

Reviews

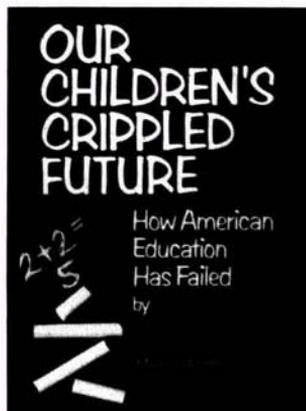
Review Coordinators: Charles W. Beegle, Associate Professor of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; James B. Boyer, Professor and Institute Director, Urban Education Institute, Kansas State University, Manhattan; Wilma S. Longstreet, Professor of Education, University of Michigan, Flint; and Edna Mitchell, Head, Department of Teacher Education, Mills College, Oakland, California.

Our Children's Crippled Future: How American Education Has Failed. Frank Armbruster, New York: Quadrangle. 308 pp.—Reviewed by Willard L. Hogeboom, Oakdale, New York.

Our Children's Crippled Future is an expanded version of a recent study done by the Hudson Institute, Herman Kahn's "think tank." The author, Frank Armbruster, aided by members of the Institute's staff, has gathered an impressive amount of data in the form of tables, charts, and graphs to support the claim that student achievement in the U.S. has declined, and the blame falls mostly upon teachers and the schools.

Armbruster's data trace the results of various standardized student achievement tests dating back to before World War I. He concludes that while the general intelligence level has remained more or less constant, student achievement has been steadily declining. At the same time, the costs of education have been skyrocketing because, as the author contends, teachers have been getting smaller classes, and large salaries and fringe benefits. This is not the result of merit or increased productivity, but rather the fact that teachers have organized themselves into powerful unions that can intimidate school boards and politicians.

While Armbruster's contention that student achievement has been declining is more than adequately supported, he fails to make the necessary connection between his data and his conclusions as to the causes. For instance, he rejects all explanations for the student



achievement decline that deal with factors outside the schools. In fact, his refusal to accept that the public school system is a reflection of society is one of the serious faults with this study.

Another fault is his romantic nostalgia in which he rejects practically every innovation in education over the past several decades as unnecessary or even destructive tinkering with a system that was working. He frequently refers to an idealized past in which all students learned to read, write, and compute in well-behaved classes of up to 50 or 60 students many of whom didn't speak English. Apparently Armbruster is unaware of recent studies that indicate that this is not a true picture of education, at least between the turn of the century and World War II. For

one thing, the mere fact that the dropout rate didn't get below 50 percent in this country until the 1940s indicates what happened to poor achievers then. Also, contrary to popular belief, there were multi-lingual programs for non-English speaking students in many urban schools.

Armbruster's book, in spite of its scientific trappings, was not written for professional educators. His intention seems to be to wave the "back to basics" flag for parents, taxpayers, school board members, and politicians. Armbruster's back to basics goes far beyond the emphasis upon reading, writing, and computational skills. What he seems to really want is a society dominated by traditional middle class values in which everyone, not just students and teachers, knows his or her place and what is expected of them. Unfortunately for Armbruster, it's never that simple.

Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. New York: Basic Books, 1976. 340 pages.—Reviewed by Lowell Horton, Professor of Education, Northern Illinois University, Carbondale.

Let me begin this review by

predicting that this will not be the last you will read of this book. Bowles and Gintis have designed a work that is sure to capture the attention of serious students of education. Certainly not all reviewers will agree with the authors' assumption or with their conclusions. I suggest that most entrenched members of the educational establishment are likely to reject much of the analysis of schools in society as presented in this book. However, it will be difficult to reject the careful scholarship and erudite style demonstrated throughout.

Educational reformers from Dewey through the free-school movement, from voucher plans to deschooling, have assumed that the present school system is the product of irrationality, mindlessness, and social or educational backwardness on the part of teachers, administrators, school boards, and parents. On the contrary, Bowles and Gintis argue that the available evidence indicates that the pattern of social relationships and the structure of educational experiences fostered in the schools are consciously designed and admirably suited to nurturing attitudes and behavior consonant with participation in the labor force. Those personality traits conducive to proper work performance on the job are the same traits that are rewarded with high grades in the classroom.

Education in the United States plays a dual role for the capitalist economy by imparting technical and social skills and appropriate motivations on the one hand, and by defusing and depoliticizing potentially explosive class relations on the other. Thus, schools in capitalist America serve to perpetuate the social, political, and economic conditions through which the products of labor are expropriated in the form of profits. The educational system does not add to or subtract from the overall degree of inequality and repressive personal development. Rather it is best understood as an institution that perpetuates the social rela-

tionships of economic life through which these patterns are set by facilitating a smooth integration of youth into the labor force. The schools operate in this manner not through the conscious intentions of teachers and administrators in their day-to-day activities, but through a close correspondence between the social relationships that govern personal interaction in the work place and the social relationships of the educational system, specifically the hierarchical division of labor, power organized along vertical lines of authority, fragmented and compartmentalized areas of knowledge, and institutionally induced competition among students for grades.

The authors' recommendation for reform for the economic as well as the educational condition (for the two cannot be viewed independently of each other) is reminiscent of George S. Counts' sagacious question, "Dare the schools build a new social order?", to which Bowles and Gintis cast a resoundingly affirmative vote. They argue that the key to reform in all societal areas is the democratization of economic relationships, including but not limited to, social ownership, democratic and participatory control of the production process by workers, equal sharing of socially necessary labor by all, and progressive equalization of income and destruction of hierarchical economic relationships. They envision an educational system that, in the process of reproducing society, vigorously promotes personal development and social equality. They conclude that the creation of an equal and liberating school system requires a revolutionary transformation of economic life.

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis stand squarely in the American Marxist tradition in their philosophical orientation toward the role of school in society. Through a careful and thoughtful analysis from a rich pool of available sources, they have assiduously drawn a set of perturbing but intriguing conclusions. The authors

have analyzed the data in meticulous fashion and presented their conclusions in a reasoned style which tends to stimulate and provoke intellectual reaction in the highest tradition of accomplished scholarship. Serious students of education are in the debt of Bowles and Gintis for providing another vantage point from which to view the schools in this society.

All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure.

Kenneth Keniston and the Carnegie Council on Children. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977. 225 pages.—Reviewed by Lowell Horton, Professor of Education, Northern Illinois University, Carbondale.

The rhetoric of today's American society proclaims that "children are our most precious natural resources" and calls families "the building blocks of our society." Reality falls far short of rhetoric.

The United States supports a national health system that results in a higher infant mortality rate than 14 other nations, despite the fact that we spend more of the gross national product on medical care. Television is programmed for the financial advantage of sponsors and networks with little or no consideration given the exploitation of the American child who is exposed to more than 15,000 hours of television viewing by the time he is 18 years old. Our welfare system forces fathers to live apart from their families. An "acceptable" unemployment figure of seven percent results in severe privations for thousands of the nation's children. Soaring inflation further erodes the purchasing power of those parents trapped on the bottom of the economic ladder resulting in lasting physical and emotional damage to children.

American families are under pressure. Many parents, especially those who are educationally and economically deprived, feel powerless, frustrated and unable to cope.

But if parents *feel* powerless, it is because they *are*, powerless. Although they have the responsibility for their children's lives, parents seldom have the voice or the authority to make others listen. When parents feel powerless, it is not because they need reform, therapy, or education. Changing requires not just individual change, family therapy, or childhood education, but social, economic and political reform.

The American family has changed and is changing. The old myths about families do not apply to new realities. Presently 54 percent of married women with school-age children work outside the home. The percent of working mothers of preschool children has increased from 13 percent to 37 percent during the past 30 years. In 1975, in only 34 out of 100 husband-wife families was the husband the sole breadwinner. This is the first time in our history that the typical school age child has a mother who works outside the home. A 700 percent increase in the divorce rate since 1900 has resulted in many children spending part of their childhood in a one-parent family, usually with the mother as head of the household. Statistics only hint at the personal stresses that accompany these shifts.

The pervading myth of a family as a self-sufficient cradle to be blamed for the failures and cred-

ited with the successes of future citizens is a myth that has caused numerous problems in our ability to think creatively about families in contemporary society. For today, far from being the sole influence on their children's lives, parents are more like executives who must try to orchestrate the societal influences on their children. All families, including the rich as well as the poor, need supporting systems in order to function in the best interests of the young. The poor, more often than the rich, are unable to seek out and coordinate the necessary services.

It is not enough to help parents. We have too often blamed the victim for his own misfortune. What must be done, writes Keniston, is to make a comprehensive commitment to children. It is the broad goal of the Carnegie Council on Children to sensitize and mobilize society to support the family's authority and viability through the development of a family policy as comprehensive as the national defense policy. Keniston and the Council call for laws geared to maintaining families' integrity and to offering help in crises. The family cannot be separated from the society in which it functions. The most pressing problems of families and children are in fact the problems of society.

In *All Our Children*, a book that might serve as a platform for a children's rights party, Keniston

recommends that children be considered first when Americans debate questions of national policy. The policies he has in mind go far beyond the immediate needs of children to any policy that directly or indirectly affects the quality of a child's life. The effects on the lives of children of decisions on unemployment, national health care, welfare, and energy are profound and lasting. Keniston and the Council are asking us to begin perceiving public issues from the children's point of view. Once we are able to do this the necessity of certain programs and directions becomes obvious. We begin to ask unexpected questions about tax reform, health care, racism, sexism and national spending as they relate to children. We begin to see that policies that address only the immediate needs of children miss the shaping social context that created those needs. We are more able to deal with the council's controversial diagnosis and prescription for a national family policy whose premise is that supporting the development of the next American generation means, above all, supporting parents and families.

All Our Children is an important and excellent book. Although the entire work is animated by a vision of a better society, it forces us to see how poorly we have done by the citizens who need us most and on whom we ultimately depend for survival as a nation.

Reviewers



Willard Hogeboom



Lowell Horton

Copyright © 1978 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.