

POINTS OF VIEW

Educational miracles do exist in smart schools

I kind of dragged myself to the Southfield offices of Channel 7 early Tuesday morning.

They were previewing a show on education, which they're promoting as "A Landmark Television Event that will change the way we think about education in America." It's called "Common Miracles: The New American Revolution in Learning."

Yeah, yeah — sure, I thought ready to see more of the same. Ready to see visions for education that somehow, be it lack of money, powerful unions, bureaucratic stagnation or giving up, will be just one more addition to the pile of unimplemented solutions.

These visions would fail to show administrators how to get from here to there, how longtime teachers can adapt their styles to what is now called for, and how parents, whether educated or not, can fit into the picture.

But I was wrong. While I watched, I'm sure I grew a

new dendrite — that, I learned from the program, is a new part of my brain — and you can too. Just gather your family around the tube at 8 p.m. Saturday night for a one-hour "American Agenda" Special from ABC News with Peter Jennings and education reporter Bill Blakemore.

Together, you can watch how successful schools in suburbs and inner cities across our country deliver education. And plug for yours to do it, too.

The common theme of these schools, developed pretty much separately by each: it's not how smart you are but how you are smart.

It's recognizing seven different kinds of intelligence — not just verbal and mathematical.

It's changing the role of a teacher from lecturer to mentor and broker of information.

It's using computers as assistant teachers. It's involving parents "in education,



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parents are gold," and business through apprenticeships and courses on site.

It's learning from each other — called cooperative learning (no more is it cheating).

Most of all it is the belief that all children will learn.

And how very sweet — and exciting — it is. Now I wouldn't take my word for it. After all, journalists these days are in

disrepute. They dig too deep, or not deep enough; they have no compassion or they become too much a part of the stories they cover; they come with preconceived notions so they don't hear and see what's really happening.

But the people gathered around the Channel 7 conference table were excited too — and most were educators, not journalists.

Mary Vertrees, a counselor from Salem High School in the Plymouth-Canton school district, said flat out "This is one of the best things I've seen." She could hardly wait to get the word out in her district. "It instills a sense of hope."

Rosalyn Whitney from the Detroit Public Schools requested "as many brochures as you can give me."

Gloria Grady-Mills, statewide coordinator of the Michigan Adult Literacy Initiative at Oakland Community College, pointed out that the program

shows teachers how their skills can fit in.

And, I'm not sure who said it, but it really doesn't depend so much on dollars.

The timing is on target. If there were ever great expectations, it's now. It's like we've come fresh into a new era, where it's important to give more than lip service to change.

And the change we need above a tax cut, above universal health insurance, perhaps even above jobs — is a massive, immediate change in the way we deliver education.

It's seems so simple. If we can give each child the means to develop to her or his full potential, it will benefit us all.

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With war in equation, conclusion is forgone

The times they aren't a-changing. So it now seems, with the Bush administration participation in a renewed Al-Itied bombing campaign against supposedly justifiable targets in Iraq.

"Two years after our alcheming "victory" in the Persian Gulf, Bush just can't seem to leave horrifying enough alone. His actions and continued manipulation of a country that does not belong to him appear comparable to that of a spoiled child who, upon receiving a gold bracelet, screams, "N-NO! I wanted 24 karat, not this 18 karat imitation!"

Realizing that his effort to test new weapons, re-instill patriotism in the nation, protect oil interests, and raise his popularity ratings (a phenomenon known to most as the Gulf War) resulted in failure, namely in Kurdish and Shiite humanitarian disasters as well as massive civilian deaths, ol' Bushie looks desperate as he takes one final nose turn toward the sky at his rival Saddam Hussein before leaving office.

Nineteen civilians perished in the recent bombing that occurred as the supposed result of continued Iraqi defiance. What do we expect, for them to always comply with our insatiable demands? If

they did, we might as well colonize Iraq as the 51st state. Bellicose Bush now has more blood on his hands, and these were civilians. Innocent civilians. Nineteen living, breathing, loving human beings with a true leader in the fight for humanitarianism. Does the fact that they were Iraqis soften us up a bit? Just possibly?

The United States, as the leader of the free world, must end its violent, imperialistic campaigns around the world and become a true leader in the fight for humanitarianism, not Manifest Destiny II, which seems the current jingo-like policy spearheaded by the fortunately departing Bush administration.

Somalia exists as the perfect example of what the military could involve itself in: the delivery of food shipments to impoverished nations and furthering the advancement of altruistic projects intended to actually assist another nation in need, not merely assert our own interests and depart, leaving a country to clean up our mess. We tried that after World War I, and look what happened.

Granted, our soldiers should not bear arms in these projects (defense with plastic, not-fatal bullets or tranquilizer guns



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might be feasible) and should work in harmony with organizations such as UNICEF and the Red Cross, not the CIA.

War cannot ever receive justification on any basis whatsoever. Violence is not an inevitable consequence of human nature unless we allow it to be. For the same reason that humans can become vegetarians, people can abrogate violence and war absolutely and finally. We were not born carnivorous; now we have abandoned to the point where one can sustain oneself on a herbivorous diet and actually improve his/her health.

Similarly, humans are not violent by

nature. Of course our ancestors hunted for meat and had war, but now the time has arrived where none of this appears necessary at all.

"If we want to reduce drastically, or remove, reliance on war and other types of violent conflict, it is necessary to substitute a nonviolence counterpart to war, 'war without violence,' by which people can defend liberty, their way of life, humanitarian principles, their institutions and society, at least as effectively against military attack as can military means," wrote Gene Sharp in his essay "Making the Abolition of War a Realistic Goal."

The Army can become a civilian-based nonviolent institution with aims to assist in efforts such as relief for Hurricane Andrew victims and Somalia (but without guns); two classic examples of what the military should exist solely for.

Part of the reason war occurs stems from our desensitization to violence through television, movies, and military-censored news reports such as those during the Gulf slaughter. I grew up blowing up planes and shooting people on my Atari and later Nintendo like many my age without a second thought. This same

phenomena threatens to numb the next generation to similar atrocities, and the technology only improves year by year. Something isn't right!

Do you have a favorite song, poem, or work of art that stirs your soul, that you have a truly visceral interest in?

Once at a concert I experienced a similar revelation. The band began to play a song most knew as their most popular and best song.

I had the fortunate experience of flying above the crowd, supported by hands of people I'd never seen a day in my life. But unfamiliarity with one another had no relevance; what mattered was the mutual love, constructive efforts toward a common goal, a goal in which each person had a common link.

What we need is a nationwide concert to realize that myriad evils that occur in the world are completely unnecessary. If we take the same commitment to abolishing war and violence, all will benefit.

As long as we accept war as inevitable, we enslave ourselves and future generations.

LETTERS

Against the clock

I am writing in response to the proposal by the DDA and the 125th Anniversary Committee to install a clock tower on property owned by the Masonic Temple at the northwest corner of Grand River and Farmington Road.

As someone who was born in Farmington and who has fond memories of that building going back to when the public library was lodged there, I want to state my strong opposition to this latest plan.

I suspect that I am not alone in this reaction. Perhaps another use for the money can be found which would not interfere with the appearance of one of Farmington's most unique sites.

Judith A. Cook, Farmington

'Less is better'

Regarding the article in the Jan. 15 Observer — "Downtown Clock Tower Right on Schedule" (or "Wzaczny's Folly" as I would name it) — I would like to express my thoughts.

The Masonic Temple on the corner of Grand River and Farmington Road stands out like a jewel and a reminder of the past.

The corner needs no enhancing. Less is better. This corner does not need a 34-foot, 6-inch clock tower to distract from the simplicity of the Masonic Temple. The height and mass increase with every description I read or hear.

Whatever is done with this corner should be done low key and also low in height, as it is now. Let nothing detract from this lovely building.

Built in 1876, it is on the Register of National Historic Places. The Masonic Temple has been a landmark for people traveling Grand River ever since the horse-and-buggy days.

Farmington's overloaded with clock towers — one in the Village Commons, one in front of the Motro Bank and another in the downtown center.

Also, when you display a clock you have a responsibility to see that it shows the correct time. The Motro Bank Clock is the only one that was correct the last time I looked. Who will

be charged with keeping the new clock accurate?

From what I have seen of the plans for this corner, there is also planned a three-tiered concrete flower bed to be planted with perennials. What does this concrete planter look like from October to May? Not too inviting to my way of thinking.

I fail to see the point in Wzaczny's sentence "the clock is symbolic to maintaining history and tradition in the city," and pointing to Rome and Florence with similar vertical elements — ho-hoy!

Italy has space around its towers to balance their vertical elements. A 34-foot tower in this cramped space would be overwhelming.

In the Masonic Temple you have a fine example of Victorian and French Renaissance architecture, second to none. To downgrade this with a massive modern structure denigrates the focal point of Farmington's downtown.

Nancy Leonard, Farmington

Clocks and clutter

What clock tower? Why didn't the architectural drawing accompany the article? 34 feet high? Has anyone looked at the skyline at the intersection of Farmington and Grand River? We need less clutter there, not more.

At least we can still admire our long-recognized Masonic Building while waiting for the light to change. A clock "plaza" conjures visions of a barren cemented square with a harsh-looking brick pillar supporting a clock too high to see from a car window and badly out of proportion to the limited area at its base.

Would this just be a marketplace corner to accommodate flea market vendors once a year? Why visually disturb the only "openness" we have left at our main intersection? How can a contemporary brick structure (and electronic sign?) be "symbolic to maintaining history and tradition in the city" and "a testament to the success of the 125th celebration."

Tradition in Farmington should be maintained by reminders that we are an old city with lots of history and not a glitzy suburb.

Betty Borgman, Farmington

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