I have been trying to understand what it is about the Report of the Commission on Academic Standards that so enrages me. It is not just that I disagree with the recommendation to not allow late registration except under strictly limited conditions or the recommendation to move the withdrawal date up or the recommendation to REQUIRE remedial courses for students who do not pass tests of questionable predictablity. It is not even because I resent a committee composed largely of people from Social Science, English and Natural Science recommending graduation requirements that stress English, Social Science, and Natural Science. English 1 may be a fine requirement but is a history or political science class more important than a psychology or sociology or even a Spanish class? After all, the idea of a "body of knowledge" to be picked up at school and used for the rest of one's life is nonsense in a world that changes as fast as ours does.

I don't think any of these particular recommendations is the complete cause of my dismay. It is, I think, the view of education that the document represents that is the cause of my anger. I believe that learning - learning that is permanent and useful, that leads to intelligent action and further learning can only occur when the student is the active agent. Education is something a person gets for himself, not something that someone else gives or does to him. In language, it is the effort to use words well, to say what we want to say, to people whom we trust and want to reach and move that will cause us to use language better. When the environment of trust and respect has been created and there is a will to improve - that is when technical advice is useful.

If students are the active agents in their own education, they must be allowed to make decisions - good and bad decisions - about their schooling. They must be allowed to chote the course to take and whether to drop one class and add another. We should give guidance and advice to help them make decisions - but we should not force our decisions on them. When mistakes are made, we should help students analyse their mistakes and take a better path next time. But we should let students learn what every educated person must some day learn, how to take control of their own life, how to make their own decisions.

What happens to a person who is never given a chance to make a real choice? What will this person think of herself? What kind of a society will we be creating? Do we create a nation of sheep or a nation of free men and women?

To close, I believe our emphasis should be on learning - not grading, not degrees - learning. The joy and satisfaction of understanding is what we should be all about. The Report has very little to do with that.

Oct. 1978