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In my opinion

Our students need individual attention

By JULIE CHARPENTIER

Every week, the newspapers are littered with articles on the decline of our country's educational system. It's no longer even a disputed fact: Something is wrong within our schools.

Some people believe desegregation is the answer; others believe that substantial pay raises for teachers or stricter graduation requirements offer a miracle cure.

But how can we possibly claim to have found the answers when the cause of the problem itself has not been identified?

Ask any of the so-called experts, and they will mumble vague generalities pertaining to a "necessity to racially integrate," a "need for greater incentives," or a "desire to reach higher goals." The truth of the matter is that no one knows what has gone wrong, and like a politician floundering to answer a difficult question, people resort to cloudy, meaningless phrases. Most educators claim that it is a complicated, intricate problem that will take years of study to decipher. Thus, they justify their ambiguous responses.

But is the deterioration of our schools as complicated as many believe it to be? I think not. The cause is strikingly obvious to those who will look up from their computers and charts of statistics long enough to see the human being once again.

The student needs nurturing and love within the classroom just as the child needs nurturing and love within the home. The two needs are integral, and an attempt to dehumanize either portion will result in failure.

In the schools, this dehumanization stems from the impersonal student/teacher relationship and branches outward. Consequently, behavioral difficulties such as rebellion, indifference, and lack of motivation are symptoms of this more deeply rooted problem. Just as with a physical ailment, once the problem is treated, the symptoms will disappear.

The first step in this healing process is to familiarize teachers with the importance of individualized instruction at every level of education. Tutorial arrangements are, of course, impossible in most circumstances. However, an allotted time should be set aside weekly for each student to confer with the teacher privately. Study methods should be modified and adapted to the individual.

Established curriculum need not be



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forsaken, but a personal touch from the instructor could mean the difference between a C and an A-. All teachers have the option to apply this method, but unfortunately, few choose to do so.

The second step is to distinguish exceptional students from the predisposed "norm." By exceptional, I mean both extremes in apparent intelligence and desire to learn.

Students having an unwarranted amount of difficulty should be allotted extra time for individualized instruction. Likewise, those who are inclined to excel or who exhibit an unusual amount of enthusiasm should also be given additional time.

Unfortunately, such is seldom the case in most classrooms today. Students with exceptional needs are left to either flounder helplessly in a mass of incomprehension, or to remain in a constant state of frustration and dejection as a result of boredom.

The final step is for the public to recognize that the teacher's role in a student's life is more important than one who merely bestows a service upon another. A person would not dream of demeaning a parent's role to such a degree. Neither should this be the case with that of the teacher, for it is just as vital. Each instructor should be remembered for some personal quality which has been essential to the student's educational advancement.

Anything less than this is a failure.

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