

Impact of Social Forces on Public Schools in Cities

LEONARD S. DEMAK *

CHANGE generates resistance, it precipitates defensive reactions, and it creates opposition. Social forces, forces for change, are abroad in our society which should have impact on our public schools. These forces, to some extent, share a developmental history and relationship in purposes and methods. A brief recounting may be helpful.

Some forces are directed specifically at the educational establishment and functioning of schools. This familiar category includes the demand for more effective preparation of students in the basic skills as well as the broader demand for accountability of educators and relevancy of educational programs to modern life. Such forces are also manifested in demands for student power and participation in educational decision making; demands for school systems responsive to inadequate preparation of minority groups, particularly Negroes; and demands for community control of schools. All attest to perceptions of "school" as it currently operates, as an alien or alienating force.

Another group of social forces is often perceived, unfortunately, as either irrelevant or at most, only marginally related to education. As measured by the response behaviors of the systems they help operate and control, many educators have not adequately conceptualized the nature of current social forces, or seen them as immediately relevant.

Vietnam is one issue which has brought

new groupings together. A general anti-establishment posture links these groups and focuses much of this posture on a most visible social institution—the public school. Similar protest movements have taken place in all of the modernizing societies as new social groups enter the political process, tensions erupt and value conflicts emerge. "Crime in the streets," the call for "law and order," and similar issues, on the one hand, and, on the other, the alienation of some of our youth, the up-beat generation's behaviors regarding sex, drugs, and the draft reflect an emerging set of values that rejects traditional means of social controls. Once again the schools should expect to be blamed for crises and subjected to the usual demands and exhortations. Again, the schools will be held responsible for a system which benefits some but not others, economically, educationally, and socially.

Renewal or Removal?

There are other less dramatic illustrations of the relationships of other forces on our national scene and education:

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The impact on schools of renewal-planning concepts has had several dimensions. There has been a removal of people and property from neighborhoods. In many cases the fact that renewal programs have been less than totally satisfactory has diverted attention to the educational establishment.

Future efforts in large-scale urban planning will need active involvement of government and business. It is also evident that effective participation in such processes by educators is a *sine qua non* for anything that would purport to renew our cities—as in the Model Cities Programs.

Slum clearance has managed some accomplishments while generating new problems. Relocation of residents has been accomplished only at the cost of much disturbance. For "renewal," too often we have read "removal." In some areas, income and revenue producing properties have been removed—rarely replaced very readily by satisfactory residential and institutional buildings. Most large city school systems have seen their tax bases eroded at a time when they need vastly greater sums of operational dollars.

The experience of New Haven, a city which continues, with justification, to serve as a model of renewal and planning, dramatizes the unfinished business before us. Even though New Haven has successfully pioneered much of what other cities are planning or have embarked upon, it still has resentment and alienation sufficient to generate riots.

The programs New Haven developed were for rather than with people—a recurring theme in the social indictment drawn up by the ghetto. New Haven is changing its processes to avert that kind of criticism.

That the critical concerns generated by racial and class issues have had impact on the schools needs little testimony.

Several dimensions of this problem deserve comment.

One force which has not been carefully studied for its implications is the ambivalence a growing Negro middle class may feel. This feeling is based on some commitment to racial integration on the one hand and a growing identification with a black militant or nationalist movement on the other. Only to the extent that educators are seen as capable of redressing education-linked racial problems will they be credited with what this group believes education must do: assist in resolution of legitimate grievances of Negroes.

The direction and movement taken by black nationalists and other black militants in this country will depend in large measure on the quality of the white response to their demands. These groups expect and are demanding accountability and relevancy of social action to achieve equity in American society.

Effects of Intervention

The *U.S. Riot Commission Report* has documented the polarization of the nation which continued violence and the fear of violence reinforce. The action recommendations concerning education are *must* reading for educators. Are the sensitivities of professionals so acutely tuned to criticism that they automatically respond with an increased lack of awareness?

The psychiatry panel which met to explore ideas for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence made some suggestions. It held that sharing power could resolve potentially violent conflict and "reduce the sense of panic and threat now flourishing in so many urban communities."

What other messages do educators get from riots? Komisaruk and Pearson¹ have concluded that it was obvious that, in the Detroit riots, there was no correlation between socioeconomic status and participation

¹ Richard Komisaruk and Carol E. Pearson. "Children of the Detroit Riots: A Study of Their Participation and Their Mental Health." Mimeographed. (To be published in *Journal of Urban Law*.)

in the riots by juveniles. The most significant finding was that the average youth lacked pathological hostility. The impression of the team was that the youngsters arrested exhibited a somewhat higher level of personality integration than the delinquent population usually seen. They concluded that the aggressive behavior encountered in the riots was more in keeping with white American culture which placed emphasis on aggressive behavior in the male than with passive behavior stereotypically ascribed to the American Negro.

In many *integration efforts*, educators have intervened with varying degrees of success. The United States Commission on Civil Rights, in *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools*, has described techniques for desegregation.

There is little doubt, however, that integration is no longer the name of the game some are playing. In many cities, since integration is not easily attained, some representatives of black communities are committed to other means to achieve quality education.

Demands for *comprehensive decentralization* of large public school systems are increasing. In New York City, the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Decentralization was presented a mandate to relieve the crisis in New York schools. The premise of the Panel's recommendations for decentralization is that parents constitute the power element on which the school system should be based.

There are many who view decentralization as control by parents and a cop-out for those in authority, to relieve them of responsibility and to avoid leadership. Must this be seen only as an either-or situation?

In Detroit, the High School Study Commission investigated high schools and reported inadequacies that Commission leaders called "a disgrace to the community and a tragedy to thousands of young men and women." This Commission was appointed by the Detroit Board of Education following a student boycott at one high school.

In their critique the Commission included a description of barriers imposed by teachers and administrations—barriers which

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got in the way of performance by students. Cumbersome administrative structures of the schools were criticized. The Commission believes that powers of the principal should be strengthened and greater decision-making authority should be in the hands of a decentralized administration.

One recommendation called for creation of a citizens advisory council in each of the 22 high school service areas, each to have a representative on a city-wide citizens council to give citizens an active voice in policy making.

While the name of the game is still education, the rules of the game are changing. Many critics maintain faith in education, with little or no faith in schools.

Mel Ravitz,² Detroit Common Council member and a sociologist, told members of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club:

If it were feasible, which I know it isn't, I would recommend that we scrap our present school system and even our concept of education, and begin anew . . . It would be easier to start all over again rather than attempt to refashion our present educational structure to meet the needs of the present and the future. We will be lucky to succeed at any price, yet most of us do not seem disposed to expend more than token amounts in rather ineffective ways in the inner city. We would like to be able to buy our way out of our educational crisis and we want to do it at a bargain basement price.

Kenneth B. Clark has written³ that *alternative forms of public education must be created*. Dr. Clark presented six models: regional state schools financed by the states; federal regional schools; college- and university-related open schools; industrial comprehensive demonstration schools financed by industry, business, and commercial firms for their employees and selected members of the public; labor-union sponsored schools; and, Department of Defense schools for adolescent dropouts or educational rejects.

In "A Poor Children's Bill of Rights,"⁴

² *Livonian Observer*, May 22, 1968.

³ Kenneth B. Clark. "Alternate Public School Systems." *Harvard Educational Review* 38(1): 100-113; Winter 1968.

⁴ Theodore Sizer and Phillip Whitten. "A Poor Children's Bill of Rights." *Psychology Today* 2(3): 59-63; August 1968.

Theodore Sizer and Phillip Whitten state that "reliance on formal education as a significant vehicle for social mobility is an unpopular article of faith these days." They would have *government give money directly to poor children* through their parents to assist in paying for education. Their proposal is based upon the argument that modern society calls for an equality of attainment which would make "schools appropriate for people with respect to their environment."

They propose a sliding scale of grants which would be given in the form of coupons to be presented to the schools of the choice of the families. The money could then be spent by the schools as they see fit. Possible consequences include decentralization which would promote responsiveness to the needs of students; competition between school systems or even between the schools within a system as well as with new private schools; and public judgments of the quality of schools.

Other patterns are emerging. A new street academy, patterned after the successful New York model, will be operated by the Detroit Urban League. The purpose of the program is to bring dropouts off the street, interest them in an education and prepare them for work or college. Interestingly, financing has come from the Detroit Edison Company and the Youth Opportunity Council (through OEO).

Michigan Bell Telephone Company has "adopted" an entire high school in Detroit by making manpower resources, training facilities, and technical and management skills available to the staff and students of the school. This effort, illustrative of other programs which demonstrate that business has a stake in what happens to young people, is centered on an inner-city high school.

A vast number of *compensatory education programs* has been generated in response to defined needs. Compensatory education programs are intended to bring particular groups of children to a point where they can be reached by existing and conventional practices and programs. (The Civil Rights Commission Report on *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools* refers to compen-

satory education as "special education for Negro children.")

Diane Ravitch⁵ has described the nature of many compensatory education efforts and documented the reasons why some programs fail and others succeed. She concluded that where compensatory programs have failed, it is because they are not understood to be in fact "quality education." She refers to most compensatory education programs as having incorporated only an array of remedial techniques and lack of a fully conceptualized framework. She asserts that *organization* is the foremost quality of successful programs. Part of Miss Ravitch's response to the question, "What is to be done?" follows:

Most urban school systems are not presently organized to use the money in ways that would provide basic reforms. . . . To speak of curriculum reform, of encouraging teacher initiative, or of any specific improvement is fruitless until the necessity for institutional reform is confronted. . . . This will require radical decentralization of school systems and radical redefining of the roles of teachers, principals, and students built into the organization of the school. . . .

Disturbance and disruption, particularly student violence and rebellions, in the daily activities of schools, have been amply reported in the press and popular literature.

Many control efforts have been tried. Strategies have included the "policeman in the school" plan. Most have emphasized efforts to see the policeman in a new role as friendly "counselor." In some places, policemen have been installed to control access to the school by those who have "no right to be there," and to minimize the possibility of conflict in the school during the day. The "policeman in the school" arrangement has generated controversy involving civil liberties groups, lay public, educators, and police, as in Tucson. Other programs are located in Flint, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Evanston, Illinois.

The need for such control techniques is indicative of the need to develop new

⁵ Diane Ravitch. "Programs, Placebos, and Panaceas." *The Urban Review* 2(5): 8-11; April 1968.

organizational insights. To the extent that containment and control in cooperation with other agencies such as the police and juvenile authorities are viewed as necessary to prolong the life of the school as it currently operates—to that extent—lack of long-term success seems assured.

Schools have a responsibility to reduce the alienation of youth. Schafer and Polk⁶ have asked for schools to be responsible for making relationships and learning experiences in school environments more relevant, successful, and challenging for *all* youth, not only the delinquent or vulnerable.

. . . Proposals for preventing, reducing, and controlling delinquency cannot refer to programs that only relate directly to control problems in the school, but must reach deeply to the underlying . . . conditions that help produce educational failure, perceived irrelevance, lack of commitment, and exclusion—and therefore, delinquency, . . . unless basic radical and immediate educational changes are made, delinquency will continue to increase—and will be accomplished by the spread of other social ills that stem from the same root.

Project REMIDY

RE MIDY (Recapture, Educate, Motivate, Innovate for the Development of Youth), a small-scale development project, worked in two school settings in the metropolitan Detroit area in order to build institutional commitment to increased participation of both students and staff in the developing of policies, rules, and curriculum.

RE MIDY (Supported by a grant from the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare) stationed a local school coordinator, a change-agent, in each of two secondary schools: one an inner-city senior high school and one a suburban junior high school. REMIDY was built on the prem-

ise that, without direct active involvement of youth in helping determine the means and ends of educational programs, efforts to re-direct or restructure schools will again be the result of someone else "doing to" or "doing for" a group of consumers. The insights of youth can help strengthen the reality base of programs.

An essential element of the REMIDY approach was to sensitize school organizations and school people to factors which facilitate or inhibit educational change and to performance factors which measure output of the educational enterprise. Under this umbrella can be gathered information on the structure—its norms, resources, personnel, communication channels, decision-making processes, and its operation—grouping and marking practices, reward and sanctioning procedures, complaint procedures, formal and informal sponsorship systems, students' perceptions of the impact of the organization. Performance factors include achievement levels, withdrawal rates, attendance and truancy data, opportunities open to youth and use made of them. Both as a demonstration model and an action program, REMIDY offers some support for the notion that successful intervention in local school systems is possible, but these are not easily accomplished strategies.

In this discussion of the impact of social forces on the schools, schools have been seen as both victim and victimizer.

There are many models being proposed for the schools of the future. Most emphasize use of new technologies. However, schools of the future will grow from a number of different models, the evolution of which is progressing and the end product of which is nowhere in sight.

It may be that in retrospect the 1950's will be seen as the decade which generated problems. Identification of problems and trying out strategies, some miniscule, some larger, can be viewed as a major theme of the 1960's. If the 1960's are a research and development stage—a tooling-up—then perhaps we can expect education to do its part to fulfill the American destiny for each of its citizens.

⁶ Walter E. Schafer and Kenneth Polk. "Delinquency in the Schools." *Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime*. Report on Juvenile Justice and Consultants' Papers, Task Force on Juvenile Delinquency. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967.



Perhaps one day we shall have urban-grant universities supported by block grants, comparable to our land-grant schools. Perhaps one day, too, we shall see adequate funding of necessary urban research (there is only \$15 million available for research in the recently passed Housing Law).

Concluding their discussion of a framework for "the analysis of the internal economics of education," Burkhead, Fox, and Holland⁷ help us see the relationships between educational outcomes and resources.

It is just possible that the demands currently placed on the educational system at all levels are vastly in excess of the volume of resources that the nation is willing to devote to the tasks. If this is the case, we will continuously fall short of our expectations. But the shortfall will be less if some attention is given to the effective deployment of the resources that are now and will be devoted to the educational process.

It is "effective deployment" of resources

⁷ Jesse Burkhead with Thomas G. Fox and John W. Holland. *Input and Output in Large-city High Schools*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1967.

that should be emphasized as well as the call for greater resources.

John W. Gardner's statement to the Committee on Resolutions of the Republican National Convention, 1968, reviewed crucial needs: meet urgent housing needs; the "gargantuan" task of rebuilding our cities; and other important elements in the long-term task of transforming our society. He reviewed the threats posed by social tensions but asserted the necessity of "positive forward movement" rather than attempts to solve problems by "a punitive effort to control negative attitudes and actions." Gardner states:

Most Americans are not in doubt as to their shared values. . . . Justice, liberty, the worth of the individual, equality of opportunity, individual responsibility, brotherhood—those are the values. But it is not enough to reassert the values. Hell is paved with reasserted values. Action is needed. Such values cannot be said to be alive unless they live in the acts of men. We must build them into our laws and our institutions and our ways of dealing with one another. That is slow, arduous, painful work. But it is the great work of our generation. □

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