

Business, Industry, and Schools

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Is "what's good for business" good for schools? Or do we have to rethink (once again) our whole approach to education?

THE TRAGEDY of the contemporary movement to link the public schools to a business and efficiency outlook is that we are witnessing a replay of similar movements in the first third of the 20th century. The adoption of time and motion studies, the efficiency movement in education, the saving of monies by enlarging classes—in short, the aping of industrial techniques by educators has been ably documented by educational historians such as Callahan and Krug.

In listening to the more recent and contemporary lingo about efficiency in education, the words may have changed, but the melody lingers on. Instead of time and motion studies we now have input-output analyses; instead of cost cutting procedures, we now have on-line evaluation of programs; instead of principles of educational efficiency,

we are told to construct educational programs in line with program planning and budget systems.

No matter the refrain, the issue remains the same—will educators have to play the same scenario to please what they think are cost conscious boards of education? Or will it be possible to approach the education of children as the *sine qua non* of a democratic society?

George S. Counts, in reviewing the impact of time and motion studies and the efficiency movement in education, indicated in a particularly apt remark that, "Never in the history of education has so much paper been used to so little purpose." The winding interstices of our new generation of economists, behavioral output specialists, and administrative organizers may well challenge the Counts conclusion, for the recent outpouring of materials on "management by objectives," program planning and budget analyses, and other such procedures, leads one to conclude that the pile of paper grows higher with each passing day.

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What Are the Objections?

What then are the objections which can be laid at the mentality of business efficiency as applied to the education of children?

1. It degrades the person of teacher and student by subjecting each to external criteria and places the entire operation in a cost-benefit relationship.

2. It places schooling in a clearly subordinate position with handmaiden's status to the larger Industrial Community.

3. It makes quantification and objective evaluation the touchstone of the worth of educational programs.

The combination of these factors along with the linkage of corporate interests to governmental actions portends a new and dramatically dangerous time for American educators. One is forced to conclude that the linkage of individual talent, schooling as a screening device, the rise of a credentialing society, and the interest in education as a corporate matter (as opposed to individual self-fulfillment) have created a vastly different sorting and screening agency than was ever conceived by Horace Mann.

As an example, the intrusion by the federal government to ensure certain school outputs (science, math, NSF, and engineering) is striking testimony to the limited and almost anti-intellectual attitude which relates national concerns to the productivity of certain fields of study. More recently the overriding concern of the Federals in career education places the task of schooling in juxtaposition to jobs—not enjoyment, pleasure in learning, aesthetic development—but jobs!

Consider the following two quotes from the President's Commission on School Finance.¹

The entire school program would be focused around helping the individual student achieve his own self-established career goal (p. 65).

Businessmen are complaining that they cannot get the people they need and students are complaining that they cannot find jobs. *The link between the two is supposed to be the educational system* (p. 65). [Italics added for emphasis.]

Well, that puts the matter rather baldly. What's good for the business community is what the schools are to be about!

What Does Democratic Education Mean?

Before educators travel this road again, I think it important that we rethink and reconstruct just what the educational process means for children and a democratic society. This rethinking must pay far more attention to the non-economic and non-measurable areas of schooling such as aesthetic development, artistic appreciation, and critical thinking. It means we must not lose sight of the process of schooling as that potent force which introduces children to a democratic way of living that is both compassionate and critical, intellectual and practical, and that is worthy of our best time and effort—not because there is a payoff for the Pentagon, General Motors, or even MIT, but simply because a fundamental belief in the dignity and worth of all our citizens demands nothing less than the best for all our children.

When the larger purposes of schooling are thus understood and related to the preservation and extension of our democratic society, I simply do not believe that the practical good sense of American teachers and administrators will then allow the schools to be anything else.

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¹ Bethesda, Maryland: ERIC Reports, November 1971.

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