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AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

AFT QuEST '87

LUNCHEON SESSION

"SERVING STUDENTS' INTERESTS: THE REAL CHOICES

REMARKS OF:

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MR. SHANKER: A few minutes ago we heard a moving message from Mrs. Feinberg. And each and every one of you in this room, and I think all of the members of the American Federation of Teachers, would have been very proud of themselves and of the organization and its leadership had they been present a few days before the QuEST conference met.

These were days when the Executive Council of the AFT was meeting and we invited the presidential candidates this time of the Democratic party to meet with us. They all came. They worked out their schedules one way or another and came from all across the country, and each and every one of them spent a full hour with our Executive Council.

And as you might expect, when a candidate comes in to meet with the Executive Council of the American Federation of Teachers, most of their introductory remarks consisted of a statement indicating what each and every one of them will do for teachers and for education. That is good. We certainly wanted to hear that.

But I think we may have surprised those candidates, because when they spent their 10 or 15 minutes, first 10 or 15 minutes, giving their statements, we then

had a discussion and a question period. And one of the things that I am sure surprised each and every one of them is that the rest of that hour with each and every candidate was spent in discussing, what are you going to do about human rights? What are you going to do about America's productivity and competitiveness? How are you going to handle money situations? What are you going to do about cities and about farms and about all sorts of things?

And I am not sure about the views that those candidates had of teachers and of the American Federation of Teachers, in particular, when they came into that room. But when they walked out, I am sure that they felt very good that here was a group that, sure, was concerned with its own interests and its own needs, every group in this country ought to be, that is what democracy is about.

But here was a group that was interested in every aspect of America's being in the world. And as I listened to Mrs. Feinberg, I know that it would have been a special thrill for her to see candidates for the highest office in this country not only coming to us and promising us some things, but in a way being educated

themselves about what America's teachers were about.

Now, this has been a great conference. First, of course, there is just the size. The immense, huge, vast spaces that had to be occupied and the number of rooms. And then of course there is another vastness and that is that you can have a lot of these conferences and you can go from room to room, you have been to them and I have been to them, and sometimes there is a conference and there is not an idea in the whole hotel.

This one not only risked failure because people might not get in the rooms and get to the places where they were supposed to be because it was so huge in size. But we also took a chance, a lot of people out there said, don't throw a lot of heavy stuff out. People are not ready for that. Most people don't think too much. Be careful. Put out a lot of little formulas. That is what people want to go back with.

And this one, we took that other risk, was filled, crammed with complexity, rather than simplicity, with ideas, not just formulas. And I want to, I know, express your thanks and mine and all the teachers we are going to go back and talk to when this is over, all those school districts that we will affect and change as a

result of this conference. To thank Marilyn Rauth and her staff and Pat Daly for the hours, the weeks, and months of work and agony in putting this together.

Marilyn, we thank you. It was really great.

(APPLAUSE)

I know nothing this big or this good starts this way. We have been doing this for many years. In the old days we were lucky, if we made a lot of phone calls and twisted a lot of people's arms we would get 300 or 400 people to come.

And for a long time in between those conferences there were a group of people in our ER&D program and they met usually either just before or just after, and at times during the conference and then all through the year went out doing things in those schools that convinced many who are here right now, who did not realize that they had a great interest in educational policy or educational structure or issues or all these things we are talking about today.

I will bet if you take a look at all things on this conference agenda that you went to, if you asked yourself, was I interested in any of these things 10 years ago, and I include myself, there are not many of

us who were.

Well, we have got those pioneers among us here. They had a very nice reception the other night, and I want to give special thanks to the person who works with them, both here and around the country, year in and year out and that is Lovely Billups.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, Pat is right. I am probably one of top people with frequent flier awards. And as I have been going around the country, one of the things I have found is a lot of people are saying that they are waiting for Carnegie. When is the Carnegie National Board on Professional Teaching Standards going to be set up? When are they going to have their first assessment? When is the first person going to become a Board-certified teacher? When are they going to give us the plans for the new type of schools?

You remember "Waiting for Godot"? Well, waiting for Carnegie. People are waiting. It is just like in the old days when we started talking about collective bargaining, people thought that if you got collective bargaining, somebody would fly in from somewhere and solve all of their problems.

It was a metaphysical sort of concept. They did not realize that collective bargaining was something that brought people together and got them to do things themselves in a way which they could not do if they were merely individuals.

And reform and Carnegie are like that too. There is no point in waiting. There is no point in merely having teachers with another certificate or another stamp of approval.

The purpose of Carnegie is to transform the schools. To change the way kids are treated. To change the way teachers are treated. To change the way in which the entire educational process takes place.

When that happens we will have something powerful. We will be able to say, here are certified teachers, Board-certified teachers, certified by their own profession. And it will help us to identify certain people and to give them roles in schools that will change a lot of things.

But if we are just waiting, and if nothing else happens, this will all be very, very pointless. What needs to be done is being done by all of you. As I indicated a few minutes ago, two years ago we had many

sessions that were full of ideas. But we did not have very many places that were doing something exciting and very different and very daring.

And now we do. This conference, yes, we still presented a lot of ideas and a lot research people. That is fine. But it was crammed with workshops, with union people, and school board members, and principals, and superintendents who are doing things that were just outstanding, things that were unthinkable just a few years ago.

The transformation of American education is not going to be made by just stamping out certificates somewhere. It is going to be made school by school and district by district all across the country. And the people in this room are the leaders of that movement.

You are making it happen, not only in your own districts, but the word gets around. And one of the most exciting things of this conference was walking on the street yesterday in the evening and bumping into a number of people, leaders of local unions who are here with their superintendents or somebody from their boards of education, and I did not feed this to them but each and every group that I bumped into said, we learned a

lot and we have decided to go back and do this or that or something else or a number of these things.

That is the purpose of this, to bring people together who have gotten some terrific ideas and made them happen, to share them with others, and to get a movement going to transform education.

Now, a great deal has been accomplished over the last few years. The business community is more on-board than ever. In September, you are going to see a new report from the Committee on Economic Development. It is going to be wonderful, it is going to surprise you in terms of what it says, in terms of the commitment that it makes.

It is very important as the percentage, as parents as a percentage of the total population goes down, that we have additional allies in the political structure of this country. And the business community is a very important ally.

The governors continue their interest. Most of the, not all, some are not interested and some have economic problems in their states, but that is still important movement.

And of course the Carnegie Board, additional

names will be out in a very short time, and executives will be employed and that will start moving very, very soon.

Now, two years ago when I spoke here, the title of my talk was "The Danger of Not Having Ideas", the danger of not having ideas. And what I was exploring was the notion that we just sort of accept schools as they are and we keep going along and doing what we've always done, and we do not realize that if we don't come up with ideas of our own, that that is an open invitation to others to come up with ideas and to do it to us; that is, you can't constantly complain that others are telling us what to do unless we exercise leadership and say, "Look, we're on the inside, and we know what it's about, and these are the things that we think need to be done."

But in these two years, I think if I had to title this talk, that I would probably change it a little bit. The last time I talked about "The Danger of Not Having Ideas", and this time I would like to talk about "The Danger in Having Ideas". Because I have had a somewhat different experience in the last two years.

Now, one of the major problems that we face in American education is a very widespread and pervasive anti-intellectualism. We have always, not especially the people in this room, but I'm talking about all of our colleagues all across the country, and some of us. Over the years we have

always tried to defend education in a very strange way. We would say, you know, don't criticize us; it's not our fault because, basically, nobody really knows anything about education and, therefore, why blame us.

Somehow people thought that that was a brilliant way of defending the institution. Now, why anybody should feel that you're defending the institution by telling the public that's paying all those dollars for education that we don't know what we're doing, that they will somehow feel confidence in us if we say that, I don't know. But it's still out there. You can't blame anybody. You can't really say what's a better textbook.

As a matter of fact, it was this same sort of thinking that led a judge in Tennessee to say that a group of parents had a right to pull their kids out of class and have them read not what the class was reading or what the board of education or the state had decided, but to read whatever their parents had decided, because, as he said, you could learn to read with anything. So why have the school curriculum.

Now, two years ago, of course, we received here a very different message. E.D. Hirsch, who had not yet written his best-selling book "Cultural Illiteracy", was at a general session here in which he pointed out that you cannot really

understand other people in your own society and you can't read most things unless you have some common background knowledge that every writer assumes that intelligent people know certain things and they don't write every little bit of that background knowledge down, either in footnotes or right there. And so if you don't get that common background, you're really not going to be able to communicate and you're not going to be able to -- you're not going to be literate.

But as long as we take the position that it doesn't make any difference what we teach, as long as we teach children how to learn, that it doesn't make any difference what book they read as long as they learn how to read, this whole emphasis on process, saying that the content doesn't make any difference, as long as we do that, we're essentially right back to the old anti-intellectualism.

I recently came just a few weeks ago from a meeting of the Education Commission of the States. Here were governors, state legislators, leaders of teachers, administrators and colleges, and other organizations from all across the country, and I was on a panel dealing with this issue of cultural illiteracy -- what do people in our society need to know, what background knowledge do they need in order to have -- to be able to talk to each other and to be able to read.

There on my panel was a very prominent state legislator, the chair of an education committee, who stood up and said, "Gee, I never even heard of this book Cultural Illiteracy." Here it is number two on the Best Seller List. I said, "Don't worry. I was in a meeting yesterday with 100 principals and only two of them had heard of the book."

Well, it's pretty devastating. You cannot possibly imagine a book coming out by a prominent doctor saying that something you've been doing is all wrong and you're killing lots of people because you're using the following procedures. You couldn't possibly imagine a book like that being number two or three on the Best Seller List and 98 percent of the doctors not knowing that the book existed or that people in the country were reading it, or that they needed somehow to say that this man is right and we're going to change our ways, or he's wrong for the following reasons. So we have that problem.

Of course, we are here to share these ideas, to find out what they are, and to move out there and educate many of our colleagues to engage in a dialogue.

Now, the danger in having ideas. One of the things I found this year is, you know, it's very easy if you just say we believe in higher salaries -- and we do -- and we believe

in smaller class size, and we do, and we believe in collective bargaining. That's easy. Nobody can misrepresent you.

But if you start talking about complex ideas, if you start talking about how you're going to change the school and how the role of teachers will be different, how the role of management will be different -- perhaps you're going to use some technology and you're going to do other things -- then it is very, very easy for the other side -- in this case, the National Education Association -- to put out all sorts of things, so that I've had to run around more than ever answering people on different charges -- as John Gardner said, explaining, running all around explaining our position and our points of view.

Now, we believe that one of the most important developments is the Carnegie Board and the assessment which the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards is about to come up with. Therefore, I would like to spend a few minutes on this issue because many of you may think "well, there we are; AFT is there and the NEA is there, and there are some governors there, the Carnegie Foundation is there, the school boards are there, and a lot of people on that board, that now it's all done, it's great, the AFT proposed this a couple of years ago, and now this prestigious group has

met and it's going to happen."

Well, not so fast. It looks a lot better right now than it actually is, and there is very great danger that lurks there.

Now, the idea of the professional board is very simple. The idea is that in our society you get to become a professional if two things happen: first, you've got to have a knowledge base; people have to say we know things about our field that ordinary citizens don't know, and so they're going to come to us for the things that we know. You respect a doctor and a doctor is a professional because most of us believe that doctors can do a better job when it comes to health care than we can ourselves. Or you go to a lawyer or an architect because they know things and they've got these secrets which are theirs and which they have and which they don't share with us. We don't have them and that's why we go.

When teachers have a set of secrets, ideas, practices, which others feel are not generally spread among college graduates or just generally well-educated people, that we know something, that we understand things, that we do things in a way that's different because of our training and our understanding and our procedures and our processes, that is the

of the aspects that, one of the hallmarks, that will get them to say "You deserve special trust and special respect, and a special place in the making of educational judgments and decisions."

And there's a second piece to this, because it's not enough for us to know more than everybody else. The public also must believe that what we know we're going to use not for our own self-interest but that in every decision we make we will use that knowledge in the best interest of the client, of the student; that we're never going to decide to do something one way because it makes life a little easier. I mean, a doctor can say that's a messy procedure -- "It's likely to save him, but I don't like to do that, so I'll use this other procedure which is a little easier for me." If you had doctors like that, you wouldn't trust them. You wouldn't say they're professionals.

If you had a lawyer that said, "Well, this is really long and complicated, but you're likely to win that way, so I'm going to do it the easy way", you wouldn't trust him. So you have got to separate the self-interest from the clients interest.

One of the things we have got to do is convince the public that teachers are capable of doing things that are

sometimes in conflict with their self-interest. That's what Ted Sizer was talking about that first night. It was a very important that he raised that.

The reason that we're not setting up a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards by the AFT, or asking the NEA to set one up, or the school boards to set one up, or the principals or the superintendents, is that all of us are interest groups. There's nothing wrong with that. You need somebody to help elect good people in the Congress, the legislatures and governors and everything else. But that is not the same group that decides to certify teachers.

So what happened? The day the Carnegie was announced in San Diego in May, a spokesperson for the American Association of School Administrators said "This is horrible. The teachers unions of America have just taken everything over." That's what they said.

And what happened? Well, I said it's not true. You've got a separate board there, it has public members, the teachers who are on that board are there because they're outstanding mathematicians or scientists or English teachers or special education teachers, who are there by virtue of expertise -- with a few exceptions; I'm one, and Mary Futrell is another. We're there to essentially get organizational support.

But, over time, this will essentially be a board of professional practitioners.

Well, what did the NEA do? It has engaged in a process of trying to destroy the board. And it has done it in a number of ways. The first thing it did was to say that-- when the AASA said the teachers unions are taking this over, the NEA's response was "In a few years we will elect a majority to that board because we are a majority of the teachers." In other words, they were saying "That's right, we're taking it over, and it's going to be an NEA board."

The second thing they did at their convention was to pass a resolution which said that, in the future, any NEA member who goes on the board has to receive training from the National Education Association.

Now, imagine how demeaning that is -- first of all, how it undermines public confidence. You're going to put an outstanding physics teacher on there, but they can't go on there as far as the NEA is concerned unless the NEA tells them what to do and gives them training.

So one of the efforts to kill this is to undermine it in the eyes of the public and say this is not a professional board but it's just an extension of a teachers union.

The second thing in this multi-faceted campaign to

kill the whole thing is to say "well, that's nice that there's a Carnegie Board up there, but meanwhile, we're going to devote a lot of money towards establishing separate professional boards in each state." That's what they're doing in each and every one of your states now. They're going to the legislature and they're saying "Let's have a board in this state." So what they are trying to do is set up 50 separate state boards that will be, in effect, that will hire people to administer tests that will have -- it will have an examination, it will have the whole thing set up, before the national board has any sort of an instrument there, so that when the national board finally has something, the states are going to say "We don't need what you have nationally because we've already got our own thing."

Of course, in each of these states they're proposing laws which say that the majority teacher organizations shall be a majority on the board in this state. So, once again, it's not an effort to get a professional board. It's an effort essentially to get political control.

Third, the Association, at its recent convention, passed a resolution that said in no case shall a teacher who is certified by the national board receive any additional compensation or play any other role than any other teachers in

the school. Well, why would anybody go through all the trouble of paying for the money and studying for and taking a complex assessment like a bar exam or a medical exam, the equivalent of that for a teacher, if in advance it is said that they can't get any money for it and they can't do anything different in the school than they've ever done before? What's the whole purpose of it?

Now, by the way, I don't see how a national organization can tell its local organizations what to do. Local organizations have negotiated extra money for a Ph.D., extra money for a master's, extra money for college credits, extra money for all sorts of things. If you can get extra money for a master's degree, why can't you get extra money for becoming a nationally board certified teacher?

The worst part about the whole thing is that over the year I have faced several campaigns. I have gone across the country, and in both the NEA's national literature and local literature there is stuff saying that I am now against collective bargaining, that I'm anti-union. That's from an organization that still doesn't tell half of its own members that their in one.

(Laughter and Applause.)

Then they have got another one out that says I want to replace teachers with computers. I am looking forward two years from now to giving this address to 2,000 computers sitting before me.

And then I am told that I want to reduce the number of teachers, and I am in favor of merit pay, I want to increase class size, there it is. So one of the ways to prevent ideas is if you make it so difficult for a group that has new ideas by going around and misrepresenting what they are saying so that I have got to run all over the place putting out the fires.

They are really saying, listen AFT, if you are going to have any ideas we are going to go all around spreading rumors about what you are doing. They are false, but boy, we are going to keep you hopping all over the place. You are never going to catch up with all these things we are saying about you. So stop thinking new things and stop getting new ideas. Go back to the old slogans because otherwise we are going to make life so difficult for you that you will never catch up with all the things that we are saying about you.

And then we have got the business of information.

You cannot have an intelligent discussion about these issues unless people have information. The NEA has not distributed copies of the Carnegie Report, even to the delegates to its own convention.

So no one in the NEA is talking about what the Carnegie Report says unless they individually wrote to Carnegie and got a copy of it. Otherwise, what they are talking about is what they are fed by the organization.

Now, the other thing that happened to me this year was kind of interesting. I have been invited to a lot of places to talk about Carnegie. And I have spoken to school board associations, administrative groups, universities, teacher groups, some NEA groups as well.

At a lot of these places I got there and what did they tell me? They showed me a letter from the NEA saying that if you invite Albert Shanker to speak to you, we will have a picket line in front of your place and we will boycott the session.

Now, there are many places where they threatened, and I am sure I did not get invited. But there are a few places where the people had guts and they answered the NEA and they said, hey, you are supposed

to be a liberal organization. You are against censorship. If anybody tried to take a book out of a library, you would be yelling and screaming censorship.

Well, what do you think it is when a man who has got ideas that you do not agree with, and you do not want anybody to hear him? If you disagree with him, come here and tell him what you disagree with. But don't say that you are going to boycott listening to new ideas.

(APPLAUSE)

Now I think we have got some very important issues here about the National Board of Certification. And should teachers who get the certificate be paid more, and should it be a basis of a career ladder, and should we teach in teams once this happens, and all these other issues.

We are not unanimous on this in the American Federation of Teachers. We are here to discuss these ideas and we have got all kinds of different ideas. And it is great. There is a lot of ferment here.

I do not think these issues ought to be decided by Al Shanker. And I do not think they ought to be decided by Mary Futrell. These are issues that

will determine the future of the profession. These are issues that ought to be debated by every single teacher in this country.

These are issues that every single teacher ought to hear what Mary Futrell has to say and what I have to say and there is certainly a third, a fourth, a fifth, and other points of view.

They are issues that should not be decided on the basis of misinformation, on the basis of a lack of familiarity with the original sources, or a lack of familiarity with what the other side's point of view is.

These are very important issues. If we lived in another country there would not be any problem. In England there is a London Times Education Supplement, and in every school somebody is reading that and the word gets out.

In France, there is a national system. If you had the issue, you would have people in every school debating the issue. But our country is different. We have got decentralized schools. That is fine. We have got 15,000 separate school districts. We do not really have a national press.

There is no way in which educators are going to debate these issues on the basis of the news and the information that is out there. We have the ability to get to our members. They have the ability to get to their members. Their members do not know what we stand for and ours may not know what they stand for.

And therefore, I would like to extend an invitation to the National Education Association and to Mary Futrell. A sincere invitation, because I do not think that this is a decision that should be made from the top down. It should be made by the members.

I would like to invite Mary Futrell to address next year's AFT convention.

(APPLAUSE)

And to give her whatever time she needs to speak to our delegates on these issues of professionalism and Carnegie. And I will do everything in my power to see to it that she is cordially received and listened to and given a respectful hearing, provided, of course, that I am invited to the NEA convention.

(APPLAUSE)

To do the same thing. But that is not enough. Because that just means that I will be talking to their

delegates and she will be talking to our delegates. That is not the same as opening up the debate with all the teachers of America.

And so I propose that in each and every one of our newspapers that we give the NEA one or two pages to communicate with our members on these issues. Not to ask them to join us, not to say we bargain better, not to show this contract.

To talk about professional issues. The issues before us. And that they do the same, that they give us an equal amount of space to talk about the issues to their members. And that sometime at the end of this coming school year we have some sort of a national conference which is jointly held, where the people in this room would meet with those people in the NEA on the same issues.

(APPLAUSE)

Where the conference talks about them. Where different points of view are given equal time and are represented. And I would like to have C-Span there, and I would like to have people video-ing the thing so that when it is all over not only will the people in that room, but teachers and school board members and

superintendents and others all across America will be able to see it live, will be able to see it when it is done on cable later, or will be able to get the cassette and take it home and watch it during their free time.

I think that we ought to have a national debate on these issues, and they should not be made by top leadership. They ought to be made by all the people involved in education in this country. And that is the challenge we put to the NEA.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, why are we so committed and so involved? This is not a game. And we better take this seriously. A few weeks ago someone sent me a page from a newspaper on Long Island. And it was a big headline. It said, salaries up to, I forgot what it said, something like \$60,000. And then the subhead was, grade scores, student scores remain the same.

We are facing a possibility with all the, I mean, our own salary report shows that in recent years as a result of reform efforts that we have made great strides. But a backlash is possibly in the offing. People expected great miracles from these very simple reforms that they put in place, and they are not going

to get them.

But more than that, just a few months ago, and you may or may not have heard this, but one of the most important events in the history of public education in America took place in Iowa a few months ago.

Iowa passed a tuition tax credit bill. They tacked it on to the salary increase for teachers, so that the association in the state has a choice of opposing it, defeating it, and not getting their salary increase or getting the salary increase and putting in tax credits.

And they voted to get the salaries and to go for tuition tax credits. And so we now have a state, guess what that is going to do in your state next year, now that one state has it?

And what will happen when that goes to the Supreme Court, especially after the Supreme Court has a new addition? And it might not be 5-4 against, it might be 5-4 in favor of the idea that government funds can be used to support non-public schools.

So we are in a very dangerous situation of public education. We have got to view ourselves the same way as the auto companies and other industries that

are endangered. We cannot view ourselves as a protected monopoly. We are about to go into serious competition with religious and non-religious private schools in this country.

And if we do not have a school system that the American people like, they will go elsewhere. That is how serious it is.

Now, we have been talking about restructuring schools. And another aspect of this business of it is dangerous to have ideas is that when you get an idea like restructuring, which is a very powerful idea based on powerful analysis, it is very easy to kill it by turning it into a slogan.

Everybody is talking about restructuring. Everybody. And what do they mean by restructuring? They mean doing just what they did last year and the year before that and the year before that. They just put the label restructuring on it. And they go out and try to make people believe that they are really doing something different and they are about to change.

Well, that too is very unfortunate. Now, I would like to spend the remaining time with you talking about a vision of what is wrong and what we ought to do

about it.

And I have always got a problem at meetings like this. I do a lot of traveling. I do not create a special speech for an occasion because that is like what I said last week has already finished with and today there is a new agenda. That is not true. The agenda is the same as it was last week and five weeks ago. Agendas do not change every day.

So those of you who have been at a meeting where I spoke recently may have had parts of the same thing. It reminds me of the story of the Frenchman and the Japanese person and the American who were on a trip through the jungle and they were captured by some wild tribe.

And they were told that the custom of the tribe was that whenever foreigners captured them, they had only one hour to live. However, they had one wish that they could make and it would be fulfilled.

And the Frenchman said that before he died he wanted to have the opportunity of publicly standing up and singing his national anthem. And the tribe said that they would agree with his wish.

And the Japanese man said that before he died

he would like to get up and once more give the speech that he usually gives on quality control. And that wish was granted.

Then they got the American and said, what do you want, and he said, I would like you to kill me before I have to hear that speech on quality control again.

(LAUGHTER)

So I hope I am not putting you into that position. But if there are a few of you who have heard some of these things, there are many of you who have not. And I would feel very bad if I did not take this opportunity to share this picture with you.

First, let me start with, how well are our schools doing? And I think one of the great things about restructuring in our discussions is that we have stopped being defensive. The only way we can ever make progress is to say that there are some things we are not doing right. We do not know how to cure this disease.

If you do not start by admitting what you cannot do, you are not going to work at doing the things you cannot do and making them work or getting them better.

I know that everybody else attacks us, so we do not like to talk about these things. But let us talk about them for a few minutes.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress gives us a pretty good picture of what is happening in our schools. And very briefly, what is happening is this.

Almost everybody can read, is literate, if they can read an exit sign, if they can read stop, go. Practically all of them can open up a box. If it has got simple instructions inside, they can follow the simple instructions.

About 85 percent of the people who have graduated high school in this country can read a simple comic book or a very simple newspaper. By the time he gets to the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal or the Washington Post, you are down to about 35 percent or 36 percent of those who graduate high school. We are not counting the dropouts. Of those who graduate.

But then if you get a little bit tougher and say, how many can read an airline timetable or a railroad timetable, now please do not laugh at that because you might say you do not need to read an airline

timetable when you can just call the airline and ask what time the plane is leaving.

But reading an airline timetable means that these people really cannot look in a world almanac and look at the chart with figures about population or something else. They cannot get technical, simple technical information from a chart. So it is very important.

The percentage of 17-1/2 year olds about to graduate from high school who can read that simple technical information is under five percent, about 4.7 or 4.8 percent. Not very good. Remember, these are graduates. These are successful students and not the dropouts.

Mathematics, just about everybody can add, subtract, multiply and divide. Who can do a simple arithmetic problem that takes two steps? About 27 percent of those who are about to graduate.

Writing. Everybody can write something simple. But what percentage of the 17 year olds about to graduate can write a letter to a prospective employer, saying "Dear Prospective Employer; I know what you need; you need somebody who can handle money and somebody who comes on time and somebody who can do this because that's what the job is like, and I can do those things because here's what I did in my church, and here's what I did in my uncle's store, and here's what I did here. So here I am. You need me", or whatever, something that shows a little bit of critical thinking. Supporting evidence, a little bit of persuasiveness. What percentage can do that of those who are successful and about to graduate? Twenty percent. Twenty percent.

Now, I could go on. I'm not going to because the

bottom line is that we're educating somewhere between 15 and 25 percent of our youngsters not to the genius or creativity level, but to a level that one would consider necessary in our society, unless we're to reduce our standard of living and work the same number of hours and work for the same wages that Koreans do, or Taiwanese do.

That's the picture. You know, if you look at foreign countries, with the exception of Japan, it is hard to get comparable information, but it's similar, if you look at those who have gone to college, and in some of the Western European countries, anywhere between 15 and 25 percent meet certain standards.

Well, what does this mean? Does this mean that God only made 20 percent of the kids smart and we don't have to worry about the others? Or does it mean that we are doing something, not as individual teachers, but that schools are doing something because of the way that we're structured? If we had gone to General Motors or Ford or one of our auto companies 15 years ago and said, "Hey, how come you're turning out 35 percent lemons and you're recalling them", they would have said "that's part of mass production. You can't have mass production without producing lemons", they would have said.

Then along came the Japanese and they showed that you could have mass production -- not the same mass production. You had to do a lot of things differently, but it is possible to have mass production without producing lemons. As a matter of fact, you can do it and practically produce everything perfectly.

Is there something that we are doing, not consciously, but like doctors used to do when we went to them and they didn't realize they were supposed to sterilize their instruments and they killed us instead of saving us. Are we doing something like that?

Well, let's take a look at a few of the things that happen in schools. They're not our fault, but frequently teachers and kids are filled with anguish and with guilt because we feel that there must be something we're doing that's wrong and that's why these things are happening. But they happen because things are so automatic -- it's just like the business of knowing that you have to sterilize your instruments and wash your hands, but we haven't looked at it yet.

What are some of those things? I'll just touch on a few of them and then ask ourselves can we create a school, can we really change, really restructure a school so that it avoids all of these problems that I'm about to talk about which

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turn off kids and which get them to be unsuccessful, which get them to fail.

We take kids in on one day in September. We put them in the first grade. We get them to compete with each other, to read the same stuff, to do the same math work, to listen to the teacher talk at the same time. We get them all to do everything on the basis that they're all in the first grade and they're all six years old.

How do you get into the first grade? You get into the first grade by being born after a certain date. If you're born before that date, you wait until next year; if you're born after this date, you come in. So every one of these classes has one year of kids, and the oldest kid is a year older than the youngest kid, and one year makes a tremendous difference at the age of six. A kid who is a year younger and a lot smarter thinks he's dumb when he's competing with a kid who's a year older.

Why do we have to have schools that way? Well, of course, that's when the teacher start talking and that's when the course starts, so we've got to do it. Can we organize the schools so the kids are not forced to compete unfairly with each other? Because getting those two kids to compete with each other is a lot like getting a heavyweight boxer and a

lightweight boxer and putting them both in the ring and saying you're both fighters, go ahead. It's fair.

It is unfair, and the kids who are the youngest kids, most of them go through life with a lot of scars, and a lot of them later drop out.

The second thing we ask kids to do, we ask them to perform an unnatural act every day. We ask them to sit still and keep quiet and listen to someone else for five hours.

(Laughter and Applause.)

Then we're told that we're no good if we can't control them or that the kid who can't sit still and keep quiet for that period of time is a disruptive kid. Now, there are really disruptive kids who would be disruptive under any circumstances. But there is just no one in his right mind who, if they had to redesign schools today, if we were starting from scratch, who would start with the notion that you sit kids down and force them to sit still and listen to somebody for five or six hours a day.

The next thing, on the teacher in the class, you have done some work, I have talked to you, you have read something, and now I start asking questions. Some kids are great. They love school and they answer them all. Every time they raise their hands, their esteem goes up and all their

colleagues look at them. Most kids just feel great about it.

But at the other end of the room are kids who never know the answer. They're sitting there praying -- there is prayer in the schools -- (Laughter.) And they are praying that I do not call on them, and when I do call on them, they turn red or they stand up and the blurt out some answer that they know is not accurate.

What is happening to those kids? What is really happening? We don't think of it that way. I never thought of it that way in all the years I was a teacher. But a kid who is asked, morning, afternoon, next day, the next day, to get up when he doesn't have the answer is being publicly humiliated in front of his peers. How would anybody here feel at a union meeting, at a faculty meeting, if somebody asked you each time and each time you had no answer and you didn't know what it was about? Pretty soon you would stop going. I would. We all would. We would stop playing the game.

Now, there's a very common everyday occurrence. Is there a way of structuring schools so that when kids learn, especially when they're younger, that it doesn't have to be with everybody else watching? Is there a way of organizing a school so that learning, especially before a kid develops a sense of his own self-regard and self-esteem, they can do it

without having anyone, or maybe only one or two other people, see that it's kind of hard for them to learn.

By the way, if others can't see their rate of success, they can't see others, so they don't know if others are doing better or worse. Is there a way of doing that?

Then we ask kids to do something else. We ask them to have a character trait which very few adults have. How many people in this room, if you got your full salary check today for the year to come, would have any money when the 12th month came around? (Laughter.)

Well, I won't ask you to raise your hands, but that business of being able to realize that what you do every day has an impact down the line there somewhere is a very difficult thing for people to learn. And yet, when you have the annual promotion of kids, what you're really saying to the kid is "Hey, you're not going to find out until next June that what you did on September 6th, on September 7th, and September 8th and September 9th all has a cumulative impact on what is going to happen down the line." That is a very sophisticated piece of understanding that we expect kids to have.

Well, we do something else that's impossible. We not only ask them all to sit there and listen, but we also say

"Look, if you're not one of those kids who can learn by listening to words --" You know, the ability to listen to someone's words and have those words come in and create a picture in your head is not something that everybody has, especially at an early age.

Do we say to Johnnie and Mary, "If you can't learn by listening to me, I'm going to give you a videotape; maybe you can learn it this way". I'm going to give you a little game which has the same sort of ideas in it. Try that. I'm going to let you sit down with Joan there. Joan really knows how to explain this to other kids. She learned this last year."

Do we say that kids are different, that they learn all sorts of different ways, and we're going to give them the different ways to learn. We're not going to say you're stupid and you fail if you can't learn it in only the one way that we're using here, which is frontal teaching. We don't. We don't have the structure to do it. You can't do that with the way schools are organized now. How are you going to do that? You can't. But yet that's really the right way to do it because all these kids are not going to learn the same way and they're not going to learn at the same time.

Then we have this annual promotion, so we're faced

with a tragedy each year. What do you do? Leave a kid back? You know what that does to self-esteem. Move him ahead even though he hasn't learned anything, a reward for not having passed? That's no good. So we've got it organized in such a way.

Now, who says you have to have promotion, or annual promotion? These things have to be rethought.

Something else has to be rethought and that's the nature of the curriculum. Now, one of my favorite educational philosophers is "Father Guido Sarduci". (Laughter.) Father Guido Sarduci, in one of his roles, gives people a college degree and he says look, this is no joke. You get it for 300 dollars. You take all your courses in one day. You take your courses, then the examinations, and then we have the graduation ceremony. He says this is a real college education. I'll tell you how I determine my curriculum. I go out and I get all these college students who graduated two years ago and I find out what they have remembered two years after they've graduated. (Laughter.) That is the curriculum.

For instance, I find that the average person who has had three years of Spanish only remembers "como esta usted muy bien". (Laughter.) So if you remember that, you

get credit for three years of Spanish.

Then we go on to American history, you see.

Now, why is that funny? Well, it's funny because a lot of what we do in school is based on something that does not become a real part of the individual. They can memorize it for a little while and if you give them the test right away, and that's it.

For example, suppose we wanted kids to learn about birds; what would we do? Probably what we would do is get a bunch of flash cards and we'd flash them and we would get the kids to name the birds, and then we would get a chart and put that up there and maybe we would divide the birds into three groups -- there would be water birds, land birds and mountain birds and maybe we would have east, west, south and something else. Then we would get the kids to memorize all this stuff and give an examination.

What would be the result? Well, it would be at least two. One is the kids would get to hate birds (Laughter), and the second is they would forget them, you know, along with Father Sarduci's philosophy.

Well, how do the Boy Scouts manage bird studies? It's a little different. The Boy Scouts, if you want to get a bird study merit badge, you have to go out and personally

observe 40 different birds. Well, you pretty soon find that you can't see 40 different birds by going out to the local park. One of the things you will have to do is get up early in the morning, like 6:00 o'clock, and you've got to go to some swamp or lake or watering hole because a lot of birds can only been seen at that time. You're not going to get up that early and go out in the dark without one or two friends. So you find one or two friends and you go out.

As soon as you start seeing the birds through the binoculars, you very soon find out that when you see a bird through binoculars they do not look like a stuffed bird in a museum. You will see a tail that's moving in a certain way, or you will see a certain size, or a red crest, or a white stripe across the body. Those are called field marks.

You will have a book, and the three that you're with will start looking through that book and say "There it is. That's got a red crest" and someone will say, "No, dummy, that's only in Texas, look." That's cooperative learning, right? You will have a discussion.

You know something? I have never met a Scout who went through this process -- and it takes months -- who for the rest of his life did not enjoy looking at birds, who didn't say as he walked along "Look at that, that's this kind of bird,"

who didn't feel that he had a permanent sense of understanding a power and communion with nature, not the flash card business not this mechanical thing which you forget a short time later.

So one of the things that we have got to take on as a profession is are there ways of organizing the curriculum in such a way that what you get into becomes a part of you and not the kind of thing that two years later is absolutely gone. There isn't much purpose in stuffing people with a lot of things that disappear right after that, not much purpose at all.

Well, let me ask, how could we construct a school like that and give a little picture of it. There is a place -- and we have talked about it before; it's not an exact analogy, but let's think of it this way. Suppose for a moment, just as an exercise, that in schools teachers of the future are not permitted to lecture or speak to students, and suppose as an exercise we have the job, without talking to them, of getting them to learn all the important things that we're supposed to teach them. So the homework for today is develop a curriculum which gets kids to learn all these things without talking to kids. So they're now going to be working on their own.

Some of them are going to learn it by reading it in a book. Some of them will learn it by watching a videotape.

Some will listen to it on audiotape. Others will work with
older student who has mastered it.

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They will be doing it in different ways. It's going to look something like a Boy Scout troop, where there are 40 or 50 kids and they are all doing different things, and some are helping others and some are learning from a book, and there is never a lecture to the entire group. There will be a team of adults.

Now, we don't know if this can work or not; I know Boy Scouts is voluntarily. I know, people quit the Boy Scouts too; and they drop out; but let's think for a moment of what this does. The kids are learning individually, so nobody else sees how long it takes them to learn; so you've got the privacy. They don't have to sit still and be quiet all the time. They can learn one thing with a book and another thing with an audio tape, and another one with a video tape, another one some other way; so there's a certain amount of variety and naturalness. They are not jailed and in their seats constantly.

They are not asked, humiliated in front of the group. It is private. From time to time you have some big competition where you put every kid in some position where he can look great. Whatever he can do, that's the role you put him into. Just the way you put somebody on a baseball team; you would not put him in the worst spot where he'd do a lousy job for the team and for himself. Think of what this does in some other ways: No unfair competition. In this sort of a school, kids could enter

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on their birthday. They don't all have to enter the same day because the machines are there and the other people are in there tutoring.

Teachers, because they're not lecturing, can now do things that are totally different. One, you can give these kids ideas as to the best way you think they should approach it; just like a doctor says, "Hey, I'm not sure this will work, but try this first; and if that doesn't work, come back here and I'll suggest something else." You are then the prescriber.

But more than that, because you are not busy lecturing and because most kids who are doing, working on something that they enjoy more than sitting and just listening, you have now got the time to do coaching and critical thinking; you can mark the papers; you're not locked in a self-contained classroom by yourself; you've got contact with other adults and colleagues.

All of the things that we are talking about here -- are we ever going to get the time to spend with our colleagues if we have to hire another million teachers to provide the time? Are we ever going to get the ability to mark those papers and coach kids individually if we still have to find still another

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million teachers?

I mean, there are two and a half million teachers. To get the time to talk to each other, to get the time to do the planning, to get the time to coach individuals, to get the time to mark papers -- it's like Everett Dirksen, he said, "A billion here, a billion there, pretty soon you're staring to talk real money." And it's not even money that we're talking about.

We are in a period of demographic decline. Everybody is going to want college graduates for all sorts of other things. My proposal is that the answer to our professional problems is to abolish the self-contained classroom and the classroom as we know it.

(Applause.)

To abolish a single mode of teaching, and to acknowledge that students have different rates, different styles and different roads. The end is the same; this isn't the '60s. We are not going to say to the kids, "Anything you like, you do." No. "You're going to read, you're going to read good books, we're very concerned about the content and about the goals, but there are a lot of different ways of doing it."

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We will liberate teachers, we will give students privacy, we will take them out of unfair competition, and furthermore, we will do something else, and that is we will look for ways in which students who aren't so fast at learning can play a role in the school in order to show that, you know, these people are going to play roles in a democratic society whether they get high marks on the SAT scores or not.

To go back to a Boy Scout analogy; in the Boy Scouts you do not have to pass all your tests to be a patrol leader, a scribe, a leader of a hike, a leader of an athletic team. We need to find all these other roles for all these students.

Now, it solves the collegiality problem. If you've got a team of adults working with these kids, and if in that team you have one or two or three outstanding, board-certified teachers, why do you need assistant principals or other supervisors down the hall?

(Applause.)

Now, you see, teaching now is not standing in a self-contained -- the problem we have is, is the lead teacher going to be in the classroom? Then what are you leading? You are doing everything you did before with the kids. Are you

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out of the classroom? Then you're an administrator. As long as you have the classroom, lead teacher doesn't make much sense. But if there isn't a classroom, if there is a team of adults in which two or three of them have an awful lot to contribute, and they're so good that nobody from the outside has to come in to inspect them.

The leadership is right up front; it's right in your own team. What's happening now in industry is basically they are shaping up by taking the people away -- look, if you take all the good people out of the classroom and put them into management, that's kind of stupid. Because what you are doing is taking people that you need on the front line. We have always talked about that.

So you have these self-contained teams. Now let's talk about, would we have as many disruptive kids if a kid didn't have to sit still and listen all day long, but if he had seven or eight different ways -- we'd still have some, but you know something? If you are lecturing, a kid can disrupt easily because it's very easy to make noise and to do something which takes everyone's attention away from your lecture. But if you've got 50 kids and they're doing all sorts of different things, working with another individual, working with a computer, working with a videotape, reading something, it's very difficult

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A kid would practically have to blow up a bomb or start a fire in the classroom in order to disrupt.

They may make noise, but there are a lot of noisy people in the New York subway and I can still read my newspaper. Disruption is different if you're disrupting a lecture or an opera or a theatrical performance. It's quite different, if everybody's doing his own work.

The kid who drops out can drop right back in to this school at any time. There isn't a semester, there isn't a lecture, the kid has made a mistake; he went off with some friends. She found a boyfriend, they went to Fort Lauderdale together; it didn't work forever, they come back, they go right back to the computer, the tutoring, the videotape, the audio tape, and everything else.

Parents, and volunteers in the schools. We haven't liked them. Why not? Well, nobody can help me if I'm talking to the kids all day long. If I'm talking to the kids and you're an outsider who walks in, you're disturbing them. They might look at you instead of listening to me. Or worse, you might be present when some kid blows up and I can't do anything about it, and you may go out and say it was my fault.

There isn't anything that most parents or volunteers

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can do in a classroom when the basic thing is that the teacher has to be the performer, with the undivided attention of the class. But if you've got kids doing all sorts of different things; engaged, involved, immersed in their own learning, there is no parent who can't come in and help one of those kids. You can teach those parents to help kids at certain things that kids always have problems with.

They can become helpful, just as parents are in Boy Scout troops and Girl Scout troops and clubs and things of that sort. So there are all kinds of things that come together with this.

Now the basic thing we've got to get away from, and somebody I bumped into yesterday said "Yes, but you know these kids are going to be a lot freer to move around; what about the custodial function of the schools?" And that is what we have to come to grips with. That is the basic issue here.

Our schools have two basic functions. One is custodial and the other is educational, and whenever there is a conflict between the two, we tend to say the hell with education, we will do the custodial function. And if we are professionals, we are about to say the very opposite.

I want to share with you two experiences that I

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had in camps that deal with this very issue.

How many of you ever worked in a sleep-away camp? Summer camp where the kids are staying overnight? All right. Let me tell you, the most difficult time in the day is called "rest hour." Now, what is rest hour? Rest hour comes right after lunch, and every kid is told that he is tired or she is tired and he or she must stay on the bed and be pretty quiet for a whole hour. Write postcards, read letters, play checkers or chess, or be quiet.

They are told that it is because camp is so exhausting -- now, the kids know that we are lying to them.

(Laughter.)

We are lying. Now, what is the real purpose of rest hour? The counselors are exhausted, and most of them have to go into town; and so you have one counselor taking care of a whole house where it used to be five. Now some time ago, some genius felt that the easiest way for one counselor to take care of the same number of kids that five or six take care of is to force all the kids to be on their beds for one hour.

Now what genius ever thought that up, I don't know. What happens during the day? The kids love the counselors.

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They are in athletic programs, they are in shop, they are doing arts and crafts, they are doing dramatics; but now the kids are there and they are getting off their beds, and they are making noise, and I'm worried that the camp director is going to see that I can't control those kids. And so I start yelling at them and I start saying, "Johnny, no canoeing for you tonight." And "Mary, no desert tonight." And all the good will and all the relationships disappear.

Rest hour would be more restful if the kids played football. It would be more restful if they went into a recreation room and listened to rock records. If you gave them three or four choices, it would be more restful.

The notion that the best way to get control of people is to force them all to do the same thing at the same time is not very smart. But that is the basis of classroom instruction and classroom discipline: To get people to do things the same way at the same time is almost an impossibility. That's why great choruses are viewed as a form of artistic genius for the kind of teamwork that you have. It's very, very difficult.

I had a second experience at a different camp. This is a day camp; the kids stayed with their mothers and

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fathers in the hotel and bungalows. In the morning we would come down and pick them up, and all day long we took care of the kids. At night we took them back to their parents.

What happened? The first or second day of camp, one of the campers wandered back to his mother; and she was playing cards at the main house. And what did mother think? She said first of all -- I don't know if she thought it in this order, but she certainly thought: "I'm paying for this?" You know, "I'm paying to have the kid taken care of."

But the other thing she thought was, "There's no supervision here. They don't know where my kid is. My kid could have drowned; he could be at the bottom of the lake; he could have been bitten by an animal. They have not told me that my child is missing."

So what happens? She then says to all the other parents: "Do you know where your child is? I know where mine is, but they don't." And hysteria through the camp. So there's a meeting of all the counselors, and the counselors are told that in this world, there are basically two types of children: Good kids and wanderers.

(Laughter.)

And Al, when you hand your three or four kids over

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to the other counselors, you should always point out who the wanderer is, and the rule is that no camper in this camp is ever allowed to be more than 10 feet away from any counselor. That's a true story.

Now what happened? What is camping about?

Outdoors, nature. You can walk down the road with a friend, you can pick flowers, you can look for frogs, you get a bunch of buddies and sit in the middle of the woods and sing songs. You can play hide and seek out there with the trees, the bushes and everything else. All of a sudden, it's become a concentration camp, because the custodial function became more important than the purpose of the institution.

That's the problem that we've got. Now, all of the things I just said are even more true for reaching black and Hispanic youngsters, or large number of whites as well. The ability to sit still, keep quiet, and learn by listening to someone is highly concentrated, and the children of those who have already done it, and done it well.

That is, if you have been to college already, you are likely to give your kids the skills to be able to do that. To develop a school in which children are protected and in which we find their strengths, in which they are not humiliated.

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at an early age, in which the fact that they're moving a little more slowly than somebody else is not immediately seen; in which we give an opportunity for them to develop their belief in themselves is extremely important, because this current system gets them to give up very, very easily.

Well, is this the only way to do it? No. Do we have a problem with humiliation? Do we have a problem with -- the problems are there. If you've got another way of doing it, another image, another plan, think of the other plan. But this is the kind of thinking that we need to engage in if we are going to talk about restructuring.

We have got to talk about what happens to kids in schools, what happens to teachers? Tell a teacher to keep 30 kids quiet and still for five hours and then make the teacher feel guilty; "If you can't do it, there's something wrong with you." That's idiotic.

We are asking ourselves to do the impossible, and then we're blaming ourselves for not doing the impossible.

(Applause.)

Now there are other ways, I'm sure. And what this process is about is to think about them. Don't take this: these are some thoughts I'm sharing. It is presented to you

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in order to give a picture of I think the kind of thinking that we have to engage in if we're going to talk about different kinds of schools.

Now, what are we doing? Some people are saying, What about the union? And I would just like to conclude by saying that this union is not new to the intellectual life; charter member number one was John Dewey. George Counts was president of the American Federation of Teachers. And if many unions in this country started because they wanted to prevent exploitation, there's more than one kind of exploitation and more than one kind of suffering.

Yes, you're exploited if you make very little money, and you certainly have a terrible life if you are in a coal mine that's unsafe and dirty and damp and cold. But the conditions that we work in are a form of exploitation as well; and for us to be involved in transforming these conditions is very much in the tradition and at the heart of the trade union movement.

We are not abandoning unionism; as a matter of fact wherever reform moves forward, where we have strong unions and where we have collective bargaining, teachers can feel a sense of power; they don't have to feel that they're going

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be taken advantage of; they know that they're strong enough to prevent any betrayal by the other side. And in those places where there is no collective bargaining, teachers understandably and justifiably are a lot more wary. They say, "Why should we get into these things? Because if we get into them and you unilaterally want to hurt us and change them, we won't have the power to do it."

We are not abandoning unionism, we are furthering it. And we are furthering it by taking those things that most affect our members, and we've decided to campaign for a major transformation in our lives and in the lives of the children who we teach.

(Applause.)

(Standing ovation.)

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