

Irrelevance renders education incomplete

by Mary Voboril

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In Ann Landers' advice column Monday, a recent college graduate complained that in 10th grade she had to memorize verbatim the 17 steps leading to the conjugation of the paramecium. Yet neither in that high school course nor in 12 hours of college biology was she taught the difference between a king snake and a copperhead.

The same student had taken a course in typing but never was taught how to change a typewriter ribbon.

It's the same old story. Relevance. Probably everyone has had to spend a lot of time learning and memorizing things he never really needs to know. And there are so many things we need to know that never are taught.

staff suggestion box

To pass a drivers education course, one girl had to learn the way an engine worked but was taught nothing about how to change a flat tire.

Most of us were taught to swim, but in a matter of life and death how many of us could give artificial respiration properly?

All one student remembers from his high school chemistry class is how to remove the silver from a quarter—something which might even be illegal.

At one Lincoln high school, girls required to take physical education spent most of the semester learning how to play kick soccer. Never were they taught anything about personal

defense.

The draft is something that affects every young American male. But not only were most men not taught anything about alternatives to the draft, most were not taught what to expect at a draft physical, where to register, etc.

Most of us were required to take U.S. history. Nebraskans probably had to take Nebraska history. But why did we never have to learn about current history? Why were we made aware of the past but not of the present? And why were so many of us never taught so fundamental a right as how to vote and where to register—or what attributes to look for in a political candidate?

And resumes. So few students were taught what to include in a resume. So many people don't even know what a resume is. Yet most businesses require a resume from job applicants.

The list of practical knowledge absent from most classrooms goes on and on. But one impression keeps on resurfacing: Not only is our education irrelevant—it is also incomplete.

For example, why were most of us never taught speedreading? What more valuable, practical skill could anyone be taught? And how about really simple things, like how to use a fire extinguisher or how to change a light fuse. Or legal rights—what to do if you're arrested. Or how to budget money, buy a car (and insurance) or figure out income taxes.

And memorization. One person had to memorize the introduction to A Tale of Two Cities. Another had to be able to recite the Gettysburg Address. A third had to memorize not only the Preamble to the Constitution but all the amendments.

Others have had to memorize sonnets, long poems, passages from Shakespeare. One girl had to memorize parts of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, but the play itself was not required reading, and the teacher offered no explanation of memorized



passages.

Of course it's essential to know what is contained in something like the amendments to the U.S. Constitution. But why should anyone have to memorize them? Time spent in memorization could better be spent elsewhere. A working knowledge of historical documents or literary masterpieces should be sufficient. If someone needed to know which amendment provided for the right to bear arms, who five or 10 or 50 years from now would remember if that right was contained in the first or fourth or fourteenth amendment. It doesn't matter if you had to memorize the amendments when you were a junior in high school—chances are you'd still have to look the answer up.

Relevance. Has anything really changed?

A knowledge of literature, history

and the sciences is important for a background for an intelligent adult. But the depth some courses demand should be kept at a reasonable level. And practical knowledge should be included wherever possible.

After all, what good is recognizing iambic pentameter in a pastoral poem to a man who will spend his life as a railroad engineer.

Why should students have to learn how much rainfall Nebraska receives in a given year but not the art of raising a family?

And why should a high school girl be shuttled off to a room separate from the boys to learn the location of her pituitary gland and fallopian tubes without being taught anything about contraception—she may already be pregnant. In such a case a knowledge of the location of her pituitary gland wouldn't have mattered at all. A knowledge of contraception would.

to the editor

Dear editor,

Let me commend you on your editorial in last Thursday's edition of the Daily Nebraskan, "POWs—prisoners of policy."

One point in your editorial needs further emphasis—the fate of those Missing in Action (MIAs). Of the over 1600, now closer to 1700, individuals listed as POWs and MIAs, over 1,240 are Missing in Action. We must not repeat the tragedy of having not demanded a full accounting of our men and women prior to the cessation of hostilities as we did in North Korea. To this date our government is still attempting to get information on 389 men whom it had evidence were prisoners in Korea. For 19 years the North Koreans have refused to discuss the fate of these men.

In addition to writing letters to our

elected representatives as indicated in your editorial, we must let our concern be known to the international community—those nations, including North Vietnam, who signed the Geneva Convention. In the name of humanity we demand that a neutral inspection team such as the International Red Cross be allowed to determine which men and women are prisoners. Write to:

Mr. Kurt Walheim
Secretary General
United Nations
New York, New York

There are 1700 POWs and MIAs who are dying to vote in 1972. Speak for them.

Robert H. Blodgett

Dear editor,

Jim Gray's editorial of Sept. 28 is representative of misplaced American values predominating concern for the POWs. Rather than the POWs as prisoners of policy as the headline suggested, our Vietnam policy has become a prisoner of the POW issue. Release of the POWs has become the major obstacle preventing the complete termination of American involvement in Southeast Asia.

The POW issue has been used to justify present U.S. policies of death and destruction. And what has present U.S. policy produced? According to documented evidence presented to various Congressional committees, U.S. policies of defoliation, population transfers and 'search and destroy' have created over three million refugees, and American firepower has taken the lives of tens of thousands of innocent civilians. The imprisonment of 500 American pilots pales in comparison with the magnitude of American-caused destruction, yet those 500 men are used as justification for more war.

Much concern has been raised for the treatment of American POWs, and justly so. But at least Americans can be thankful that our pilots are alive and not permanently maimed. Vietnamese prisoners taken by American troops have not been so fortunate. Testimony taken at the Winter-Soldier investigation, which took place in Detroit, Jan. 30-Feb. 1,

1971, documents hundreds of incidents of every conceivable kind of cruel torture to the systematic execution of Vietnamese taken prisoner was reported by returning Vietnam veterans.

Gray concludes his article urging the purchase of POW bracelets and paraphernalia. This will help the plight of the POWs as much as the Army's fiasco of an attempt to rescue them did. It is doubtful the Vietnamese will be very moved by the fact that so many million Americans are wearing their POW bracelets faithfully.

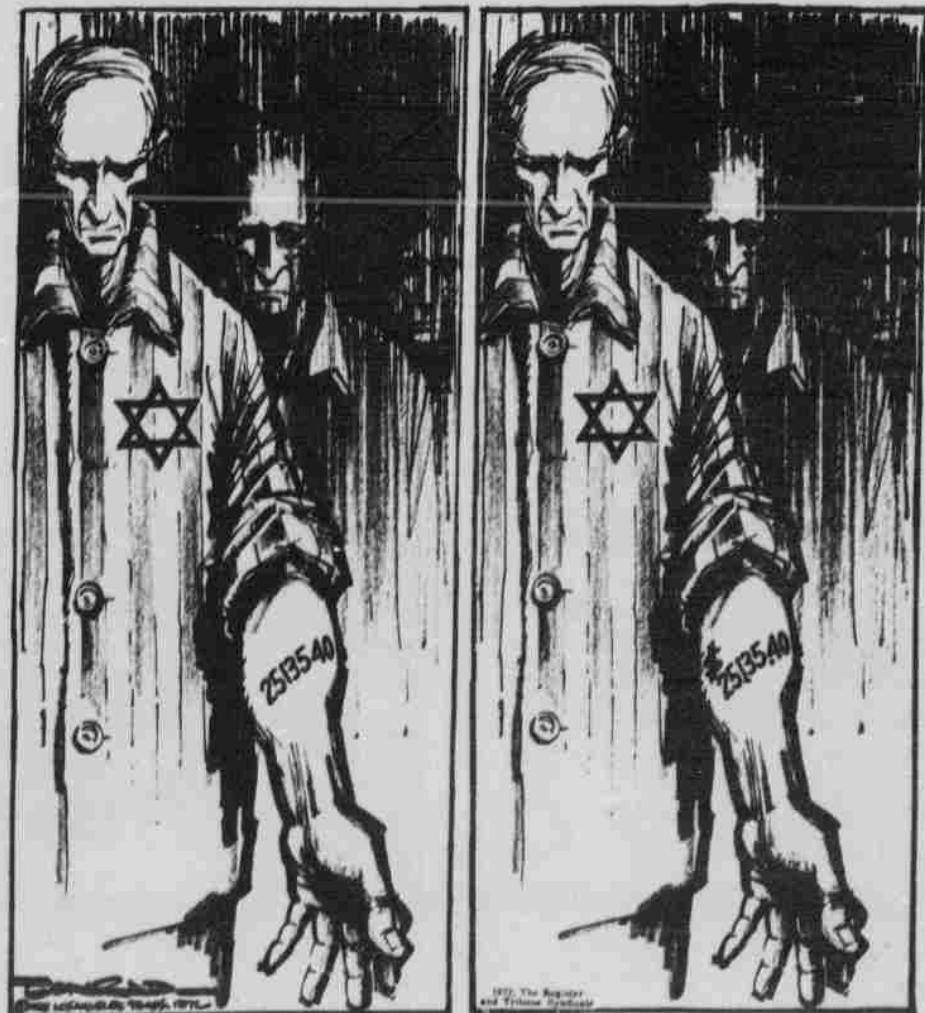
Rather, this money would be better spent for contributions to the campaigns of Congressional and Presidential candidates dedicated to an immediate end to the war. Ending the war is the only logical way to secure release of the POWs. POWs aren't released until the fighting ends; that's standard procedure in war time.

Besides, what reason would the Vietnamese have for holding them after the war ends? It would only be costing them a lot of money to feed and house them. In fact, they would have everything to gain by releasing them. They could gain the support of world opinion by releasing them immediately.

And even if the POWs weren't released, there are many possible diplomatic channels which could be used to secure their release. For instance, the U.S. might hold off on some trade agreements with the U.S.S.R. or China until they put enough pressure on the Vietnamese to secure their release. At this time, these two countries need access to U.S. trade very badly, and it seems very doubtful that they would consider 500 U.S. pilots important enough to jeopardize new trade agreements.

The point is that there are other ways to put on pressure than bombing and mining. And what other choices do we have? We can keep bombing at our present rate, and all that does is fill the POW camps in the north, or we could "bomb 'em back to the stone age" as some people want, but then, would there be any POWs left?

Cary Peterson



Germany - 1936

Russia - 1972