"We must get the government off our backs" is a catch phrase that captures the social philosophy currently dominant in the United States. There is less wrong with what this view encompasses than with what it leaves uncovered. Merely cutting back government will not set America on a course of recovery unless these efforts are coupled with a period of reconstruction—of family, schools, neighborhoods and nation, and above all, of individual renewal.

With the words above, Amitai Etzioni, a former White House adviser for the Carter administration and currently a professor at George Washington University, introduces his recently published book, An Immodest Agenda: Rebuilding America Before the Twenty-first Century (McGraw-Hill), in which he warns that if we hope to restore America's economic, social, political and ethical vigor, and if we expect to achieve this through decreased government intervention in our lives, we are going to have to take more responsibility for ourselves and for one another, "to be less preoccupied with self and more with 'us.'"

What does this "period of reconstruction" entail? Etzioni calls for an end to the kind of excessive individualism and "ego-centered mentality" (characterized by the "do-your-own-thing" proponents of popular psychology) that sets self fulfillment above all else, including family, other people and community. What's needed, he says, is a better balance between ego and other, between individualism and community-mindedness—what Etzioni refers to as mutuality—as well as a resurgence of civility—a willingness to play by the rules and to become involved in commonweal concerns. "All said and done," Etzioni exhorts, "citizens will have to become less private, more public, more actively committed and involved in the shared concerns of the community."

The family, being the first educational institution—and the place where mutuality is first experienced and civility is first taught—is the key to reconstruction, says Etzioni. Its ability to educate, particularly to develop personality and character, affects all the institutions that follow (schools, community, the workplace). But right after the family come the schools, "the second educational institution," and they, too, says Etzioni, are in need of reconstruction, "although hardly for the reasons usually given."

What follows is the first article of a two-part series in which Etzioni suggests the real reasons many (though far from all) American schools have failed in their first duty: to educate.

It is a commonplace to suggest that American schools are a diminished, hollowed institution. Reports abound of rampant violence, drug abuse and alcoholism; of teacher "burnout"; of disappointed parents and resentful taxpayers; of declining test scores; of both long delays in adopting new teaching materials and methods (said to require a generation) and a rudderless pursuit of unproven fashions in the teaching of subjects from math to reading.

My readings of the data on school performance suggest that the criticisms of schools are, on the one hand, too sweeping, and on the other hand, misfocused. A nationwide study of the scope of violence in schools, for instance, conducted for Congress by the National Institute of Education, indicates that violence and highly disruptive behavior are concentrated in only about 15 to 20 percent of the schools, mainly inner-city public schools.

The lament of declining reading, writing and other school achievements, as well as declining SAT scores, has reached the level of cliche. However, the low point may well already have been passed, with both local and national scores slowly starting to mend. This is not to deny that scores are low nationwide compared to other advanced countries, and that whatever improvements are discernible began at rather low levels. Still, these data do not show that young Americans are functionally illiterate, or that "Johnny can't read" or "can't count," or that, as John R. Silber, the president of Boston University, put it, "Today's high school diploma is a fraudulent credential." Such statements and many similar ones about schools in general are much too sweeping. It is bad enough that maybe as many as half of the nation's schools do not function effectively; we need not go beyond that and declare that the schools in toto are failing.

Aside from being too broad, the criticisms commonly focus on the wrong issue. Cognitive learning is the preoccupation of most school critics. The continuing expose of why Johnny can't read, for example, not only overstates the cognitive deficiency of young Americans but rests on the assumption that the schools stand or fall on their ability to teach cognitive skills.

This cognitive preoccupation is revealed both by those who urge that kids not be graduated, nor promoted from class to class, unless they demonstrate "minimum competence" in certain skills, and by those who oppose such educational policy on the ground that it is biased against minorities or enforces an all-too-low standard. It is the focus of those who favor a "core" curriculum as it is of those who favor plenty of electives; of those who see salvation of reading in the use of phonics as of those who advocate "sight reading." It sustains the proponents of "mastery learning" and modular, of new math and old, and so on through all the various teaching panaceas.

Character Formation, Mutuality and Civility

In evaluating the status of American schools and contemplating reconstruction, the first criterion I suggest we ought to use is contribution to personality development, to character formation. This requires special attention to school-generated experiences, which educate young Americans in the broadest sense.
A significant proportion of the children who enter American schools each year seem to be psychically underdeveloped.

To put it briefly first, a significant proportion of the children who enter American schools each year seem to be psychically underdeveloped. Their families have not helped them mature to the point that they can function effectively in a school, relate constructively to its rules, authorities and "work" discipline. It might be said that to relate well to many of the nation's schools—to their burned-out teachers, uninspiring principals, arbitrary rules and tedious assignments—would itself be a mark of maldevelopment on the side of the young generation. However, I refer here to a general incapacity to deal with authority, rules and "work," a deficient capacity to mobilize self and to commit it, whatever the setting.

Many schools—I estimate roughly a third—seem to add psychic damage to the psychic deficiencies new pupils import from their homes. These schools do little to develop underdeveloped personalities and quite often provide opportunities for further maladjustment. As a result, many young people are unable, for psychic reasons, first to learn effectively in the schools and then to function effectively in the adult world of work, community and citizenship. Thus, the root problem is not that millions of high school graduates have great difficulties in reading, writing and arithmetic; these all-too-common deficiencies are consequences of insufficient self-organization, of inadequate ability to mobilize and to commit. These graduates enter the adult world twice handicapped. They suffer both from continued psychic underdevelopment and from the inadequate cognitive preparation this underdevelopment helped to cause.

Let us look for a moment at a simple incident. A young secretary, recently hired, was asked to use the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory. When she was unable to do so, it became evident that she did not command the alphabet nor understand the principles of categorization and subcategorization involved.

Such inability would usually be considered an example of a cognitive deficiency, of poor teaching if not low IQ. However, if one asks why it is difficult to teach someone a list of 26 items and the principles of a very simple classification, one soon realizes that something more is amiss than that no one ever provided the needed time and effort. Nor could it be a question of IQ for most pupils, because so little comprehension or intelligence is involved.

Think what it would take you to memorize, say, a telephone number of 26 digits—a considerable amount of effort, but not cognitive; instead, concentration, control of impulse, self-motivation, ability to face and overcome stress (in order to resist distractions and accept the "routine" work involved in memorizing). This element of psychic organization, or capacity to mobilize and commit psychic energy to a task, is what those who are not learning well seem to me to be most lacking. It is what seems to account for their "inability" to do elementary computation (i.e., to memorize a few rules and discipline oneself to adhere to them), or to write a coherent paragraph (i.e., to remember the rules of punctuation, grammar, and so on—we are not dealing with effective writing, but straight English exposition).

The significance of psychic deficiencies for cognitive learning, for the acquisition of skills, can hardly be overstated. The relevance of personality development to the ability to work is elementary; young persons who cannot cope effectively with authority figures, rules and routines in schools cannot be expected to do so on most jobs.

At the foundation of civility and mutuality is a capacity to control impulse and mobilize ego's energies in part for acts other than the satisfaction of biological needs. The newborn infant has next to no such capacity; it is preoccupied with its immediate biological needs. The process of education, starting with the family, channels some of these drives to "energize" a regulator, to modify behavior by introducing a "personality" or character. This is achieved by tying biological satisfaction to socially acceptable gratifications (sublimation, if you wish); by relating satisfaction to sensitivity to others and deriving satisfaction from the affection and respect of others, the psychic basis of mutualit;

and by building ego-restraints, the basis of playing by the rules, and ego-involvement in the transcending (public) realm and issues, the basis of civility.

It is possible to overeducate and draw too much of ego's energies into these spheres, a process that has concerned social scientists in the past and that has led to a call for less education and more freedom for ego. However, the historical context of present-day America seems to require the opposite: schools that, making up for undereducation in the family, lay the psychic foundation for mutuality, civility and work in the adult world—and in the schools themselves.

**Structure and Self-Discipline vs. Ego Psychology**

While the common preoccupation with the cognitive agenda thus focuses on consequences rather than on the prime cause, a parallel concern with discipline is much closer to the mark. In one public opinion survey after another, teachers and parents rank discipline as the number one problem of the schools. This attention to discipline is highly relevant: It focuses on the school as a structure in which learning is to take place, and suggests that in a classroom where the proper relationships between pupils and teachers, and between students and rules and routines, cannot be developed and maintained, learning is not possible. Violent schools, the public correctly perceives, are not only unsafe but also provide institutional conditions under which schools cannot discharge their teaching duties.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, the focus on discipline itself is partially misdirected, although at least it calls attention to the right issue, the psychic one. Discipline, as most people understand it, is highly external: Teachers and principals "lay down the law"; students "show respect" (rise when the teacher enters the room, do not speak unless spoken to and so forth). What the pupil—and the future adult—really needs is self-discipline, self-organization, the ability to mobilize and commit self. This in turn is developed in structured conditions, but not in authoritarian ones.

The line between structure and authoritarianism is easy to illustrate but not to define. Basically, what is needed is not close, continuous external supervision, but a school
Not all learning can be made fun and games, and it should not be even if it could.

Current Remedies Are As Bad as Current Abuses

The enthusiastic following won by popularized developmental psychology does not help. Particularly relevant in education have been the theories that portray children’s learning as a natural unfolding from within, a process initiated and basically carried out by the child herself or himself. Educational pop psychology’s focus on ego and immediate satisfactions rather than on self-organization has been most evident in the open classroom movement, with its planned lack of structure. Students initiate their own “learning experiences” according to their interests and capabilities; the role of the teacher is to facilitate and encourage rather than to guide. For the pupil, enjoyment and spontaneity are said to be as important as growth and achievement. The open classroom, the plushest of all, repudiates deferment of gratification and ability to play by the rules, and advocates instead the educational equivalent of “do your own thing.”

As I see it, this approach imposes too much on the child and too little on the educators and the schools. Moreover, this sunny view ignores the elementary fact that what children are when they begin school is not what children are by nature. At birth, when their “nature” is most evident, children are unformed creatures who, left to their own devices, will learn little. And what schools and teachers face is not children’s unadulterated nature, but what families—and neighborhoods—have made of it. Schools cannot ignore the fact that many of the children who reach them are neither eager to learn nor good at it; they must first be won over to learning, in effect rehabilitated, and helped to develop learning habits.

I say “habits” deliberately. Not all learning can be made fun and games, and it should not be even if it could, because it would then provide a poor preparation for the post-school world. There the ability to defer gratification is required; not all work, not even thinking, can be made intrinsically rewarding.

Critics of existing schools and advocates of alternative approaches often zero in on valid problems exhibited by traditional and bureaucratic schools, but then go overboard in their criticisms and, above all, in the reforms they suggest. Thus, critics correctly see many schools as too large, insensitive to children, and teacher oriented. But their more extreme corrections—such as making schools and teachers heed kids’ cues almost exclusively, or closing the schools and letting kids learn by following adults around (“the way they did in primitive tribes”)—take reform too far, both practically and conceptually.

That structure in schools is often excessive—that teachers with rigid, preset agendas, indifferent to children’s interests and pace, will not be effective—cannot be argued. Yet learning needs structure, so the solution is not to eliminate structure, but to make it more effective for education and for the teachers. How can structure command superior knowledge and represent the adult world, that children are immature and often must be prodded to grow, and that not all growth is enjoyable and self-propelled, must balance the proper rejection of teacher authoritarianism.


Next month: Etzioni outlines the kinds of measures that must be taken if we are to make our schools truly effective.
In the second article of a two-part series, Etzioni outlines the kinds of measures that must be taken if we are to make our schools truly effective.

In last month's installment of this two-article series, Etzioni focused on the current status and criticisms of American schools. His conclusions: Although many, maybe as many as half, of the schools have failed in their mission to educate, it's not true of all schools, and it's not for the reasons usually given. These schools, he says, have failed not in teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, but in providing the psychic foundation children need to learn those skills in school and later to function effectively in the adult world of work, community and citizenship. What's more, this failure is not a result of too much structure in the schools, as open classroom advocates and proponents of an ego-centered mentality would have us believe, but of the wrong kind. Schools need structure to instill in children—and future adults—self-discipline as well as self-organization, for these attributes are at the core of the mutuality and civility that are needed to bring about a healthy society.

In Part II, Etzioni outlines the kinds of measures that must be taken in restructuring the schools, beginning with studying those schools that have proved successful in developing positive personality traits in students.

In considering a reconstruction of American schools, one approach is to look at those schools that provide creditable to excellent education, for such schools inform us whether or not the factors we consider essential for education are present. There are several studies of such schools, although much work is yet to be done. One informal account comes from an observer who visited successful elementary schools (at least half of the sixth graders were reading at or above grade level) in poor neighborhoods (at least 60 percent of the kids were eligible for free lunches). These schools, he found, showed unmistakable marks of structure: clear goals, high expectations and monitoring of students' progress.

A quite different set of observations came out of a grand tour of 750 "alternative schools." Despite the popular notion that alternative schools never require a student to do anything he doesn't want to do, the two educators who visited these schools (both alternative school advocates) reported that "no public alternative school that has survived more than two years gave students such a veto. Successful public alternative schools...soon learned that they needed rules about behavior, attendance, graduation requirements, respecting rights of others, and so on." At the same time, the observers noted, "students had opportunities to help make, review and revise many rules." However, in schools that survived two years or more, these opportunities did not include a right of students to ignore rules.

A finding of the National Assessment of Educational Progress may be relevant to this discussion. It points out that as reading scores have improved somewhat, the ability of high school and junior high school students to draw inferences and to apply knowledge to problem solving has declined. There are no compelling data to explain this decline. Among the possible causes nominated by the research team are excessive TV viewing and a focus on "basics" at the cost of more advanced skills. My hypothesis is that this development also shows lack of intellectual self-discipline. Interpretation and application, much more than basic reading skills, require following certain rules (e.g., check out all main options, avoid premature closure) and a measure of patience (i.e., control of impulse). The data suggest to me that these attributes declined. This is not to deny the possi-
ble role of other factors; for example, under most circumstances extensive television watching develops neither self-discipline nor the ability to think.

Two Major Studies
Point to the Need for Structure
The large-scale comparative study of public and private schools conducted by James S. Coleman and his associates presents a more in-depth analysis of the attributes of effective schools. What this study of 1,016 public, parochial and other private schools shows is that effective schools, both private and public, have two features in common: Their structure enables them, first, to impose discipline, and second, to uphold academic standards. Schools with these attributes graduated students with significantly higher knowledge and skills than those without them.

The single most important difference between more effective and less effective schools was the disciplinary structure. While Coleman relied on such measures as enforcement of a dress code and strictness in dealing with those who cut classes, are absent or attack teachers, he also drew on student-based measurements. These indicated that in the more effective schools, discipline was not merely imposed but by and large was accepted as legitimate—that is, the majority of students perceived discipline not as a set of dictates but as worthy of their commitment; they found the discipline "fair."

The fact that Coleman's analysis comes out favoring nonpublic schools is only because private schools are more commonly able to maintain these structural prerequisites of learning. However, when they are available in public schools, they work there too. Also, at first reading it may seem that Coleman's findings combine the psychic agenda with the cognitive one, since they stress both discipline and academic standards. However, the second most important factor determining high performance, after disciplinary structure, is also more a structural item than a cognitive one. This is the proper authority relationship between teacher and student, the ability to compel task-relevant behavior and to have the class, peers and parents support it, or at least not negate it.

Another large-scale study relevant to the question of what makes schools effective was one conducted in Britain, from 1970 to 1974, of 12 secondary schools, all in London's inner city. Holding constant the social background of pupils, the study found substantial differences among the schools in students' learning and behavior.

The single most important factor in these differences was the schools' character as a social institution—their structure and the processes that administrators and teachers used. In the schools that provided clear incentives, rewards, that had a strong academic emphasis and gave priority to student learning, that expected students to carry out clearly defined responsibilities, students not only did better in school and attended more regularly, they also were less involved in delinquent behavior outside of school. And schools with clear and well-established standards of behavior and discipline did better than those where teachers had to struggle alone to establish these standards.

The more successful schools in this study provide a good illustration of the difference between creating the structural conditions for evolving self-organization and self-discipline, and merely imposing discipline from the outside. The better schools created a climate of respect for students as responsible individuals and held high expectations of both their behavior and their academic work. Students accepted specific supervisory tasks in corridors, classrooms and assemblies, for example. Teachers provided many occasions for students to work independently, in effect saying to them, "We trust you to use your time for productive, self-guided work." At the same time, the results of work students did on their own was checked, and some students did indeed need help to develop study habits for independent work. The point, though, is that expecting students to take responsibility and work independently encourages self-regulation rather than reliance on constant close supervision.

Studies of effective schools suggest that even children with cognitive problems learn when they can mobilize and commit self.

Another important finding of the London study is that appreciation and praise—that is, positive sanctions rather than negative ones—were highly effective, although teachers did not use these tools often. Indeed, what "discipline" brings to mind most immediately is restraining and setting limits, not encouraging or promoting any particular behavior. My own studies show most clearly that involvement based on positive feelings is psychologically much more productive than the same degree of compliance attained by fear, pressure or negative sanctions. Educators must use both sets of motivational tools; to give up either would undercut their capacity to discharge their duties. However, the more they can use the positive ones, the more likely the result will be students' self-organization rather than compliance limited to the time and scope of actively present disciplinary agents.

Of course, other factors affect the quality of schooling. A community uninterested in or hostile to learning, one lacking in successful role models (or rich in the wrong ones, such as "making it" by circumventing school and being a numbers runner or drug peddler), one ravaged by unemployment, crowded housing, garbage and rats, will undermine learning. Teachers who are underpaid and who do not feel respected will not be paragons of education. Extensive exposure to TV seems to be a negative factor. And there are some pupils—of all classes and races—who do have low IQs or severe learning disabilities. However, so far as the effective working of schools is concerned—holding constant, so to speak, their environment and the cognitive abilities of the pupils—school structure is in my view the prime factor. Cognitive deficiencies are secondary and often reflect in part the other factors. True, the circle closes: Once cognitive deficiencies accumulate, they tend to pose personality problems, as evident in learning disabled pupils who become disruptive. But the main vector points the other way: Studies of effective schools suggest that even children with cognitive problems learn when they can mobilize and commit self.

Reconstruction:
School as an Experience
The first step toward reconstruction of the schools from the inside will require a higher level of awareness and analysis of the school as a set of experiences, as a structure. When you look at a school, don't see teachers, pupils, (continued on page 92)
RESTORING SCHOOLS

Or even a fair share.

The schools applying that assuranses with assuranses have been overlooked.

The schools, applying that assuranses with assuranses have been overlooked.

One step at a time.

Other steps, might be included.

A product of the schools, applying that assuranses with assuranses have been overlooked.

The schools, applying that assuranses with assuranses have been overlooked.
but merely to outline them for consideration.

* A Downward Shift of Educational Resources. If one looks at American schooling as a whole (omitting what is top-heavy), a very high proportion of the young population stays much longer in the educational sector, especially in colleges, than in other societies. For instance, as many as 50 percent of Americans in the relevant age range attend college, compared to about 15 percent in countries such as West Germany or France. (This is not to suggest that the United States should have as few of its young in college as these countries, but just as 10 percent may be much too restrictive, 50 percent may be too expansive.)

One reason for this overeducation is that many colleges, especially junior and community colleges, are having to do the work the high schools failed to do—so-called remedial education. As concern for the scarcity of resources has increased in recent years, the time is ripe to try to complete more of the educational task at earlier age levels, where it is more cost-effective. A downward shift of resources could be achieved by adding no new public resources to colleges, and instead adding resources to primary and high schools.

Two other considerations lead to the conclusion that resources should be shifted downward. One has to do with prevention versus correction. It is much more efficient to teach a subject effectively the first time around than to allow pupils to waste high school time (e.g., allowing some pupils a more vocational and less academic mix. This would work best if the work were meaningful and properly supervised, i.e., more educational.)

* A Year of National Service. A year spent serving the country, interrupting the "lockstep" march from grade to grade, right into and through college, has been widely recommended. While the suggested programs vary in detail, many favor a year of voluntary service, with options including the armed forces, Peace Corps, VISTA and Conservation Corps. Some would have it occur in the senior year of high school; I prefer it to follow high school, replacing the first year of college for those who wish to continue, or providing a year between school and work for those not college-bound.

The merits of a year of national service are multiple. To begin with, high unemployment among teenagers and young adults is generating a demoralizing experience for the many individuals involved. A year of national service could provide a positive, constructive experience with which to start one's post-school life, enhancing the individual's self-respect, sense of worth and outlook on the future.

In terms of future employment, a year of national service could furnish young people with an opportunity to try their hands at a skill they might later want to develop. For those planning to go on to college, service after high school would provide a break between "work" in two institutions, and time out to consider their goals in an environment that is largely noncompetitive.

National service would provide a strong antidote to the ego-centered mentality as youth become involved in vital services for shared needs. And finally, the program could serve as the "great sociological mixer" America needs if a stronger national consensus on fundamental values is to evolve. A year of national service, especially if it were designed to enable people from different educational and sociological backgrounds to work and live together, could be an effective way for boys and girls, whites and nonwhites, people from parochial and public schools, North and South, city and country, to get to know one another on an equal footing while working together at a common task.

Focus on Recovery

To state the obvious, that the first duty of schools is education, turns out not to be self-evident. First, there is a strong tendency to equate education with teaching, transmitting skills and knowledge, which it is not; at least that is not the school's only major task. Second, there is a lack of understanding of how important character formation, education's core subject, is in itself for the purpose for which teaching is usually sought—as a source of basic skills for work, for mutuality, for membership in a civil community.

The single most important intra-school factor that affects education is not the curriculum or the teaching style, at least not as these terms are normally used, but the experiences of the school generates. In many schools, perhaps as many as half, these experiences are not supportive of sound character formation, mutuality and civility. While many factors combine to account for this weakened condition of many American schools, the ego-centered mentality is probably the easiest to reverse; it is almost certainly a good place to start the reconstruction of the schools, by providing legitimation for a structure under which self-organization will be more likely to evolve. Reconstruction must also draw upon other factors, many external to the schools, ranging from greater parental support for the schools' primary educational mission to a reduction in the number of other missions, which currently dissipate their resources and blur their focus.