

Institutionalization as a Factor in Educational Under Performance

American society throughout the 20th century progressively institutionalized many social functions, including education. The vehicle for institutionalizing education was through the creation of public school systems. Whenever something becomes institutionalized, it becomes depersonalized. The function of the institution becomes the responsibility of "experts and professionals" and those served by the institution become "wards" of the institution. My experience has been that "experts and professionals," contrary to what they sometimes claim, have no sincere interest in input from the "unwashed." Further, institutionalization leads to homogenization of institutional services making them unsuitable for many of those that are supposed to be served. Homogenization results from the tendency to adopt an "assembly line model" with a standardization mentality and the inevitable politicization that comes with institutionalizing social functions. Under such conditions, parents and children alike become passive "consumers" and relinquish their responsibility to the institution and its "experts."

Along with this institutionalization of America has come a huge tax burden on citizens to fund all the institutions created to serve social functions. Several estimates put the average American family's tax burden at approximately 50% of gross income when all taxes national, state and local are taken into account. Dual employment has become a necessity for most two-parent families in order to afford a middle-class life style. In such families, much of one income goes to pay the family's tax bill and the other goes to maintaining a comfortable life style. Single parent families are burdened down with trying to live on a single income in a two-income society. Of course, many families simply collapse under this burden and dissolve into chaos. All of this exacerbates the problems in public education. Parents are too busy with making a living to invest much, if any time, into education of their children. Instead, they readily relinquish their responsibility to an institution that they are paying for through their taxes and that isn't interested in hearing from them in any case.

What can be done about the situation in education? Obviously, institutionalization of education isn't going to be quickly reversed though that should be a long-term goal. I don't necessarily propose that there should be no public role in education but education should at the least be put back under local control with parental oversight. I also believe that much could be done by changing the philosophy of education underlying most schools and teaching. I advocate for this in a separate piece on this site.

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