

The Federal Government, Industry, and Education

J. HARLAN SHORES

LEADERS in education, to whom this journal is dedicated, each own a crystal ball to help predict trends, developments, and influences in the schools. More often than not the developments seen there come to pass, but seldom with the force anticipated by the viewer. The crystal balls magnify tremendously and also have some distortion. Thus relatively minor skirmishes on the educational front are seen as revolutions and more of these are predicted than any one profession could stand.

Realizing the magnification and distortion potentialities of educators' crystal balls, it may be foolish to predict an educational revolution of at least the magnitude of the activity movement which climaxed in the 1930s in the effect that the combined efforts of the federal government and the huge electronic industries will have upon schools and schooling in this country. Yet there it is. From a clouded crystal ball a second major revolution is predicted in education during this century, and this issue of *Educational Leadership* concerns itself with some of its dimensions.

The crystal ball gazing and speculative aspects of these developments are many, but there is also a factual picture. Public expenditures for education at all levels now approximate fifty billion dollars a year. In 1955 these expenditures were only eighteen billion. Now there is indeed a rich market for industry in education, and large electronic industries have recently entered the field. Among these are Xerox, IBM, General Electric, RCA, Raytheon, and Sylvania. Some of these have purchased companies producing educational materials; others have not.

According to their executives, these industries will develop educational programs with an engineering systems approach leaning heavily upon communications research which will relate to nearly all aspects of the educational enterprise. Talks between high level government officials and high level administrators of these major industries have already begun, and these talks are concerned, among other things, with research and development programs in education which may be carried out by industry and financed with federal funds.

There probably is not much speculation in the expectation that these large electronic firms will receive government funds in considerable amounts for research and development of educational systems. It is surely in the interests of government for these industries to profit from their considerable investments, and if the products and services they provide are not useful in education, they will have failed. Needless to say, they do not often fail, and the federal government cannot afford to have them fail.

Just what these facts and reasonable expectations mean for education surely enters the area of speculation. Without much wishful thinking we might anticipate that much of the drudgery may be taken from both teaching and administration. There are surely many cumbersome, thankless, and time consuming tasks in which more efficient ways would be a blessing. Perhaps industry can provide these in the life of the teacher and administrator in a manner reminiscent of such changes in the life of the housewife.

Integrated Lesson Packages

Producing both "hardware" and "software" for the schools, these industries have the potential for providing integrated lesson packages that make sense. Instead of a textbook supplemented by films, tapes, and programs or audio-visual presentations supplemented by textual materials, here will be a unified package for which only a major industry could provide and balance the component parts. Lesser companies nibbling at the edge of the instructional market have offered us pieces of a program designed for the largely nonexistent "average student." Perhaps the current giants will see the entire market. Perhaps they will offer us multi-level materials and programs flexible enough to adapt to varied interests and ability levels.

If our imaginations are not so jaded by disappointing experiences with poorly developed and piecemeal programs that we find it difficult to take a hopeful view, we may anticipate the day when there will be reasonably good programs for everyone. Imagine, if you will, programs not graded at one level and in one subject, not built on tracks for students supposed to be homogeneous who are not homogeneous at all, but multi-leveled in all grades and in all subjects—truly individualized programs. For the immediate future these are, of course, dreams, but these dreams are much less unreal than to dream that the early crude gasoline engines would power the modern automobile or that the early jet engine would do all that it now does. There is truly great promise for an industrial revolution in education, and we should help it to develop in the ways that we can.

Revolutionary developments bring with them not only hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future but also grave doubts and fears. We know and like our jobs now. Will we know and like them as well when the impact of science and technology forces them to change? Will our status be threatened? Will we become puppets upon an electronic educational stage? These are natural fears that hit very close to basic needs, and there may be no good way to allay such fears, but we might remember that while these developments will come rapidly,

they surely will not happen at once. If the young man on the dirt road in the Model T saw a vision of huge sedans hurtling along a freeway he might mutter, "You won't catch me in one of them things." But he probably is there now, hardly noticing the change from year to year and barely able to remember "the good old days" that were not so good.

Balance in the Curriculum

Beyond our concerns for ourselves and our jobs as we now know them we may have doubts and fears more far reaching. Will the combined efforts of the federal government and the huge electronic industries control the schools? What will happen to state and local control and initiative? Who will pay for all this? Will the profit motives of business be contrary to humanitarian motives of educators? Will we be led into every program with "carrots" of federal money? With children in individual carrels attended by machines, will we have a robot-like, dehumanized program? How will children develop social skills, values, self-concepts, and creativity? There are no more ready-made answers to these fears than there were to those centered about ourselves and our jobs, but posing these questions need not assume gloomy answers. As the times change, teachers and schools must change, and, in the changing, answers to these questions will be found.

The 1961 yearbook of ASCD entitled *Balance in the Curriculum* alerted the profession to needs, interests, and pressures that affect curriculum decisions. Balance was not a new concern in 1961, nor is it less needed in 1967 or the years to come. Many of our objectives will continue to be valid. New means to these will not be denied. But the new must find its place with the old. It must be tested against present practice to prove its value over what we now have. The new technology should be of great value to us, and our experience in educating should be of great value to the industries developing products for us.

There is little doubt but that schools and schooling will change markedly during the 1970s and that much of this change will reflect the efforts of the federal government and industry. *Educational Leadership* does well to open in this issue some of the major concerns related to these developments with the full expectation that future issues of this journal will come back to them again and again.

—J. HARLAN SHORES, *Professor of Elementary Education, College of Education, University of Illinois, Urbana; and President, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1967-68.*



Copyright © 1967 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.