficiency is defined in past statements of the superintendent. Everyone will have a responsibility. The custodian will clean the school as never before—that is, since the last similar visit; the teachers will bring their plan books up to date; exhibitions of children's work will be placed about the room; newly made charts will be posted on strategic wall areas; and care-

fully prepared—and dusted—library and science corners will be clearly designated. Every lesson for the day will have general and specific aims, carefully developed motivation, and other evidences of a most conscientious effort to incorporate the Hebartian steps in their proper order.

New samples of children's work, school activities, various art and music displays—all of these and much more may suddenly festoon the corridors. The onrush of displays may leave almost no place in the school untouched. The General Office will have some especially cute samples of the work of kindergartners; the Principal's Office may exhibit carefully thought-out schedules and graphs, together with a child's rather good drawing intermingled for esthetic relief.

The General Office itself will, like all the classrooms, be unusually tidy. Care will be devoted not only to the classrooms but to the occupants. At the very least, the teachers, secretaries, and supervisors will be better groomed than usual. Even the children may be unusually well groomed.

Preparations cannot be so extensive, of course, if a visit is unscheduled. Even so, a little ingenuity goes a long way. This ingenuity may be packaged cleverly—a crayon in an envelope, or a question that has been agreed on as a prearranged signal. When this signal is received, the frantic activity starts—to stop in fast-frozen tableau when the door opens.

While comic aspects are not lacking, the actual effect artfully and tragically conceals the reality. It is possible, of course, for a supervisor to remain sensitive to deception (one, on receiving the signal, responded with a note, "I am the signal"). But the rewards for becoming insensitive are indeed great. Assisted by this insensitivity, it becomes possible to point with pride to a school, a program, an experiment, an innovation, a curriculum, or to whatever else one most easily dooms to success in a given situation.

The above examples of the style of deliberate concealment are especially useful, for they provide us with the dynamics of both conscious deception (on the part of the

Last year Nat Hentoff, a sensitive and persistent reporter, did a *New Yorker* "Profile" on Shapiro (May 7, 1966). The article was later expanded into a powerful little book, *Our Children Are Dying* (Viking, \$4.50). It is based on Shapiro's credo at New York City's P.S. 119, "We have to go on fighting so that more of our children do not die."

Today Shapiro is director of the Center for Cooperative Action in Urban Education in Rochester, New York, operated jointly by the School of Education, University of Rochester, and the city school district.

The accompanying article expresses some of Mr. Shapiro's views on the ills of large-city educational organization.

A teacher in New York for 20 years and a principal in Harlem for 12, Elliott S. Shapiro has gained a national reputation for his efforts to improve education for Negro children.

In JUNE, 1961, Mayor Wagner visited P.S. 119 after Shapiro and his staff had purchased a newspaper ad calling attention to poor physical and sanitary conditions at the school. When Wagner was there a rat ran across his path, and the resulting furor triggered a crash program to repair antiquated schools throughout the city. For his role in the episode, Shapiro became known as a maverick who "wouldn't play ball," according to the *New York Times*.

school staff) and motivation for the acceptance of the self-deception that is so universal in our occupation.

The manner in which the conscious act of deception changes to the unconscious automaticity of self-deception is similar to the genesis and development of neurotic devices generally. A basic factor in an original traumatizing situation is, invariably, fear—a fear that something will be too painful to bear. Perhaps a parent is too punitive, and the punishment may be escaped by prevarication, or by open-eyed innocence. Thereafter, to remain safe against the ever-lurking danger—indeed, to keep even from thinking about it—one becomes bland, fixed in this innocence. Assumptions remain forever tacit; to look at them would be tantamount to confronting the beast.

Often, however, in a neurosis—even at its inception—the beast does not really exist. Compared to us, then, the neurotic is quite lucky, because a real beast does exist for us.

The beast is the fear engendered by a society that, priding itself on its democratic tradition, will nevertheless hoist any of us on the horns of the dilemma of what will happen to our careers should we truly espouse and practice a democratic process of education.

In a real sense we have identified with this beast. Gradually, gradually, ever so gradually we have followed the tired cynicism of, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." We are the participants in—or the supervisors of—the process of making the educational environment beastly. Even when this environment is not immediately discernible as such ("This school has a democratic atmosphere"), the benevolent despotism inherent in the disguise is still there.

How, then, can supervisors touch reality? After all, as pictured above, is not the reality too dangerous to touch?

This is probably so, but even a consciousness of the ubiquitous quality of the unreal can be helpful.

Perhaps with this consciousness, supervisors will not put so many obstacles in the way of those who will finally find and creatively mold the reality: the organizations of the teachers, and, hopefully, the poor.



College Unionism in Calif.

▼ The American Federation of Teachers' College Council in California claims a membership increase of 300 since the election of Governor Ronald Reagan. Composed of only 350 state college teachers in early 1965, the College Council has now grown to 1,300, according to Bud Hutchinson, a former assistant professor of economics who is in charge of organizing. The AFT has locals on 11 of the 18 college campuses and plans to establish two more this month. Hutchinson is quoted by the *New Republic* as saying, "We're going to give Reagan an award for being our most effective organizer."

State college professors in academic robes led a union-sponsored march—in buses—on the state capitol last month to protest the Governor's proposed cuts in higher education budgets. Union leaders are working to organize a strike in April at one or both of the colleges where the AFT is strongest, San Jose and San Francisco.

Reagan proposes to give the state colleges \$154 million in state funds instead of the \$213 million requested by their trustees. An added \$18 million in tuition charges which the Governor wishes to impose would provide an operation budget of \$172 million, \$3 million less than it costs to run the colleges this year.

Head Start, Follow Through

▼ The President's Follow Through plan to extend Head Start answers the criticism that an eight-week summer preschool program has little value unless special attention continues as the child enters a slum school. (It has been said that a child might be worse off for the Head Start experience if a door that has opened is then slammed in his face.)

This year Head Start anticipates taking in about 550,000 four- and five-year-old preschoolers. The Follow Through program would next year take only about one-third of these children, using some \$135 million Johnson hopes will be appropriated.

School News Better Reported

▼ Daily newspaper coverage of education has improved greatly both in quantity and quality, according to the January Council for Basic Education *Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* cites a survey by Charles T. Duncan, former dean, School of Journalism, University of Oregon, which is reported in the summer, 1966, *Journalism Quarterly*. Of 52 major dailies studied in 1965, 49 had full-time or part-time education writers, compared with 23 in 1955 and only 10 in 1945. Also cited was growth of the Education Writers Association, revived less than three years ago. Although part of this growth must be attributed to the new executive secretary, G. K. Hodenfield of the Indiana University News Bureau, the fact that EWA now has nearly 500 members, more than half of whom work for the daily press, is significant.

The *Bulletin* believes that quality of reporting is still far from satisfactory, and the experienced, competent education reporter still a rarity. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the EWA awards made at Atlantic City in February went to writers who dealt with such significant subjects as comprehensive surveys of local school systems; state systems of higher education; recruitment, pay, and activities of teachers; and interpretation of school curriculum changes.

Jencks' Radical Suggestion

▼ The problems of the urban schools are perpetuated by weak financing and stifling centralization of control, suggests education writer Christopher Jencks ("Is the Public School Obsolete?" *The Public Interest*, No. 2, Winter, 1966). Among his radical suggestions is the notion that if the parents of slum children were given the money now spent on their children's education they could send their children to private schools. Private schools would spring up to meet the demand, Jencks believes, and would provide the variety of structures which would offer parents a real freedom of choice. The socialized education of the public school has failed with the slum child, he says, so we had better try some new arrangement.

▼ Within the next three years half a dozen or more states may have statewide computer systems in operation to provide information for teachers and administrators, maintain student records, and assist instruction.