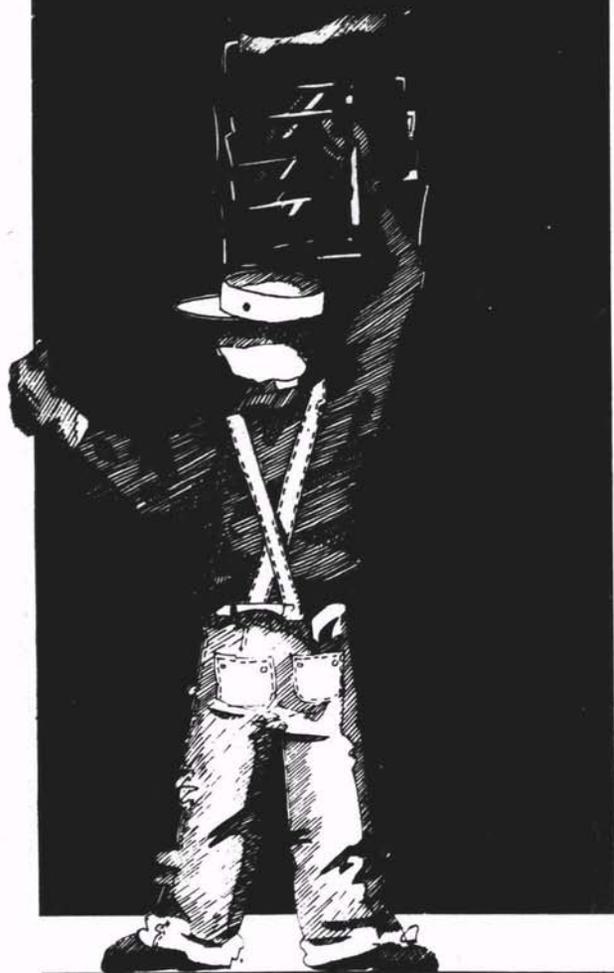


# Reconsidering the Goals of High School Education

John Henry Martin



*The time has come to recognize the school's special responsibility for intellectual development and citizenship. Educators can help achieve other aims long considered goals of secondary education by encouraging development of a comprehensive program of community-based education.*

After 60 years of dominance by the Seven Cardinal Principles, the time has come to agree upon a more circumspect and modest set of aims for the American high school. Sixty years ago educators recognized that the narrow nineteenth century academic organization of the high school was inadequate for the changing conditions of the early twentieth century and declared their intention to broaden the curriculum. In doing so, they accepted the dangerously flattering doctrine that the high school could and should be responsible for every aspect of life.

The result has been a proliferation of courses and programs. A partial list includes art education, business education, career education, character education, cooperative education, consumer education, drug education, distributive education, driver education, environmental education, ethical education, family education, global education, health education, homemaking education, moral education, physical education, safety education, sex education, and vocational education. Vacillating between the need to match course offerings to a diverse population and the need to give social cohesion to that same diversity, we have by historical accretion and philosophic confusion developed what might be called "curriculum sprawl." How did we get there?

In 1893 an influential report by the Committee of Ten described the purpose of the high school as preparation of an elite for entry into college and "for the duties of life." It would be accomplished by studying the humanities, sciences, mathematics, and languages.<sup>1</sup> This narrow view of purposes and equally narrow prescription of means to achieve them was disputed from the beginning by those whose vision of the high school was more egalitarian.<sup>2</sup>

Current moves to define minimum competencies and to "return to basics" may revive such a narrow interpretation of the functions of the high school. We are faced with the task of pruning the excesses of the Seven Cardinal Principles while avoiding a retreat to

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Committee on Secondary School Studies* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1893).

<sup>2</sup> *The Committee of Nine on the Articulation of High School and College*, NEA Proceedings (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1908), pp. 39-41.

an outmoded position inadequate to the needs of today's society and youth.<sup>3</sup>

### A School For Democracy

The *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* were published at the close of World War I by the commission examined the whole of life's functions the National Education Association in 1918.<sup>4</sup> The commission examined the whole of life's functions in a democracy and determined that high schools had seven major objectives: health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocational education, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character.

The high school was to be an extension of the common school; all children were to be admitted on the basis of age. "The school is the one agency that may be controlled definitely and consciously by our democracy for the purpose of unifying its people." Their differences were to be met through an increase in the diverse offerings made possible by increasing the size of the school. The school had to be "the prototype of a democracy."

One major impact of the report was the transformation of the older view of the purposes of the high school from a school for the elite, educated through standard subjects, into a school for all youth whose education was to include every area of human concern except organized religion. For the Seven Cardinal Principles were a remarkably broad framework for encompassing the private, the political, the economic, the social, the artistic, the recreational, the marital, and the moral lives of all. Education and schooling were regarded as synonymous.<sup>5</sup> From that time until the 1970s the major reports and studies on secondary education accepted this all-inclusive view of the purposes and obligations of the school.<sup>6</sup>

It is remarkable that a statement asserting that schools were to be responsive to all of humanity's needs should have been accepted so uncritically.<sup>7</sup> Part of the explanation may be that at the close of "the war to make the world safe for democracy" the U.S. was emerging as the leading industrial nation on earth. Our public rhetoric was characterized by over-

statement. Educators were influenced then and for years thereafter by a series of phenomena that supported the concept of a comprehensive high school providing education in all areas of human activity.

We were then a nation of immigrants. Each year between 1900 and 1923, from 500,000 to a million immigrants entered the United States. Educating and assimilating the children of these alien poor was thought to be a task uniquely suited to schools.

Progressive reforms during the early years of the twentieth century brought child labor laws prohibiting factory employment of children and raising the compulsory school attendance age from 12 to 14 and then to 16 years. Under the umbrella of these broad principles, the American high school grew until by the mid-1970s it had become an all-inclusive institution serving 95 percent of the adolescent population.

### Society's Burdens

Among the unfortunate consequences of the sweeping language of the Seven Cardinal Principles has been our assumption that schools could reform all of society's ills. Schools have undertaken burdens that they have neither the resources nor the talents to overcome. Our society has been deluded into believing that social problems can be remedied by education in schools. Whether the problem is death on our highways, divorce, drugs, or racial discrimination, we have believed that the schools, if properly orga-

<sup>3</sup> The aims of education should be as broad as the aspirations of society. The position taken here is that the school, by structure and endowment, is a limited institution, incapable of assuming that its purposes are equally as broad.

<sup>4</sup> *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, A Report of the NEA's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1918).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Educational Policies Commission, *The Purposes of Education in American Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1938); *Education for All American Youth* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1944).

<sup>7</sup> L. I. Kandel, *The Cult of Uncertainty* (New York: Arno Press, 1943; reprint ed., 1972).

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nized and dedicated, could provide solutions. The assumption is false and dangerous. Schools reflect the larger society. While capable of much, they are neither as omnipotent as we might wish nor as futile as their radical critics claim.

But social remedies require investments in political, economic, and social reform in addition to the gentle and unmeasured work of the schools. We in education have been guilty of abetting this self-defeating process, by welcoming new tasks such as driver education, sex education, and drug education. We have protested only when limited results compelled us to complain about resources.

It is a truism to say that motion pictures, radio, and television are powerful educators—that families, religious bodies, museums, private and public agencies, and the streets educate—that the press, magazines, unions, armed forces, business, and all the professions educate.<sup>8</sup> To expect schools to shape attitudes and behaviors while all the other “educators” teach other values is to be at best naive about the extraordinary tenacity of a culture or at worst to exhibit an egocentric ignorance about the effectiveness of our work with children. It is flattering to believe that one is part of a grand enterprise that can change the universe, but discouraging to find—as we always do—that our goals are not being achieved.

Another consequence of inflated statements of purpose is their remoteness from the school's curriculum. It is understandable that the Committee of Ten should have assumed in 1893 that the learning encompassed in such courses as English literature, rhetoric, geometry, trigonometry, history, and the sciences would, if taught well, produce the intellectual qualities needed for success either in life or in advanced college studies carrying the same names.

But when we turn to such outcomes as “worthy home membership,” the absence of clear linkages between them and the course offerings of the high school becomes evident. Consciously planned curriculums to affect character development are nonexistent in most schools, yet the claim to be influenc-

ing such growth is universal. It might be argued that the pattern of interpersonal relations in a school has an influence on the attitudes and behaviors of students, but that is not enough to justify claiming that schools develop character.

### Aims and Side Effects

We can teach dictatorially and brutally, producing effects upon young people that are predictably unhappy. Or we can design what we do so that while we work directly for the ends we seek, the side effects will be harmonious with our central purposes. However, when we make these byproduct outcomes into central aims there is too great a tendency to neglect our original objectives. Tender loving care is not antithetical to the mastery of mathematical concepts. Neither does mastery by the learner require less than a wholesome atmosphere. Our confusion between aims and side effects has left us with anxieties about our inability to achieve either. We act as though we believe that high scholarship for some and hard work for others requires a repressive and overdemanding teacher.

Statements of the aims of education often contain goals such as: “Apply ethical values as gained from religion, philosophy, and direct experience. . .” and “Improved understanding and control of emotional self.”<sup>9</sup> The gap between such phrases and the actual curriculum and practices of the high school make them high-sounding words of little consequence. It is not satisfactory to point to the list of subjects taught and the student activities offered and claim that they all contribute something. If in fact there is no focus, no locus of energy, and no fix on responsibility, there will be little observable outcome. We can take as an operational truism that the more ephemeral the language, the more remote will be the discoverable curriculum evidence.

An additional outcome of our extraordinary list of purposes is the excessive length of the school day with considerable pressure to make it longer. The high school day has never been short, and the custodial safekeeping function has imposed a full schedule of in- and after-school activities. But the philosophy of comprehensiveness has unnecessarily and innocently reinforced the tendency for a long school day and has thereby created a social problem of some magnitude.

Throughout the nation the formal high school day lasts about 6½ hours. An inadvertent byproduct of that lengthy schedule is the way it isolates youth

<sup>8</sup> L. A. Cremin, *Public Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Will French and others, *Behavioral Goals of General Education in High School* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1957), p. 108.

from significant contact with adults other than teachers and family. Historically, all youth in all societies after the rites of pubertal passage were inducted into and expected to perform, as adults in their work, their religion, and in the family. This cultural transfer of the behaviors and demeanors of maturity was an informal educator of great power.

### The Urge to Be Adult

Post-pubertal youth are powerfully motivated in their natural desire to be taken for an adult. This urge and its consummation assure the continuity of society, its values, its standards, and its role behaviors, sanctions, and reward systems. It was and is a powerful shaper of behavior. It requires access to and meaningful relations with adults outside the ring of childhood controls. Relations between older adults and youth historically provided the transfer process for those behaviors, which constituted growing into maturity. The isolation of our youth has reduced the number of activities that carry the hallmarks of maturity. For them, the symbols of adulthood are: (a) tobacco or marijuana; (b) using drugs; (c) working, as a volunteer or for pay; (d) driving an auto; (e) having sex; (f) getting pregnant or becoming a father; (g) keeping the child<sup>10</sup>; (h) drinking beer or whiskey; (i) marriage.

The paucity of these few processes is hazardous to the continuity of our society. Erikson<sup>11</sup> emphasizes in his studies of the stages of maturity the critical role of post-pubertal growth for the life stability of an individual. We should be concerned that, by limiting its connecting links, our society risks losing its social cohesion.

Other institutions also tend to isolate youth from adults. For example, because religious institutions imitate the age segregation practices of schools, their programs languish and serve a minor few. Community youth-serving agencies, through the same age segregation practices, unknowingly stigmatize their programs as juvenile. For that reason, they are constantly looking for ways to attract more than a handful of the adolescent youth they seek to serve.

Educational leaders should advocate greater involvement of older adults in groups such as Scouts, the Y's, the police, clubs, and neighborhoods. Including adults of all ages in the programs would enhance their attractiveness to adolescents. Reknitting the fabric of society by joining youth with their elders will aid the maturing of young adults and help stabilize communities.

### Community-Based Education

Redefining the goals of schools and building new relationships between youth and adults requires that

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the comprehensive high school be replaced with a comprehensive program of community-based education.<sup>12</sup> Such a design for the education of adolescents should delineate those purposes of education that would remain the primary responsibility of the high school, those that might better be shifted to other and new community agencies, and those that would be served by a cooperative sharing of functions and resources.

Some of the implications for how to achieve this new pattern follow. For example, instead of assuming with each principle or purpose of education that the school was the only available instrument, we would begin with the assumption that the school is a social institution with unique capabilities. The machinery we have developed for involving a wide constituency in assessing community needs in education could be employed in the next step of inventorying the resources already involved with particular education goals.

In brief, who else is educating in addition to the schools? Let us examine briefly how such an inventory of community educators might appear as they affect one principle purpose of education—family life. To assume that the typical high school can achieve "worthy home membership" by providing homemaking courses for a small percentage of the young women or a token course in barbecuing that includes some males is simple-minded, sexist, and wasteful.

Educative forces that influence families, their cohesion, their social supports, the religious practices, the interpersonal relations, changing female and male

<sup>10</sup> Sociologists have expressed their inability to explain the rapid growth in the number of full-term pregnancies in unmarried teenage mothers who retain the baby. In 1977, there were 30,000 age 13 and younger.

<sup>11</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> James Bryant Conant, *The Comprehensive High School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

roles, sex, finances, and child-rearing practices are diverse and pervasive.

In every community there are clergy of all faiths working in isolation and without formal technical support counseling the increasing numbers of their congregant-families in need of assistance. An incomplete list of the resources available in all but the most rural areas would include family courts and their staffs; welfare departments with graduate social workers; newspapers with columns of advice to the bewildered; consumer and financial articles; family service and adoption agencies; and local radio and TV with unused facilities.

### Youth Volunteers

We can begin the difficult but very promising cooperative task of redesigning, re-allocating, and creating new designs and practices. Isolated agencies are each serving fragments of the families and fragments of their problems. How can they be made more effective? One example, and only one, is the development of youth volunteers serving as apprentices with the agencies. Youth would learn by participation the insights, values, and human social skills needed to sustain their own current and future families. The schools could take the leadership in supporting family counseling agency staff, in part by reassigning school psychologists and counselors.

Similarly the other purposes of education lend themselves to a broader-based implementation than the present school-centered process. Analyzing the resources of a community should be repeated for other aims of education. Health, recreation, the arts, and vocational training are examples of subjects that might be learned partly or wholly outside schools. Driver education may be another example.

There are two criteria that might be used to determine suitability of alternative or cooperative programs. One is increased opportunities for youth to have working relationships with older adults. The other is improved quality and efficiency of the educational experience over that provided by the high school.

In some instances the analysis of available resources will disclose that a new program is needed. In others a shifting of management responsibility may be in order, and in still others a cooperative venture with multi-agency support will evolve. Because these tasks will require high levels of expertise in the design stages, regional and state sponsorship—perhaps with federal support—is recommended. Political scientists, systems designers, urban sociologists, and other social scientists should be members of a design team joined with representatives from formal education and the communities. Their task would be to design the orga-

nizational structure of new programs, their staffing, their financing, and their purpose.

Such new designs for old purposes could include a community-based youth employment service to help adolescents find jobs—parttime while they are attending high school and fulltime when appropriate. Such an agency might be staffed and administered by paid student leaders and volunteer geriatric adults with appropriate skills. Another agency might draw upon the voluntary mobilization of all local resources in the arts into a community council for the arts and humanities, again joining youth's energies with the resources of older adults. These and other models are referred to in the U.S. Office of Education publication, *The Education of Adolescents*.<sup>13</sup>

The role of the high school in all of this will not be without difficulty. Territorial imperatives are as binding on agencies as they are on schools. Inter-agency cooperation is difficult to achieve. Pride, jealousies, and scarce resources will impede progress, but the schools, by demonstrating their willingness to surrender their monopoly position, may be able to act as catalyst for bringing more youth into the mainstream of the adult world. The curriculum expert in education has a new and expanded role. If the superintendent is to become a community leader in education, the curriculum director must become expert in dealing with public and private agencies.

### The Special Responsibility of Schools

If, as I have suggested, much of what schools have been trying to do could be done by other agencies, what remains as the high school's special responsibility? Historical precedence and common sense suggest at least two major goals: intellectual competence and citizenship in a free society.

The intellectual skills we are concerned with were described in the late 1930s in connection with the Eight Year Study by committees on evaluation headed by Ralph Tyler, Hilda Taba, and others. Will French's *Behavioral Goals of General Education in High School* published in 1957 contains much that is useful. But a word of caution—to change abstraction into a compendium of the trivial is a danger that we have seen come to pass, largely because Benjamin Bloom's *Taxonomies* have been neglected.

Most people would agree that speaking effectively at several levels of social discourse is a necessary intellectual skill whose furtherance is basically a function of the high school. It is enough for our

<sup>13</sup> John Henry Martin, *The Education of Adolescents*, Report of the National Panel on High Schools and Adolescent Education, U.S. Office of Education (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976).

purposes to say that such competence in speech involves ordinary social exchanges improving the most ubiquitous of all human behavior—talk, clear talk between two people. In addition, speaking and listening in small working groups and before larger audiences require rigorous training. This education cannot be left to curricular chance lying somewhere in limbo between English classes and the other subject areas of study.

Other skills that should be taught in high school are those involved in reading including comprehending printed material, from simple narrative to complex exposition, and the analysis of bias and propaganda.

Teachers of the sciences, social and natural, need to define more sharply the critical and technical skills required for reading materials in their fields. Then they should design both curriculum and evaluation measures to ensure results.

Writing is another skill for which the high school has a unique responsibility. To write clear prose—to muster the information necessary to analyze an issue, to organize that information coherently, and to write one's conclusions persuasively—is an art needed by educated adults. Only the schools can take primary responsibility for teaching writing. And they can do it only if they rid themselves of purposes and programs better or more efficiently accomplished by others.

Complementing the other intellectual skills is the ability to “read” media other than print. Listening to the radio means being exposed to statements of persuasion from advertisers, disc jockeys, and politicians of the right and left. Television sets are reportedly turned on for six hours a day in the average American home. Two soap manufacturers spent 300 million dollars last year to get us to purchase their products. The schools are the only agency likely to educate a populace in how to respond intelligently to the flow of information, persuasion, and seduction to which they are daily exposed.

### Mathematics and Science

And there are the high intellectual skills that come with the proper study of mathematics and the sciences. We need formal training in the disciplines of

inductive and deductive reasoning, logic, rhetoric, and the nature of proof. Mathematics as a language for thinking is an elegant elevation of the brain and a source of great joy in learning, denied if taught poorly. The sciences need to see themselves as instruments for sharpening intellect. Each science has its own domestic and valid reason for being in the curriculum, but each must bear specific responsibility for increasing youth's ability to reason beyond the rigor of a novice in science. Science taught historically, following the discoveries as they occurred, would bring learners to Galileo's shoulder as he asked the questions, took Copernicus' hypothesis, and looked for proof in his telescope. Why was it proof? Reasoning from data, thinking analytically, and deriving arguable conclusions are exercises in improving the intellect. Some will learn well, others not. But few will learn at all unless the high school is charged with the primary responsibility for devoting its resources toward these aims. Albert North Whitehead understood this when in writing about the aim of education as education of the intellect he admonished, “Do not teach too many subjects,” and again, “What you teach, teach thoroughly.”<sup>14</sup>

These intellectual skills, in brief, consist of the uses and limitations of logic; the nature of comprehension, interpretation, and extrapolation; the application of knowledge to new situations; the analysis of elements, principles, and relationships; the construction of a synthesis, a plan of operation; and the evaluation of evidence and conclusions through the use of internal evidence and external criteria.<sup>15</sup> These are severe intellectual skills uniquely the responsibility of the schools. They represent one set of basics; the other—highly related—is citizenship.

### Citizenship

The nature of freedom is complex. To hunger for it under a repressive regime is as old as history. To achieve it is an historical rarity. To maintain it requires the highest form of social and political organization. The fabric of a free culture is fragile, and the behaviors of society's members are vital to its preservation and progression. All societies have their injustices. Ours, like others, is an unfinished structure. The young need to understand that they inherit an unfinished task just as we did.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929, p. 14).

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom and others, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook 1, The Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay Inc., 1956); Lyle M. Ehrenberg and Sydelle D. Ehrenberg, *A Strategy for Curriculum Design* (Miami: The Institute for Curriculum and Instruction, 1978).



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Schools are the unique agencies for developing the understanding, the knowledge, and the commitment to freedom. First we need histories written to analyze the growths and regressions of liberty throughout history in many societies. We need a citizenry that understands the bloody power of repression and its universality in time and space. Freedom is the rarest of human conditions—never complete, always flawed, and forever in jeopardy.

One prime function of high school and hence a major competence we should seek is the education of youth in the graces of a free people. Gentleness and consideration are the characteristics of a civilized people. Thoughtfulness of the needs of others who differ from oneself or one's own primary group is the hallmark of the truly cultured person throughout the world. When we come to understand that abuse of others because they differ in race, or religion, ethnic background, sex, or age are behaviors based upon ancient barbarisms, we can call ourselves civilized.

The high school along with other institutions of our society can educate for civility. For example, one activity of school could be the establishment, with older adults in the community, of a citizen-group to monitor the effectiveness with which agencies work and services are delivered to the populace. Youth and interested older citizens can observe and report on the friendly helpfulness with which services are provided by all agencies. Youth learning to expect that people and institutions serving the public need to be civil and helpful are youth we hope will learn to expect such behavior from themselves.

### A Laboratory in Government

Secondly the school needs to be a laboratory to conduct planned exercises in *petit* government, all kinds of government. For example, what happens when speech and unpopular opinions are suppressed? What happens when the right to assembly is denied? Can we design curricular simulations of situations that deny or affirm the essential freedoms of our society? What is due process in an institution serving adolescents? Serving teachers? How shall we arrange for the participation of youth in those decisions where their denial serves to teach them the values of arbitrary power to those who possess it? At the same time we need to maintain society's charge that the institutions operate within understood boundaries of orderliness and sound education—a difficult task.

These general statements on citizenship are suggested only as guides to construction of the kind of curriculums needed in our high schools. I have prepared a more detailed framework that should be practical for curriculum specialists and teachers to use.<sup>16</sup> It has the following six sections:



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4. The duties that democratic citizens accept;
5. The freedoms in which a democratic citizen believes;
6. The ideals toward which a democratic citizen strives.

Americans are dissatisfied with schools and with youth. Their separate and joint failings are common topics of conversation. For the first time in our history the high school population is declining—and it will continue to decline into the mid-1980s. History tells us that social institutions under such pressures tend to react defensively and lose their capacity to adjust to change. That must not happen. We must be willing to re-examine established doctrines and rethink our aims. If so, we may be able to re-establish the high school as a major elevating and unifying force in our society. *ET*

<sup>16</sup> Space considerations prohibited printing the framework in this issue, but readers may get a copy by sending a check or money order for \$1 and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to ASCD.

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