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Laurance Labadie
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1958

Retrieved 10/25/2021 from http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/labadie/LabadieEssays.pdf
From a carbon copy of the typed manuscript original, signed and dated November 9, 1958. Reprinted in *Laurance LaBadie: Selected Essays* (Libertarian BroadSides), James J. Martin, ed., Ralph Myles Publisher, Inc., 1978.

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Education—What For?

Laurance Labadie

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Discussions about education blandly assume the necessary existence of buildings, classrooms, teachers, pupils, and a curriculum. But education in fact is something which everyone acquires every day and hour in life. Everything we experience educates us in some way. That is to say, something impinges itself upon us, and there is an impression made which evokes some kind of reaction, with appropriate consequences, and the whole episode is recorded upon something we call our memory (whether conscious or subconscious), and probably is correlated with other impressions we have received. It appears to be an exceedingly complicated and mysterious phenomenon—education.

Be all this as it may, it almost never occurs in such discussions to suppose the complete abolition of formal or school-room education. Why indeed should this appear so silly? Of course it will appear silly to professional educators, but I am speaking about the rest of us.

Speaking for myself, much of what I learned in school I found out later was pretty much nonsense. But it was much more difficult to unlearn this stuff than it was to learn it. I had to unlearn it however before something sound could take its

place. Here was a terrific waste of effort which might have been avoided if I hadn't been "educated" in the first place. Moreover, the things I learned afterwards were things I was interested in and did not need to be disagreeably pounded into me. Most of what I "know" I got outside the schools, soaking much of it up in day by day contacts.

Frankly I really cannot see where I would have been much worse off, if any without any formal education at all. No doubt everyone has heard someone express the same idea at one time or another.

Specialization has gone so far as to erase versatility. Most of us are salesmen, or motormen, or executives, or nut-tighteners, and not much of anything else. Few of us stop to consider what's the sense of what we are doing and I suspect that at least three-quarters of what people are engaged in doesn't really amount to anything, if indeed it isn't downright pernicious.

I also have a suspicion that if formal education were abolished, there would arise in its place forums where people would get together to discuss things, to inaugurate laboratories to experiment with and test some of the ideas or theories which occurred to them, to construct things, etc. All in all a voluntary spontaneous developing of thought would arise to supplant much of that formal, dull, specialized caricature which is called the school system today. And who knows, maybe even teachers would get to know something themselves.

I have not too much difficulty in imagining that the inane, vacuous "conversation" which goes on when people get together in homes, cocktail parties, and the like would cease, if for no other reason that schools which educate us how to be stupid had ceased to exist.

Is anybody of even limited experience going to deny that the driest, dullest, boring stuff put into books is writ by professional educators? Considering their numbers, how many of the professional pundits can you name who ever really amounted to much?

I have listened to several radio programs dealing with the education question, by those in the educational system, and about all they could talk about with any vim and conviction was if only teachers would be paid more money. From the top to the bottom, college presidents to truant officers, what they couldn't do in the way of "education" if they weren't subjected to such stinginess in funds. They may be right, but somehow I developed a sour taste in my mouth.

Parents would appear to be the natural teachers of the child, but one wonders what would happen to filial respect when the alert, inquisitive mind of the child meets the vacuity of mind not uncommon among parents. The economic pressures which are causing the break-up of home life are not conducive to the education for sane living which some deem so important. It is no secret that kindergartens and some primary grades appear to be for the purpose of "keeping the kids off the street" or a place to stow them so that the parents might get a respite from the annoyance of the little brats. Truly the sins of the parents are visited down even to the fourth generation.

Before we go haywire pouring more funds into the education mills, I propose for serious consideration the complete abolition of the educational system, and contemplation of what would arise in the supposed void.