

A Look at Voluntarism

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The Kiesling book follows the year-old Armor report by also presenting a retrospective analysis of research done in integrated schooling and compensatory education. Both report that the hoped-for yield of integrated schooling has not been forthcoming whether in terms of achievement, aspirations, or improved social understanding. The book recommends, as did Armor and other researchers, that voluntary integration should be undertaken, as opposed to forced busing and compensatory education.

HERBERT J. KIESLING in *The Value to Society of Integrated Education and Compensatory Education*¹ assesses carefully the major research finding that little improved academic achievement for the poor has resulted from expenditures for desegregation and compensatory education. Hence Kiesling questions desegregation and compensatory education as continuing determinants for social policy.

Kiesling concludes, therefore, that the ineffectiveness of the programs of integration and compensatory education "... should yield to a principle of voluntarism [the right of parents to choose which school their child

¹ Herbert J. Kiesling, *The Value to Society of Integrated Education and Compensatory Education*. An Urban Institute Reprint from the *Georgetown Law Journal*. Washington, D.C.: the Institute, 2100 M St., N.W., 1973.

will attend] which would permit maximum citizen choice."

That Kiesling, an economist, has added his recommendations on educational policy to those of an increasing number of non-educators indicates both the defection of schoolmen and their failure to develop significant educational programs. It has been external pressures, societal and economic, more than educational leadership, that have set educational policy.

Voluntarism for Whom?

It is not because he has not tried that the professional educator has not substantially influenced national policy. Few attempts, however, have significantly dented the characteristics which have, according to Katz,² restricted education since the year 1880: "universal, tax-supported, free, compulsory, bureaucratic, racist, and class-biased." Neither desegregation nor compensatory education has succeeded in breaking education out of this mold.

² Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, & Schools*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972. p. xx.

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LITTLE ROCK CENTRAL

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Compulsory integration and compensatory education have failed, some educators maintain—but is voluntary integration a viable alternative?

Nor is Kiesling's suggestion for voluntarism likely to do this. As discouraging as are the results on desegregation and compensatory education, as lacking as are the men with educational statesmanship, as non-existent as is the governmental leadership, voluntarism is not yet a viable approach for educational policy, certainly not in the form that Kiesling seems to suggest.

We may well need to move toward voluntarism in the years ahead. When we do, we must reconceptualize where the schools and tomorrow's education lead. The shackles of which Katz speaks must be removed. We must ask: Voluntarism for whom? What are the choices? Who other than the schools educate?

Prerequisites Are Needed

We may yet "save" the schools if we would pursue three major paths. First, we have yet to use in our schools what we have known for many years about how children learn. Are we better advised to slow our

steps toward voluntarism until we first put into practice the findings of learning theory?

Second, we have failed to achieve a real partnership between lay citizens and educators. Would we more wisely control our pace toward voluntarism until we allow citizens major involvement in educational decision making?

Third, we need to know and define our educational programs, and our measures of success. We must have efficient data collection systems.

Voluntarism without these three prerequisites will fail as surely as desegregation and compensatory education have failed, as certainly as the schools are failing. Voluntarism, abetted by these prerequisites, can lead to an educational policy with exciting, creative, productive practices and results, released from the shackles that were described by Katz.

Voluntarism, without these prerequisites, would seem to be only an expedient cop-out for those who despair before the national nightmares of the 1970's. □

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