

CAN ACCOUNTABILITY IMPROVE SECONDARY EDUCATION?

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"The accountability movement can be directed to humanistic ends. Professional educators can accept the techniques of systematic planning, can learn how to involve large numbers of people in the planning process, and can, as a result, develop curricula which encourage learners to assume progressively more responsibility for their own self-development. The accountability movement, if viewed in this way, can make a substantial contribution to the improvement of instruction."

AT LEAST two basic theories of accountability are now being discussed and considered in our country. In my opinion, one of these theories, if implemented widely, could lead to the stagnation and possible destruction of secondary education. The other could, I believe, strengthen and revitalize it.

Theory I—Accountability as the Strengthening of State Control

Theory I has grown out of the business-industrial-military traditions of systematic

planning and management.¹ According to this theory accountability is an authoritarian process to be imposed on schools by legislation and mandate. It is rooted in the belief that teachers and administrators cannot be trusted; that learners, given a choice, would prefer not to learn; and that procedures appropriate to the production of consumer goods, such as automobiles, can be applied to the production of skilled, motivated, and knowledgeable citizens.

More specifically, a system of accountability reflecting Theory I would have the following characteristics:

1. The state defines the goals and objectives of education ("product specifica-

¹ For an interesting account of how this trend has developed and affected the management of education, see: Herbert M. Kliebard. "Bureaucracy and Curriculum Theory." In: Vernon F. Haubrich, editor. *Freedom, Bureaucracy, & Schooling*. 1971 Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1971. Chapter 4.

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tions”) and imposes these goals and objectives on local communities.

2. Through mandated statewide testing programs and through monitoring of the schools by state-employed inspectors, the state determines which schools are most successful and which are least successful in teaching the objectives.

3. Funding decisions are made at the state level on the basis of the effectiveness of schools. Presumably those schools which are least successful, as shown by the testing program and as verified by the monitors, would be penalized financially.

4. Local district administrators would evaluate the performance of the professional staff members of their schools on the basis of how well pupils do on the mandated testing program. The least effective professionals would be penalized (that is, “held accountable”).

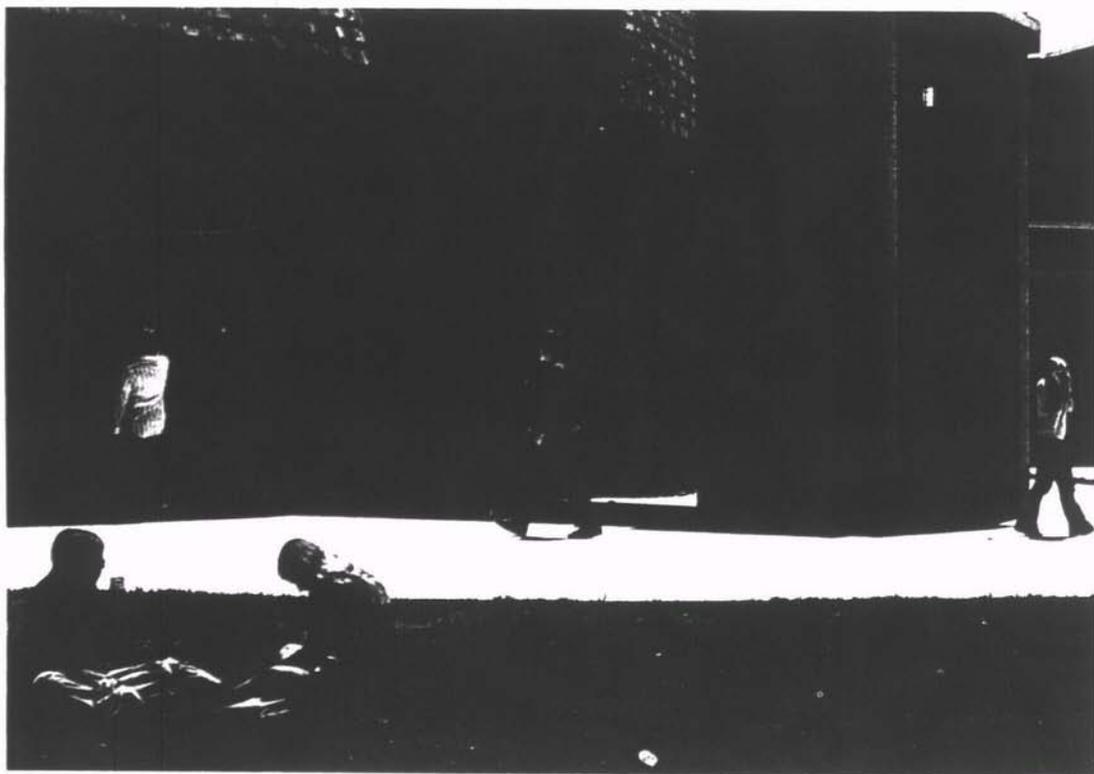
5. It would be obligatory that each

school issue an annual report of its pupils’ achievement to parents. Thus the schools will be placed in competition with one another to process the children as effectively as possible.

Parts of this concept have already been legislated in several states.

Theory II—Accountability as Planning for Instructional Improvement

Theory II has its roots in our country’s humanistic tradition. Historically, this tradition has manifested itself through such movements as those to enfranchise and provide equal rights for women, to free slaves, to protect children from unfair labor practices, to reform prisons and insane asylums, to establish social security and unemployment insurance, to provide equal rights for minorities, and to establish and encourage philanthropy. The movement has vitalized music, art, literature, and drama. It has



been and is a dynamic force, affecting substantially the nature of our public institutions, our businesses, and our industries.

Today's advocates of humanism in education, such as Arthur Combs, John Holt, John Goodlad, and Chris Argyris, to name a few, reject Theory I accountability. They even reject the term accountability, associating it, presumably, with one or more of the Theory I characteristics.

A Theory II accountability system, however, which is compatible with our humanistic traditions, may yet be designed. Such a system would be characterized as follows:

1. It would be based on the assumption that students learn more in environments in which planning is shared, communication is open, and within which self-evaluation, independence, and creativity are facilitated.

2. It would be assumed that it is possible and desirable to build nonmanipulative organizational environments based on increasing self-control. Such organizations would be self-monitoring.²

3. It would be assumed that, with few exceptions, people can be trusted; that educators want to learn how to do their jobs better, and that kids, if given learning tasks which make sense to them and which they can do successfully, will want to learn.

4. Accountability, then, would be seen as basically a planning process in which those who are most affected by a plan would be involved in its design and implementation. Learner objectives would be defined by teachers and pupils at the classroom level.

Such a state-sponsored program would recognize the importance of local autonomy by calling on districts and schools to develop their own goals, objectives, and curricula. It would mandate only that districts involve representatives of the people in planning for school improvement, and it would provide for assistance and support to school districts as

² See: Chris Argyris. "Essay Review of *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* by B. F. Skinner." *Harvard Educational Review* 41; November 1971. Argyris challenges many Skinnerian assumptions, arguing that individuals are capable of becoming autonomous and responsible for their own actions.

"Accountability . . . a planning process in which those who are affected by a plan will be involved in its design and implementation."

they implement the planning process. Important assumptions underlying the administration of such a state program would be that the teacher-learner relationship is a very personal one; that teaching and learning are human, creative, sometimes emotional acts; that all pupils do not need to learn the same things; and that the curriculum must be flexible so that individual differences can be accommodated.

The program would recognize that communities are different, that there is more than one educational philosophy afoot in the land, and that if schools are to be human places they must, to a large degree, be shaped by the people in them.

The accountability movement will contribute to the improvement of secondary education to the extent that it is implemented in accordance with Theory II instead of Theory I.

Curriculum Implications of Theory II Accountability

It is possible to organize a humanistic curriculum in such a way that learning outcomes are predicted and measured and that responsibilities of teachers and pupils are defined and agreed to. Such a curriculum would have the following general characteristics:

1. *The curriculum provides for individual differences among learners.* The curriculum must provide for a wide variety of learning activities for reaching specified objectives and, in some cases, *for alternative learning objectives.* It is known that all pupils do not learn at the same rate; therefore, the curriculum should be organized to permit self-pacing for at least some pupils. It is also known that the same content is not equally appropriate for all learners in a

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group; therefore, content options should be provided.

Faculties should be held accountable for developing plans of work which specify how much progress they expect to make toward developing such curricula each year. Supervisors, administrators, and boards of education should be held accountable for providing the needed planning time, consultant help,

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and materials so that such planning can proceed on schedule.

Given such human-oriented curricula, a pupil can be held responsible either for doing the prescribed work or for reaching an agreement with his or her teacher for alternative ways to be productive.

2. *The curriculum is goal and objective oriented.* Goals toward which the curriculum is oriented should have been defined at the district level. It is the task of the building level curriculum planning group to indicate which of the district goals a particular curriculum is designed to accomplish. Learning objectives supporting each chosen goal should be stated.

Learning units can then be planned around each objective or set of objectives. Each learning unit should contain the following elements:

- Prescribed or suggested learning activities which will enable the learner to achieve the objective, including a variety of options.

- Prescribed or suggested evaluative activities, including in many cases both pre-tests and post-tests. Provision for student-designed evaluative activities.

- Possibly an invitation to the individual student or to a sub-group that they design their own learning unit in place of the teacher-designed one.

- Provision for some pupils to move

into student-oriented "quest" activities as soon as the objectives of the unit have been achieved.

- Provision for acceleration of individuals or sub-groups of students who achieve the objectives quickly.

The process whereby the pupil demonstrates that he or she has accomplished a given objective—whether that objective be originated by the teacher or proposed by the learner—is the process of accountability.

Records should be kept jointly by the teacher and the learner, perhaps in a file folder system, that will enable the learner to demonstrate to others that he or she has achieved the specified objectives.

3. *The curriculum provides frequent options for student-initiated learning.* As indicated earlier, students should be constantly invited to plan at least some of their own learning activities. These activities may be aimed at achieving either a teacher-developed or a student-developed objective. Students should be encouraged to propose their own objectives. Such objectives may be accepted or rejected by the teacher, or the teacher may suggest modifications.

Planning one's own learning should not be viewed by pupils as just an "extra credit" type activity. On the contrary, it must be viewed as an accepted way of achieving any objective, whether that objective is specified by the teacher or by the learner, or by the two together. Learning groups with from two to five members are to be encouraged. Such a group becomes feasible whenever two or more learners can agree to accept a common learning objective.

4. *Provision is made in the curriculum to define the students' and the teachers' rights and obligations.* It should be specified, for example, that pupils have the right and are encouraged to propose alternative learning activities. It should also be stated that once a set of activities has been agreed upon by the pupil and the teacher, the pupil has the obligation of either completing the plan on time or of securing from the teacher an agreement to modify the plan.

It should be stated, perhaps, that teach-

ers have the obligation to provide students with a curriculum plan which provides for individual differences. Teachers should be held accountable, through the evaluative process, to their colleagues, their principal, and their pupils for effectively meeting their agreed-upon obligations. Evaluation processes should be designed which provide each teacher, pupil, and parent with information regarding the extent to which the individual has met his or her obligations.

5. *The curriculum provides for diagnosis of learning difficulties and prescription of remedial learning activities.* Pupils have the right to expect that the school system will provide them with basic learning skills such as reading, computing, planning and evaluating their own progress, and forming opinions or conclusions on the basis of information. When individual pupil performance is less than satisfactory to the teacher, he or she has an obligation to diagnose the pupil's difficulty in a professional manner and to prescribe appropriate learning activities.

Learning the basics should not be left to chance. The faculty should be held accountable for developing diagnostic and prescriptive procedures and pupils should be held accountable for completing the prescribed activities.

6. *The overall progress of the group of learners is periodically measured and reported.* The progress of each group should, of course, be measured in terms of the agreed-upon objectives. For this reason it is likely that criterion-referenced tests should be used to measure the group's progress. The tests should be designed in such a way that the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum being evaluated are identified.

It should be recognized that many of the objectives of a curriculum cannot be measured by a paper and pencil test of any kind. For these objectives, other means can be used such as direct observation, check lists, accumulation of evidence in marked folders, videotape analysis, and opinionnaires.

Norm-referenced tests may be used for the purpose of providing each pupil and

parent with information regarding how well the pupil compares with others his or her age regarding certain common skill areas. They can also be valuable as predictors of future academic success of individual pupils. They should not be used, however, to measure the effectiveness of a curriculum.

7. *Teachers assume the responsibility for planning and evaluating their own work.* Teachers must learn how to plan and evaluate their own work. Otherwise, they will be unable to help pupils learn how to do their planning and evaluating. Teachers must demonstrate that which they advocate. It is especially important that faculty members learn and practice planning and evaluation skills in schools dedicated to developing independent learners. Schools dedicated to educating conformists would, of course, stress teaching teachers and pupils to follow plans developed by someone else.

B. F. Skinner has written the following:

The hypothesis that man is not free is essential to the application of scientific method to the study of human behavior. The free, inner man who is held responsible for his behavior is only a pre-scientific substitute for the kinds of causes which are discovered in the course of scientific analysis. All these alternative causes lie *outside* the individual.³

Such assumptions, if generally accepted by our profession will lead us into state-dominated school systems. In such systems artificial manipulative techniques must be used in order to force people to learn.

The accountability movement can be directed to humanistic ends. Professional educators can accept the techniques of systematic planning, can learn how to involve large numbers of people in the planning process, and can, as a result, develop curricula which encourage learners to assume progressively more responsibility for their own self-development. The accountability movement, if viewed in this way, can make a substantial contribution to the improvement of instruction. □

³B. F. Skinner. *Science and Human Behavior*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953. p. 477.

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