
If citizens and professionals were not in fact satisfied with the current educational system, the system would change. How can school people overcome such self-satisfaction and bureaucratic inertia?

To Change or Is There

MANY of us (parents, students, educators) feel schools need to be better. We are concerned about and are trying to find ways to help schools change. It is difficult for those of us who see a need for significantly different kinds of learning experiences to understand or accept a fact—the fact that *most educators and parents are satisfied with the schools we now have*. You may argue that their satisfaction with the present school curriculum is based on mythology. We have led people (and ourselves) to believe we are doing a good job (when in reality we probably should do and could do much better). We have pointed to our well-credentialed staff, our students who go on to higher degrees, the successes our graduates have, the economic growth of our nation, and we have taken credit for much. Just recently, writers and our own public have been pointing out the evils and the negative effects of schooling. However, the fact remains that if the vast majority of citizens and professionals were not supportive of the current educational system, the system would change. *They* would change it.

Certainly, bureaucratic inertia has some effect, but even bureaucrats can respond when the public pressure is great enough. The system changes very little because, in

the main, we have the schools most people want. No matter how upsetting this fact may be, we should face it and deal with it.

Are we dealing with it? No; presently we who feel change is needed are attempting to develop strategies and implement programs which will move the status quo. One major way of doing so is through in-service education. We are committing sizable resources to release teachers, buy materials, and bring in speakers and resource people who, we hope, can stimulate change. When one examines the usual procedures employed in in-service education, we see that often school is dismissed so that disinterested (and even unwilling) teachers can attend sessions dealing with techniques *someone else* feels they should learn but which *they* aren't concerned about.

Sometimes the experiences provide some new ideas, but the implementation of the innovative concepts is usually lacking. Sometimes all that is communicated to teachers is that there is dissatisfaction on the part of administrators with what teachers are doing. (Otherwise, why try to change their current methods?) Rather than fostering change, the in-service sessions sometimes generate hostility and resentment. Teachers often do not go back to the classroom stimulated or

Not To Change- Any Question?

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inspired to do something new. They go back feeling uneasy and defensive, clinging even harder to their existing techniques with which they feel comfortable and which they now feel a need to defend. In a climate of unspoken criticism, it is not surprising that resentment exists and that change does not take place.

A Part of the Conspiracy

In a way, in many districts there seems to be a conspiracy. Released time for staff development is a part of many teacher contracts. Administrators, sometimes with the participation of teachers, plan sessions to develop goals and objectives, to share promising practices, or communicate new techniques. Recognizing the teacher resistance to change, great emphasis is placed on "inspiring" (which means entertaining) the staff. At this point, the conspiracy arises. If the sessions are sufficiently undemanding of teacher energy or commitment, then the teachers cooperate by attending without raising too big a fuss.

There is an unwritten agreement that "I'll attend the session if you make it entertaining enough and if I'm not expected to do anything at the session or later in the classroom. I'll cooperate if it's understood that

I'm not expected to change much." Too often, the administrator is just so pleased to find something to fill that in-service time, he becomes a part of the conspiracy. He is tired of conflict, hostility, grievances, and strikes. He is loath to insist on in-service activities that may evoke rebellion. He does his job by providing the staff development experience. He often does not know or care or is unable to ascertain whether the in-service session is reflected in new teacher behavior in the classroom.

In actuality, if you examine the present educational bureaucracy carefully, you will see that conservatism and maintaining the status quo is the behavior that is rewarded. We should understand the fact that the administrator is in his position by virtue of his commitment and his ability to keep things "on an even keel" (which means unchanged). Most administrators are chosen on this basis. Indeed, researcher Zeigler of the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration reports that "Thus if reform in education is desired, it is important to understand that educators have much to lose and little to gain by becoming responsive to demands

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for change.”¹ Making significant basic change (not just nibbling around the edge) is the best way to lose your job in education. Those administrators and teachers who attempt real innovation are risk-takers. They do not last as long as the “leaders” who concentrate on keeping things the same. Generally, the system rewards those who keep things the same, not those who work for change.

The Need for Reform

It seems time, then, to ask: “Does it make sense to expend scarce resources in an effort to try to drag unwilling teachers, kicking and screaming, to in-service situations which they see no need for, are likely to resent, and where the likelihood of their implementing the ideas is slight?” You might say, “But we have a *responsibility* to make schools better!” Do we? If it is true that most citizens and educators are, in general, satisfied with the educational system, and if the schools belong to the public and should be designed to implement their desires, this same group can very well ask, “Why the need for change?”

Those who question the need for reform have found some support in recent prestigious studies. Coleman,² Jencks,³ and the Rand Report⁴ all indicate the nature of schools (at least as presently constituted), and even specific instructional programs, make little difference in pupil performance. It certainly seems appropriate not to condemn current programs with which you may

differ philosophically, because it is difficult to prove that they are less effective than those you value! It also seems appropriate to move decisively to establish alternatives which will be a dramatic contrast to the present pale educational offerings.

It is widely recognized that an individual does not change unless he sees a reason—has a need—to take on new behavior. Since many educators and many parents do not see a need for change, it seems inefficient, if not impossible, to move the total system. Yet this is what we have been trying to do. We have tried to encourage the total school or school system to change. It has not worked. A more logical and more fruitful approach (if you will not be satisfied with the ways things are) is to make it possible for those educators, parents, and students who want “something different” to have that option.

It should be possible, on a school building basis, to allow alternatives to the present program, staffed by interested teachers and participated in *voluntarily* by students with the consent of their parents. If sufficient interest exists for any given option (for example, open classrooms, community-based education), then a total school could be devoted to the pursuit of such education. In this way, those who want change can have change. Their readiness should make possible rapid progress toward the establishment of whatever innovation they are committed to.

But, you say, you feel a responsibility to have better education for all children—not just those who volunteer to participate. You want improved instructional techniques used by all teachers, not just those who chose to help establish and operate an optional program. Well, our efforts to date in pulling and moving “the group” have been generally unsuccessful. We usually provide the same in-service education for a large group of teachers (often, the total staff) at the same time and for the same length of time. For a profession which professes to know about learning and is fond of talking about the need to individualize, this is curious (and ineffective) behavior. Despite this contradiction, we continue to use a major portion of our

¹ E. Joseph Schneider. “Roadblocks to Reform.” *D & R Report* (A periodical of the Council for Educational Development and Research.) 2 (3): 3; April 1973.

² James S. Coleman *et al.* *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1966.

³ Christopher Jencks *et al.* *Inequality: A Re-assessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1972.

⁴ Harvey A. Averch *et al.* *How Effective Is Schooling? A Critical Review and Synthesis of Research Findings*. Prepared by the Rand Corporation for the President's Commission on School Finance, March 1972.

in-service funds in this way. We should direct our resources to those who are ready to move. We usually use them to attempt to change people who we know are the most resistant to new ideas. No wonder we get poor results. It's like killing a healthy chicken to make soup for a sick one.

Not Pushed—but Allowed!

Let's try working with folk who don't have to be pushed but just *allowed* to move! From what we know about how change occurs, we realize that our peers have, perhaps, the greatest impact on behavior. If this is so, having a few really exciting classrooms in a building, manned by enthusiastic staff who are getting real satisfaction from their work, could be the best source of impetus for change among staff. Having several optional schools which are significant departures can be a source of ideas and inspiration to the faculties of the more traditional schools. If they don't act as a force for change in the more established schools, we haven't lost anything—we've gained much. We will have provided some genuine choices for students, parents, and teachers.

We should have support rather than the criticism we've had of late from those in the school and community who wanted "something different." Hopefully, we should have little criticism from the defenders of the status quo, because they will have their students attending the schools they want. Those teachers who want to teach in the more traditional setting will be doing so.

Let's be selfish for a moment. We've been discussing the values of options to students and teachers. Establishing optional programs can help educators—especially administrators. Certainly, there is some extra effort to work with staff, kids, and the community to get the option operating, but once established, let's look at what it can do for the harried administrator. At present, if you have a student who isn't benefiting from the program, or a teacher who differs philosophically with the administrator, your responses are very limited. That's because most of our programs are the same and striving to be

more so. Once a variety of alternatives is created, you have a significantly different climate in which to place people who, because of learning style, temperament, or philosophy aren't happy where they are.

Establishing options also creates a climate which communicates to staff in a dramatic way that new efforts are encouraged and rewarded. The public relations value of having options can be sizable, because this can project the image of the district as a forward-looking one. Alternative programs provide a low risk arena (separate from the "regular" programs) in which to try out new methods of instruction and governance. Options offer a way to "defuse" antagonistic and militant community groups and other pressures by allowing the creation of programs tailor-made to fit the needs of a few.

Choice is an essential element in a democracy. Alternatives to traditional educational programs have been lacking for most people. This has not been in the spirit of our democratic society.

Options should seek the same overall goals as our present programs. They would offer new routes to reaching these objectives. If we follow the practice of establishing options on demand for those who wish to participate voluntarily, we *can* provide improved education for those who are interested. We also may find that we have more impact on those who presently do not see a need for change and with whom we have had little success in current in-service efforts.

A few dollars for materials and released time would go far in establishing an option by which educators can work toward establishing an alternative program they believe in. It might be that some of our in-service resources ought also to be used to allow teachers, under teacher leadership, to establish teacher centers—centers committed to identifying and solving instructional problems identified by the teachers themselves.

Let us use a significant amount of our resources to support movement on the part of those who are ready to move. In this way, we will be rewarding those who want to work for change, rather than those who are devoted to keeping things the same. □

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