



Needed: A Structure for Perpetual Renewal

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CHANGE itself is one of the greatest problems facing society today, and a major roadblock to the solution of the problem is the inadequacy of our social systems for handling change.¹ Structures that society has developed to deal with live problems have been maintained with fervor long after the need was gone, the problem changed. Action has become form, warmth and feeling have become ceremony, and a movable skeleton of structure has hardened into a relic, often cherished and valued only because of man's love of continuity.

The historic approach has been for institutions to be shoved or dragged into altering some part of themselves. The assumption seemed to be that the institution is substantially fine, but may need some innovations to bring it up to date. In education we apparently have added assembly-line techniques and industrial age accessories to a one-horse shay operation, which is having an impossible time justifying itself in our electronic age.

The challenge for educators is to develop schools with a built-in mechanism for con-

stant, perpetual renewal. John Gardner pointed out that in all history, no people has seriously attempted to provide for the continuous renewal of institutions.² It is imperative that we become the first to do so. It is more important for us to develop the capacity and the structure for "changingness" than for any other innovation suggested today.

There are two major reasons for this. The first is that so much of the present breakthrough of discovery and new knowledge is in the field of education. Much exciting work these days is in the area of the biological sciences. We can expect to know much more about people—how they develop, how they learn, and hopefully how they are best nurtured to healthy maturity—in the near future.

We would be foolish or blind to act in the traditional manner at this point. It is obvious that any present innovative arrangement will bear reexamination and change in light of new knowledge of better educational methods and perhaps even of more humane

² John Gardner. "Toward a Self-Renewing Society." *Time*, April 11, 1969; pp. 40-41.

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¹ Nancy R. Reckinger. "Educational Implications of the Predicted Effects of Cybernation on the Non-Work Segments of Man's Life." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1970. p. 240.

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goals. Melvin Tumin said that education should be the continuous creation of capacity.³ Surely the educational structure must also respond to the challenge of its own continuous creation of capacity.

The second reason is the changing role of schools in our post-industrial society. It is no longer possible, if it ever was, to encapsulate all of man's knowledge and to force-feed it to the young as a way of preparing them to participate in society.

Education must be a lifelong quest and activity. Now, in addition to whatever demands society would place on the school to help maintain itself, school should also be an enabling agency, facilitating the self-actualization of individuals. And as living, growing individuals change, the school as an enabling agent of change must be a responsive, plastic, improving organism of itself.

Our post-industrial society is likely to be more learning oriented because of the information explosion and the rapidity of change. The verb "to educate" is no longer something we do to others but a process we are all a part of all of our lives. In this context, surely the organization that society establishes to help that process and the people who operate the organization must have the capacity and the structure for changingness.

An Adequate Structure

Administrators and others concerned with the health of public education should be taking a look at that need in order to design an adequate structure. This is a large task, not to be taken lightly, with many ramifications. It would be presumptuous to

³ Melvin M. Tumin. "Education and Educators in a Changing Society." *Preparing Educators to Meet Emerging Needs*. Vol. 7 of: Edgar L. Morphet and David L. Jessor, editors. *Designing Education for the Future*. 7 volumes. New York: Citation Press, 1969. p. 5.

lay out a plan; yet some of the vital pieces of the intricate puzzle are easily recognized.

The first large glaring area of need is with the professional staff. If teachers are supposed to be the most direct source of enabling the self-actualization of others, they most urgently need the professional structure which enables and encourages them to self-renew and self-actualize themselves. There is much talk in the literature of a need for teachers to be creative, whole, warm human beings. They also need to stay current and flexible for up to 45 years of daily contact work with young people. They should be models of what they hope for in their students.

Yet their professional structure certifies them as finished after so many years of experience and so many college courses. The present system gives little meaningful thought to the continuing growth of their capacity. In order to do that, it would probably be necessary for them to see themselves on a lifelong continuum of learning. Such insight, once gained, would in itself cause reverberations in the whole sphere of what goes on in school. Provisions for that continuum should be a definite, though not a rigid, part of the profession of teaching.

Time and structure to be a student reaching for fulfillment need to be built into the educational process for everyone. How vital, then, for it to exist for teachers; how valuable for their students if it could start with teachers. Engineers, doctors, and other specialists are already struggling with the need to keep professionally current. It is within the realm of possibility for educators to lead the way in instituting continual self-actualization.

Better Communication

The post-industrial electronic age offers some concepts useful to a new way of thinking about education, as many authors have

suggested.⁴ We need to leave the industrial assembly-line procedure of dealing with people and adopt the cybernetic concept of completed circuits of communication, feedback, and constant individual adjustment. Education should be a complex communication net characterized by a multiplicity of feedback loops.

At this point in education, lack of communication is probably the biggest hindrance to the development of the kind of self-renewing structure this article calls for. The dialogue needs to be opened in all directions. We badly need closed circuitry and feedback among all interested parties within the system.

There is no way to respond sensitively to needed corrections if the guiding mechanism is not receiving all the necessary accurate information. And there is no value to sensitive corrections being programmed if the channels back to the problem are clogged. Cybernation has much to tell those who would establish a self-corrective educational structure.

Need for Clear Goals

In addition to the necessary communication network, basic things such as perpetual long-range planning based on clear goals are necessary. Business has been able to move into the post-industrial age because it is willing to invest in planning, studying, evaluating, and revising goals and plans.⁵

Educators have preached the problem-solving method for decades without ever taking it seriously enough to apply it to their own bailiwick. Experimentation, demonstration, and evaluation are vital today and for the future. It is important that everyone engage in testing the educational program. For the goal of self-actualization, testing the

⁴ For example: Marshall McLuhan. "Cybernation and Culture." In: Charles R. Dechert, editor. *The Social Impact of Cybernetics*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1967; and Norbert Wiener. *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950.

⁵ John K. Galbraith. *The New Industrial State*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967.

program is more important than the testing of students.

As Peter Marin said, many innovations "only heighten the problems and make the schools more efficient for the destruction of the young."⁶ If schools must choose between evaluating themselves or their students, let agencies looking for specific competencies do their own testing of applicants while the schools concentrate on keeping themselves in line with their goals.

It is important now that educators engage in the problem-solving process, preferably in the Socratic manner of:

This may be true, but it is also quite likely to be untrue, and therefore I would not have you too easily persuaded. Reflect well—and when you have found the truth, come and tell me.⁷

Obviously such a change in structure will require new educational roles and changes in many of the present ones. A watchdog kind of person would be useful, a professional educator who could be a constructive critic of what is happening. Perhaps an ombudsman to represent the lay criticism would also be helpful.

There is a great need for someone to undertake as a primary task the role of communicator—someone to keep the communication circuits open, to repair breaks, or to clear up static and reduce entropy.

There may well be the need for urban educational extension agents to respond to the needs in the community much as agricultural extension agents do in rural areas, taking problems back to the schools for study, perhaps taking members of the community back into the schools to help work on the problems, and then communicating results back to the community.

Whatever the plan, the point is to design within the educational structure a process which can respond to today's needs and the probably different needs or different situations of tomorrow. □

⁶ Peter Marin. "They Said It" column. *Saturday Review* 52 (21): 79; June 21, 1969.

⁷ Edith Hamilton. *Witness to the Truth*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1948. pp. 30-31.

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