

Educational Here and

AMERICA's schools today are more severely criticized than ever before. The charge is that they are not meeting the changing needs of society, are not educating a third of their population, and are causing too many youngsters to drop out physically and psychologically. Recently a powerful front of critics, backed by government and industry, have proposed their solution—accountability.

The principle of accountability has always been essential to education; new and revolutionary, however, is the recent redefinition of the concept. Critical aspects in the current view are: (a) improvement in education is imposed upon the schools; (b) measurable performance outcome is the sole criterion for improvement; (c) the economic model of cost efficiency provides the criterion for determining the degree of educational improvement, that is, learning is a commodity, and the question is how to get more for the tax dollar or, better, how to get the most for the least; and (d) educational improvement is assessed by independent accomplishment audit agencies. Most ardent proponents of the new accountability promise nothing less than a "renaissance of American education."¹ They claim, in other words, that a rebirth or renewal of American

education will be brought about by an economically motivated technique of coercing (inducing) educational change adopted from the industrial model.

This new approach to better education appears, at first glance, to make a good deal of sense. After all, our country is on the forefront in industrial and technological advancement; her size has made education a massive national enterprise involving millions of people in its operation; her present economic condition coupled with an antiquated tax structure call for a tighter squeeze; and an operational model that has proven successful in industry ought to work in education as well.

Add to this the fact that American psychology has, in the past half-century, developed an efficient technology of behavior modification. According to many hopefuls, its application to education will guarantee improvement provided the desired behaviors are predetermined and appropriate reinforcement schedules used. Add also the impressive number of tests produced by the testing movement over the years (1,219 according to the *Sixth Mental Measurements Yearbook*, edited by Oscar K. Buros, 1965), along with a sophisticated technology of testing. Learning for the test is not new in education. The current notion of accountability merely adds another dimension—*teaching* for the test; that is, the reward or punishment for learning goes to the teacher, or to the learning

¹ Leon Lessinger and Dwight Allen. "Performance Proposals for Educational Funding: A New Approach to Federal Resource Allocation." *Phi Delta Kappan* 51 (3): 136-37; November 1969.

Accountability

Abroad

HANNELORE WASS*

corporation that has entered into a performance contract with the school.

Production of Knowledge

Underlying the current concept of accountability is the belief that better education means increased academic production. This notion is not new either. When Sputnik went into orbit, America reacted fiercely with the demand that teachers teach more, sooner, faster, and with more rigor. This pressure has continued ever since. No doubt, the current wave of accountability demonstrates a total loss of confidence in the ability and willingness on the part of the teaching profession, but surely, it must also reflect a deep concern with the education of our young—a concern we share with other societies.

It may be worthwhile to take a look abroad to see whether other industrialized countries are facing a crisis in education as we are, and if so, how they are attempting to tackle the problem. The result of such a survey may come as a shock to many Americans. A recently published report of an international conference on the role of the teacher in educational change, held in Berlin, and attended by educational leaders from 31 nations (mostly European), may not be representative, but certainly is indicative of current educational thinking and developments in other industrialized countries such as Germany, the USSR, Great Britain,

France, and others. According to this report² and other recent publications,^{3,4,5,6} other countries share with us the recognition that educational change is desperately needed, that new scientific knowledge and insights must find their way into the schools, and must do so with less lag, and that modern technology and media offer useful means toward educational improvement.

The current American concept of accountability, however, is totally absent. The idea of coercing educational change, the focus on increased production and on the economic factor, and the notion of assessing effectiveness by agencies outside the field of

² Alexander Schuller, editor. *Lehrerrolle im Wandel*. Pädagogisches Zentrum Veröffentlichungen, Reihe C, Band 21, Verlag Julius Beltz, Weinheim, Berlin, Basel, 1971.

³ Klaus Goehrke. "Dienst die Gesamtschule der Demokratisierung?" In: *Gesamtschul-Informationen*, Pädagogisches Zentrum, Berlin 4 (1): 41-45; 1971.

⁴ Der Senator für Schulwesen Berlin. "Bericht über den Schulentwicklungsplan für das Land Berlin." Drucksache Nr. 1417 des Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin.

⁵ "Nachrichten und Berichte—Inland-Ausland." In: *Gesamtschul-Informationen*, Pädagogisches Zentrum, Berlin 4 (1): 3-35; 1971.

⁶ *International Yearbook of Education*. Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 1968-1970.

* Hannelore Wass, Assistant Professor, Foundations of Education, University of Florida, Gainesville

education apparently have not occurred to other countries as a possible solution to their educational crisis. Rather, the trend is in the other direction:

1. The new American concept of accountability imposes, assesses, and reinforces educational change from the outside. This in turn reduces the role of the teacher from a professional to a skilled worker. European countries, on the other hand, hold firm in the belief that effective change must come from within the educational institution. They focus their attention upon the factors that might facilitate this process, such as broadening the teacher's competence, particularly his recognition of present societal needs, the school's role in society, and his own importance as an agent of change; involving him more actively in decision-making processes concerning matters that are essential rather than peripheral; and granting him more freedom to enable him to assume more responsibility.

2. The new American concept of accountability demands specification of more finely separated subject matter, and minutely detailed, hierarchically ordered specification of learning objectives, stressing ever more detailed skills. Other countries, on the other hand, have begun to stress interdisciplinary coupling, such as aesthetics with science (particularly in the USSR), and integration of traditional subject matter into more embracing, more meaningful, life- and problem-oriented entities, stressing broad relationships.

3. The new American concept of accountability requires that learning objectives (behavioral objectives) be predetermined and predefined for the learner by others. European countries unanimously have begun to emphasize self-propelled, self-directed "interest" learning by the pupil.

4. The new American concept of accountability implies that curriculum objectives and other important curricular decisions be determined by the "experts." European countries, on the other hand, are demanding shared decision making involving teachers, scientists, parents, and pupils.

5. The new American concept of accountability defines the teacher's role as that of a learning engineer and subject matter specialist. Other countries have begun to stress such personality factors as sensitivity, positive

self-concept, skills in interpersonal relations, autonomy, initiative, flexibility, openness to experience, and problem-solving attitude.

Thus it appears that production of knowledge is no longer the primary concern in other Western industrialized societies, and that a shift in emphasis is occurring from product to process, from curriculum content and methodology to the persons in the process, and from the strictly academic to the realms of personal development and interpersonal relationships. Most ironic is the fact, for instance, that America reacted to the Soviets' Sputnik with increased pressure toward academic performance, while at the same time the Soviets have been shifting their emphasis to character education and personality development.^{7,8}

These developments become the more noteworthy when the educational histories in European countries are considered. European countries are far more tradition-bound than the United States. Their schools are given less to fads and fashion, they have been less vulnerable to public pressure, they respond more slowly to changing needs, and when they do, changes tend to be deliberative rather than hasty. There is no question that changes now proposed or already in progress, in countries such as Germany, the USSR, Great Britain, and France, are radical departures from long-established educational traditions.

On the whole, the indication is that other Western countries are responding to their industrial-technological revolution with a counterrevolution of humanistic education. America, on the other hand, seems to be well on the road toward industrializing her education and making it more technological. Current approaches to accountability will indeed more quickly accomplish such industrialization and application of technology. Yet perhaps we need to pause and ask ourselves if that is what we want. □

⁷ Ingrid Mönch and Gesine Bühlow. "Differenzierung in der sowjetischen Einheitsschule." In: *Gesamtschul-Informationen, Pädagogisches Zentrum, Berlin* 4 (1): 36-40; 1971.

⁸ Urie Bronfenbrenner. *Two Worlds of Childhood—U.S. and U.S.S.R.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970.

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