

The Need for Broader Perspective and Dialogue in Education¹

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IN TERMS of fundamental principles and value orientations, certain frames of reference and practices have dominated curriculum development and school organization more than others. Today's school programs and methods stem largely from the rational/empirical/behavioral frame of reference, which induces pragmatic assumptions such that education can become a scientifically ordered enterprise and that it should develop definite curriculum and instruction that can stand the test of cost-effectiveness.

All levels of education show increasingly greater commitment to larger, systematic organizations operating on the basis of management accountability and outcome evaluation as determined by research and development. Unanimity concerning the feasibility of the rational frame, especially among educational leaders and researchers, has become so complete that the great majority of educators offer little or no challenge to its preeminence and seldom pursue perspective.

¹ Adapted from the Preface to: Albert H. Yee, editor. *Perspectives on Management Systems Approaches in Education: A Symposium*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications, 1973.

However, conformity and lack of debate do not denote substantive knowledge and comprehension of how and why such practices should prevail. Most teachers and principals concern themselves very little with the substance and esoteria of empirical approaches, but they presume sufficient understanding about them to practice modern teaching concepts. As school organizations grow larger and more complex each year, the individual input of practitioners into policies and programs decreases, and they must become more acquiescent to the specialized expertise and judgment of researchers and central administrators who determine educational opinions and decisions for them. Forming a detached elite structure, researchers and administrators tend to be managers and engineers, not theorists and philosophers; and many of them have never taught youngsters or for long.

Rational Frame of Reference

In this age of rising bureaucracy and scientific-economic-technological development, education has changed from a cottage industry which emphasized the master craftsman and personalized approaches to a

formalized, institutionalized structure with differentiated staff roles and expectations. Such changes in America's participatory system of education require corresponding dialogue, cross-evaluation processes, and special efforts to decentralize responsibilities. Therefore, the leadership and organizational development in professional education present a tremendous need for the greater explication of basic educational principles, especially in terms of the predominant rational approaches to today's problems.

The prevailing apathy concerning fundamental principles and values reflects in part the greater emphasis upon power, expedience, and politics in education than ever before in order to handle mounting exigencies, such as finances, shifting enrollments, disadvantaged groups, and teacher militancy for higher benefits. The rational frame of reference is appealing to most decision makers, because it relates organizational and functional prediction and control and generates practical answers and assessment modes contrary to the past dependence of educators upon subjective opinion and verbal slogans.

However, while problem solving is sought through a narrow *modus operandi*, the decision maker is channeled to some degree by the solutions and direction of progress that his frame generates. Also, the rational frame and decision-making process lead practitioners to undertake programs and methods that they were not involved in developing, do not fully comprehend, and often perceive as one-sided and belittling. The superficial stress upon the mechanical and quantitative tends to put the practitioner more "in line" with the processes than in development and control of them, and perceives learners as "manipulated" and conforming recipients instead of interactive individuals.

There is a growing uneasiness in America about the formulation and handling of educational policies and programs; and unfortunately, many educators seem unaware that one basic source of the concern could well be the inadequate dialogue (or the attitude toward seeking dialogue) on funda-

mental principles in professional education. For example, the financial situation facing most school systems today seems to come from a lack of real school-community relations and overreliance by schools upon quantitative relationships and concerns. It seems that the problem at hand, therefore, becomes one of perspective and assessing what basic assumptions underlie curricular policies and programs, especially on the part of opinion leaders and decision makers in professional education.

Becoming more knowledgeable in technical methods and gadgetry is not what is needed to overcome the problems of perspective that must be confronted. Techniques and facilities in and of themselves do not create the problems we wish to discuss, for their integrity rests upon assumptions and proofs independent of application. Rather, it is why and how they are used that make the crucial difference. This conflict of means and ends in education is analogous to many troublesome aspects of modern society and world concerns, such as the increasing controversy between traditional and broader views of scientific processes and products. Heretofore, professional education has not been as involved as it should be in the debates of recent years over the universal feasibility and applicability of empirical approaches to knowledge.

The Search for Progress

Standardized norms, statistical analyses, experimental designs, behavioral objectives, etc., have become routinized in educational research and development. To many, such aspects of the scientific movement in education have become so prominent and ingrained that it may seem heretical to probe their omnipotence, their proper status and function. Yet that kind of arrogance alone may indicate sufficient reason to do so; for many people, educational R & D have become almost synonymous with raw, quantitative methods. The general usefulness of such approaches to enhance the quality of decision making and the search for competing alternative procedures deserve close examination, since the influence of a dominant frame of

reference upon the nation's educational enterprise can be inestimably great.

Not many educational researchers and decision makers, not to mention the typical educator, will feel adequate if pressed to provide an in-depth rationale for their operational assumptions and procedures that is intellectually comprehensive and consistent in terms of the total and significant purposes of schools. The simplex retort that present approaches solve issues objectively and without verbal ambiguity does not square with the facts. Rational processes alone are not as successful in providing certainty and overcoming equivocality as many had believed. Educational issues, such as performance contracting, busing, and genetic heritability in recent times, indicate that results from the empirical paradigm do not foreclose debate and indecision. Other points of contention and perspectives arise as much among empirical workers as from other approaches to knowledge and decision making.

Significant federal support of educational R & D, starting in 1954 when Congress passed the Cooperative Research Act, is largely responsible for the recent advances in empirical work in education. Such funding demands the extension of organizational structures and the posture of proposing specific objectives, rational systematic methods, and the accounting of results. With a large input from federal sources, about \$200 million is spent for educational R & D today. The amount is minuscule compared to nearly \$70 billion in annual school expenditures and about \$7.6 billion spent each year for defense R & D since 1969 and the \$6 billion the Space Program consumed in 1966 alone, but it is great indeed compared to past support. The National Institute of Education, which is modeled on the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health, has finally become a reality and is presently being organized. In time, its centralized position and authority could have powerful long-range effect upon America's educational system and would require careful attention.

Comparing the progress of educational studies and the number of those involved in

them before 1954 and today, we can only say that the difference is revolutionary. Besides having greater financial support, researchers benefit too from massive technical advances in processing and analyzing data and organizational structures in which they are the primary figures. Research and management skills and techniques in education are rapidly maturing, and the technical competence of those earning doctorates in education is more seriously developed than before. Yet educational technicians are becoming fairly common now; what we need are more leaders who are creative educational thinkers and practitioners with adequate backgrounds in socio-philosophical-humanistic studies as well as scientific methodology.

The Educational Perspective

Without a doubt, educational R & D will continue to proliferate and improve for some time. However, the search for educational progress and fulfillment through only scientific-economic-technological or tautological approaches will continue to be fruitless and arrogant. The nature of education involves values, needs, and diversities of persons and approaches that will always be greater than any set of fact-modules and philosophical premises that one can derive.

Not only should the educational perspective be enlarged, it would benefit from much more dialogue, challenge, and concern for means-ends relations. In its emphasis upon tools and techniques, modern education neglects social interaction between learners and between learners and teachers, which are central foci comprising potentially the most relevant variables in the worth and influence of schools. It is imperative that all educators conscientiously examine the relationship of education's frame of reference, the purposes and processes of schooling, and the fundamental values of society.

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