

Makework Expands To Fill Time

Why are school lessons so bad? Perhaps we overlook the most crucial of reasons, discovered by Parkinson: *work expands to fill time*. Compulsory attendance laws mandate that children attend to *something* for ever-increasing parts of their lives, under the direction of professional educators, at ever-increasing cost.

It simply wouldn't do to pay these educators to take long naps while the students fly paper airplanes, or dance, or play other random games of their own devising. No, they must be kept busy. And so, busywork and tedium fill all the days of our children's lives. That which is simple is made complex. That which might be interesting in five-minute doses, is stretched to 45 interminable minutes.

Daniel Greenberg, of Sudbury Valley Schools, reported that it takes about twenty hours of classroom instruction to teach a group of interested students the fundamentals of arithmetic. In conventional schools, the same fundamentals are spaced out over six years or more, times 180 days, multiplied by three quarters of an hour per day. And by the end of twelve years, distressingly large percentages of students cannot even compute a 15% tip, much less cope with a tax form.

Now, it may be argued that most of us ordinarily use calculators and spreadsheets – but my question is, why do schools stretch twenty hours of focused, effective instruction into a thousand hours of tedium? I reply that school teachers and administrators feel compelled to do *something* with all of those mandatory hours. Anything will do, lest the illogic of mandatory attendance become too evident.

And that, folks, is why so many of our children are alternately bored to tears, and anxious about “keeping up.”