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Must Schools Hinder Education?

Lorraine Monroe

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Must Schools Hinder Education?

Cover Page Footnote

Lorraine Monroe is the Director of The Center for Minority Achievement at Bank Street College, former Chief Executive for Instruction at the New York City Board of Education, and former Principal of Taft High School in the Bronx.

MUST SCHOOLS HINDER EDUCATION?

Lorraine Monroe

From an administrator's perspectives, the answer to the question, "Must schools hinder education?" is an emphatic "no." However, in reality some schools hinder education by attempting to school children rather than educate them.

Schooling is what is given to children. It imposes schooling upon them from the first day they enter school until they leave either in cap and gown or in disgust and frustration. Schooling has the sound to it of: getting the basics because you have to pass the competency tests, the SAT's, the Regents...; getting the basics because you have to get a good job or position; and getting the basics because you must be prepared for real life and adulthood.

Education on the other hand, has the feel of the elegance of learning. Learning has to do with knowing for the enjoyment and challenge of knowing and gaining competency; it has to do with learning in order to explore ideas and interests to see where they lead and learning to discover how far one can go. It has to do with students coming to love a particular subject for no practical reason except that a "magical" teacher loves it or that the subject touches a spark waiting to be ignited.

Of course, administrators must see to it that their schools fulfill their primary function of teaching competency in the "basics," i.e. reading, writing, computing, speaking, and thinking; but when these basic teachings constitute skills and drills with no connection to each other or to children's past, present, or future lives, schools hinder education.

Administrative leaders who want to run schools that do not hinder but promote education must train their teachers to plan and to teach effectively so that the children in their charge learn the basics through a rich variety of experiences using many different techniques. Administrators who want education rather than schooling inform staff that the acquisition of basic skills gives children the self-confidence that comes from proven success or capability. Proven success frees children to choose to learn whatever they want on

their own which in turn develops a direct route to the pursuit of lifelong learning, one of the finest outcomes of education.

Administrators must release their staff to be innovative and creative. They must support staff with materials, time, space, encouragement, and a school climate conducive to teaching and learning.

Administrators of effective schools are visionaries and planners who facilitate education in their schools so that more teachers become committed to the worthy work of transforming the lives of children. This work is the fundamental function of the educational administrator.

Lorraine Monroe is the Director of The Center for Minority Achievement at Bank Street College, former Chief Executive for Instruction at the New York City Board of Education, and former Principal of Taft High School in the Bronx.