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From the Editor: The Promise Generation

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The Promise Generation

Recently, coming back to the campus late at night, I looked across the aisle as the train rumbled through the dark and met the eyes of one of my students.

He was well-wired into his iPod, but he acknowledged me with a slight nod and a half-wave. He had not been doing well. So when the train pulled in to Journal Square, a 12-minute walk from the college, I made a point of catching up with him so we could talk on the walk home.

Hi. Where you been? Good weekend? Dinner? That's good. I was just over in Brooklyn... Blah blah, etc. etc. The dialogue seemed to be inching along. Maybe I'm breaking through the wall? Then I saw something *glowing* in his hands. "*He was text-messaging!*" Going through the motions of talking to his teacher, but carrying on an electronic conversation with someone more interesting, I told him I was sorry to interrupt, but I would say goodnight and cross the street. Oh no, he said, he was listening. He really was, he said.

This issue — **Jesuit Education and Today's Student: A "Disconnect"?** — tries to answer the question: How deep is the trench, how high is the wall which what I call "the culture of distraction" has put between ourselves and our students? Perhaps it all started with Chubby Checker and the "twist," or the amplified guitar. Or maybe it goes back to the invention of TV, or the Radio. Or the telegraph in the 1840s. Or the realization of the 1960s generation that the multiuniversity which grew up after World War II had become a collaborator with the Political Establishment which perpetuated the Vietnam War.

The articles which follow describe, sometimes in blunt detail, the technology, the noise, the booze, the sexual attitudes, the life style which in varying degrees can come between students and the philosophy, theology, literature, history, science, and value system which Jesuit education has traditionally tried to impart. The authors also survey the literature and call upon their own experience for strategies to bridge the trench, climb the wall, and also use the technology which might otherwise alienate us to reestablish communication with this today's young.

Again, we have invited several students and recent graduates to speak for themselves; then, in

Talking Back, other voices answer recent articles on service learning and reading.

In a December *National Catholic Reporter*, the editor, Tom Roberts, describes his experience with thousands of the same young people whom we teach at the annual protest against the School of the Americas, at Fort Benning, Ga., the government institution which trains Latin America military leaders, including those responsible for the 1989 murder of the six Jesuit professors, their housekeeper and her daughter, at the University of Central America in El Salvador. "Each generation provides the material for its own caricature," writes Roberts. "Everyone wonders if the text-messaging, Googling, online, car-budded, digitalized denizens of this era's electronic world can be lured into real time, from the virtual to the actual. Will they join? Will they read? Will they communicate by means other than a glowing screen?"

Roberts answers that these students were "well-wired. They were also serious, healthfully skeptical, inquisitive, committed, and, without a doubt, as real and dealing with as large a dose of reality as one might imagine." He quotes Charlie Currie, S.J., head of AJCU, *Conversations'* publisher, who told the students assembled at the Ignatian teach-in: "You are poised for greatness on a global scale; you are the promise generation, the history makers. The boomer generation *talked* about changing the world; you will *work* at making real changes."

On the cover. Fifteen Saint Peter's College students, including several members of the dramatic society Argus Eyes, gave us an afternoon, with photographer Mark Wyville, to dramatize — of course with the exaggeration which satire requires — how their "stuff" can get in the way of their education. Our thanks to Stephanie Molkentin and Joe Galbo who assembled them and to Sarah Angora, Dan Gubelli, Andrea Contreras, John McCarthy, Anthony Latini III, Erin Rooney, Fernando Rendon, Christian Havo, Matthew Viera, KellyRose Lynch, Daniel Shea, Vishnu Nayak, and Susan Mascolo for sensing just what the problem was and for acting it out. ■

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