

School's Out and It's Time to Revamp Education

This past weekend, I watched the original version of [*Red Dawn*](#), the movie about a joint Soviet, Cuban, and Nicaraguan invasion of the United States. A group of teenagers escape to the mountains and resist these invaders. After their first skirmish in which they kill three Russian soldiers, a girl seated by the fire says, "Things are different now."

That statement is true for our country right now. Indeed, things may never be the same.

This is not necessarily a bad thing.

One aspect of American life that could take a radical turn for the better is education.

For years, that system has been broken. Many high school graduates are functionally illiterate, and many first-year college students must take remedial courses because of their lack of academic preparation. Students graduate from college burdened with debt that takes them years, sometimes decades, to repay. Moreover, many of our secondary schools and universities have become propaganda machines for Marxism and identity politics.

The coronavirus has now closed those schools. This closure has forced parents to teach their children at home and has pushed students of all ages into the world of distance learning.

Though few of us enjoy this social isolation, quarantine offers us the chance to pause and rethink the way we educate our children, to step outside the system and reimagine ways we might enhance learning.

It's likely many parents will realize that homeschooling is

not only doable, but also gratifying. Mom may find she enjoys eight-year-old Emma reading aloud beside her on the sofa. Nine-year-old Johnny, who lives down the block and has never liked school, is now thriving under the tutelage of his parents, and has asked his dad, who works from home, if he can keep homeschooling next year.

Many parents who are now teaching their children at home, or who are overseeing the lessons sent to them by teachers, may also find themselves wondering why their children spend six to eight hours a day in school when they are finishing their lessons in half that time or less at home. Is much of the school day a waste of time?

Once the coronavirus pandemic recedes, distance learning at the postsecondary level will also have found a larger audience. As Sam and Julie complete their university work for the spring semester of 2020 on their computers, watching lectures by their professors, studying the assignments in their textbooks, and taking their exams, they and their parents may wonder why they are paying mega-bucks to go to a brick-and-mortar college when they could earn a degree online for a fraction of the cost. It's true that colleges and universities do offer more benefits than just academics – lifelong friendships, for example, can be born on the campus – but at what cost?

Recently, several [medical schools](#) in the Boston area graduated their fourth-year students early so that they might join the fight against coronavirus. This laudable decision raises a question: Why do students need to spend so much time in our universities?

Why, for instance, does John need four years to complete a degree in accounting? Why must Sally spend ten or more years on her undergraduate degree, her M.D., and two or more years in a residency? Why does Jack need to study for seven years to become an attorney?

All of these programs, and others, could easily be truncated. After World War II, my father returned from fighting and decided to become a doctor. Because the country needed physicians, he took the fast track, earning his degrees in six years rather than eight. If a young person today enters college knowing she wants to be a doctor, why not speed up that process?

Some might argue that to shorten and narrow the requirements for a degree might leave a graduate less well-rounded. That young man who majors in engineering should be exposed to literature and history. That nursing student should know a little about poetry and politics.

I would agree. But universities could offer compacted courses in the humanities, courses, for example, in which students simultaneously study American history and literature. When I taught seminars to homeschoolers, I used this combined approach with great success. When we studied the Civil War, we also read Michael Shaara's great novel about the Battle of Gettysburg, "[The Killer Angels](#)". When we learned about World War I, we read poetry from those who experienced the war firsthand in "World War One British Poets."

Besides, if our elementary and secondary schools did a better job of teaching students reading, writing, math, literature, and history, students who then wanted to enter the STEM fields would have already received a healthy dose of the humanities. They would leave high school with a real education and an understanding of culture, civics, and history.

Finally, all of us – parents, students, and educators – might take this time of seclusion to ask ourselves some fundamental questions: "What is the purpose of an education? What is the reason for all these years of study? And why are so many students coming up short?"

In this one regard, the coronavirus is a blessing in disguise.

We have the opportunity to revamp our educational system and undertake an approach to learning that prepares young people to tackle the world.

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