

# FORTY YEARS OF EDUCATION: WILL THE NEXT FORTY BE ANY BETTER?

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A favorite cliché of historians is that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it, but I believe there are conditions today that have no precedent in the past. The future that we must understand includes two such conditions: nuclear weapons and the women's movement.

The reality of nuclear armaments is that human beings now have the potential for destroying most of the civilizations on this planet or poisoning the whole earth so that viable life is impossible. Nothing in the annals of diplomacy or statecraft, nothing in the rulebooks on protocol tells how to negotiate with total annihilation.

The women's movement has arisen from another unprecedented scientific contribution—effective birth control methods. In addition attitude shifts have resulted in legalized abortions not only in the United States, which is predominately Protestant, but also in Catholic countries like France and Italy; abortion has long been legal in China, Russia, Japan, England, and Scandinavia. No longer bound by the roulette chance of pregnancy, women are free, if they wish, to make the same personal and career choices that men have made. This freedom means a shift in the power structure of the family, a new view of how and when families are created, and who does what to maintain them. Nothing

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## Educators can deal with changing sex roles and the threat of nuclear war—if we have the commitment.

in the past tells us how to deal with this radical change in our social relationships.<sup>1</sup>

### Salvation By Education?

When we cannot look to the past for help in dealing with the future, education, at least, can give us the tools. As always, the schools have two chief tasks:

1. Education of the intellect, inculcating socially essential knowledge and the skills for gaining new knowledge
2. Socialization in the processes of governance and the solving of social problems through socially accepted common norms, etiquettes, and language.

Can education help us deal with nuclear weapons and the women's movement? That depends on the institution's response. Let us look for a moment at the record. How well has the school system responded to past events and to changing times?

Since I first became a student of education, in the fall of 1940, I can testify to the awesome inertia of institutions. I did not come to education a complete innocent: When I was in the 3rd grade my father was taking an M.A. at Columbia University, in the heady days of Counts, Kilpatrick, Rugg, and Dewey. His own long career as a high school teacher of chemistry was deeply influenced by this experience, and I suspect I learned by osmosis a pro-

gressive stance toward the practice of institutional education. At Reed College, I survived a rigorous intellectual program, *without any grades*, and this in a college which, long before it was fashionable, took women students as seriously as men students. Later, at Stanford, I encountered a book which became a milestone in my commitment to education, the newly published *Learning the Ways of Democracy*, a compilation of good school practices gathered by the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association.<sup>2</sup> I read the book and wept with joy. This was why I wanted to be a teacher! I too could go out and do great things. How right—and how wrong—I was.

What was "best practice" in 1940 could be "best practice" in 1980. And what was true then could be true now: there were good schools and good teachers here and there, in this schoolroom, or school or school district, but *not everywhere*. Good practices, I have learned, are not catching. Nor are they lasting. A school which boasts the most avant-garde program this year, may be "back to basics" next year. The teacher education program in which I teach is little different from the one through which I gained my teaching credentials in the early 40s, although the normal school graduate of the first quarter century probably knew more about genuine pedagogy than do our students today.

When I visit new schools today I see the same ugly lockers in the same barren halls, the same seats in rows, the teacher at the front of the classroom talking, talking, talking, cowed boys slouching outside the vice-principal's office, the furtive (or brazen) pre-delinquents smoking behind the building, and the terrible cafeteria food. Why has so little changed and what can we learn from this lack of change? Does past educational inertia mean that the schools will be of no help in the era of

nuclear war and the revolution in sex role definition?

### Substantive or Cosmetic Change?

Despite the seeming lack of change, schools have responded to several influences or events that shook the structure, the *substance*, of education and made a difference:

1. *John Dewey.* Dewey's ideas shifted the emphasis in the classroom from outcomes—what the pupil had learned—to a consideration of the pupil who was a product of the culture and who had feelings and motivations. Instruction and even school organization had to shift to accommodate this concept, and shift they did, though schools have never become as humane as Dewey advocated.<sup>3</sup>

2. *The textbook.* Although the McGuffey readers and the Webster spellers were early forerunners of the textbook, the mass marketing of textbooks involving an investment of millions is a 20th century phenomena. The national textbook has created a national curriculum, which is the result of sensitive accommodation by publishers to the prejudices and preferences of provincial school boards and their administrators.<sup>4</sup>

3. *Moveable furniture.* When I went to school the desks were tightly screwed to the floor. Some genius in the 1940s, just when the baby-boom hit the schools, invented the moveable desk-chair combination and also the separate desk and chair. Small groups, open classrooms, role-playing, games and simulations, values

clarification—all kinds of "new" methods and materials and even content became possible when desks and chairs could be moved.

4. *The school bus and all-weather roads.* Schools could be consolidated, curriculum could expand, more services could be offered, a wider range of options could be included in the curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Schools became large enough to lock into place the age-graded progression which dominates school organization.

5. *Machine-scored objective tests.* The full impact of mechanized testing has yet to be assessed. Instruction geared to the right answer out of four "possibles" is instruction that cannot develop depth of conceptualization or provide the time for the meanderings of inquiry. Expository writing is eliminated, and SAT scores of course go down. Sale of duplicating paper for short answer tests is rising while sale of lined composition paper is down.<sup>6</sup>

6. *The Carnegie Unit.* When Andrew Carnegie wanted to give pensions to poor professors in 1908, the result was the Carnegie Unit<sup>7</sup> which forever froze the secondary school into the 45 or 50 minute period for each subject five days a week. The Carnegie Unit was so amenable to the accounting needs of schools that it was swiftly adopted by both high schools and colleges and determined the way knowledge would be packaged and doled out from then on.<sup>8</sup> The efforts to open up the schedule during the exciting days of school

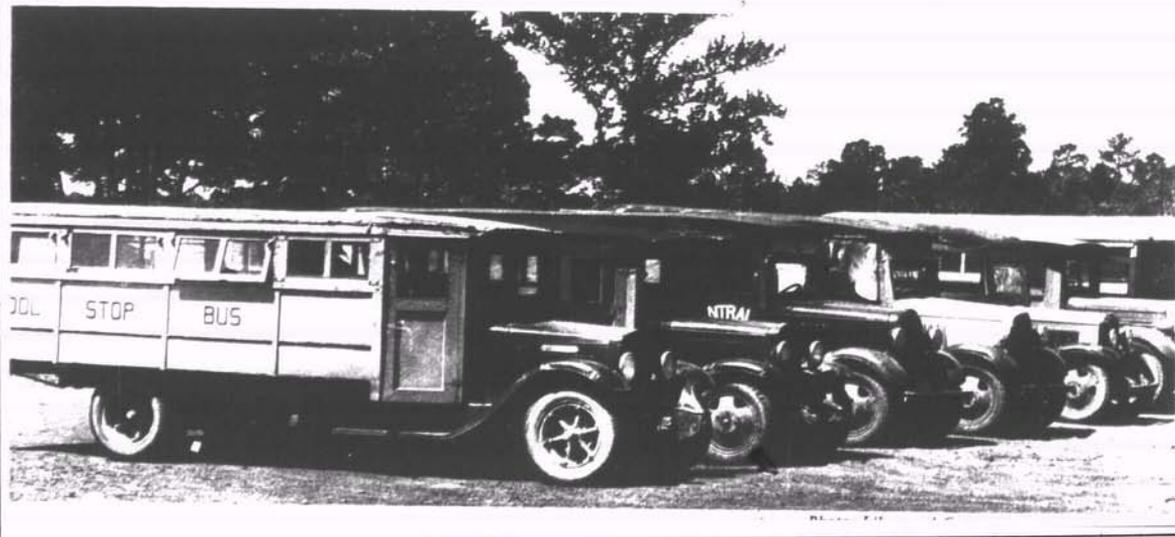
experimentation in the late 60s and early 70s were directed at undoing the mischief the Carnegie Unit had done to the logic of instruction. Unfortunately, both the Carnegie Unit and the resulting schedule were so entrenched that most such experimentation collapsed.

7. *The invention of the IQ.* Before we knew that each of us had an IQ, teachers rewarded students who did well, behaved themselves, and had influential parents. Now the system is supposed to be organized so that students who ought to do well because of their IQ do so. The continued controversy over what the IQ measures and whether educators should pay attention to it reflects in part the insistence by the lower classes that schools be truly meritocratic, and the resistance by the upper classes to inroads on their control of privilege. The IQ has provided a handy way to sort, track, and group students so that the tracks and groups coincide with student social class. The structure of the school and the content of instruction has been marked indelibly by the invention of the IQ.<sup>9</sup>

The above influences take into account most of what has happened in the schools over the last two or three decades; the rest is decorative embellishment or follows from one of the above.

### The Transitory Nature of Innovations

Many observers have remarked on the transitory nature of innovations.



As I reviewed the school happenings that really made a difference I was struck by the shallow roots of many new programs.

The influence of Sputnik? Yes, there was a flurry of interest in science, mathematics, and foreign language. Today? We teach less foreign language than ever before,<sup>10</sup> and advanced science and math enrollments are about where they were before Sputnik. Programmed learning? Effective for some kinds of lessons, but if used widely students would be out of phase with their classmates. When everyone moves up together, you can't have some lagging or some too far ahead.<sup>11</sup> Programmed instruction couldn't make it because the structure of the school could not and would not shift; the graded school is too ingrained in our accounting system to be modified for a procedure that had other handicaps: no creative role for the teacher, the defects of individualized and lonely learning, and the threat to the grading system.

Individualized instruction? Learning is too social an activity for individualized instruction, no matter how ingeniously packaged, to do more than help some students at marginal times in their day. Only isolated and withdrawn persons can long bear to "do their own thing" apart from others. Mastery learning? That is a marvelous concept except that it runs head on into the failure-based model on which the total instructional program is based. Some students must do very well; some *must* do very poorly. The "normal curve," you know. Without failure, the schools cannot do the sorting job society wants them to do. Thus mastery learning can be argued on all kinds of humanitarian and educational terms but there is no social mandate.<sup>12</sup>

Open space schools are being converted to enclosed space because the instructional model on which open space schools were built did not fit the social needs of youngsters nor the expressive needs of teachers. In an open space school teachers cannot yell at their classes, but neither can they lead their students in exuberant song or impassioned debate. The lack of tradition of collegial cooperation encourages the rebuilding of walls.

Will mainstreaming have a significant impact on schools? Probably

not. Ramps will be built but the content and structure of the program will go on as usual. In fact, some of the gains made in the education of handicapped youngsters, particularly the deaf and blind, may be lost when they are entrusted to teachers who do not know sign language nor how to communicate with a nonsighted person. It is even probable that the multiple distresses of the emotionally disturbed will only be exacerbated by mainstreaming. Certainly the average classroom will not become a therapy group, nor should it.

Some innovations are killed with guilt by association—an old story. The *Building America* series of pamphlets for students on current social issues, co-sponsored by the Progressive Education Association and ASCD, was effectively killed by local and national attacks on the PEA as a communist front, if not a communist-inspired organization. The PEA also died.<sup>13</sup> I was at Stanford in the 1950s during the first attacks on *Building America*, and I witnessed the withdrawal from confrontation by once-liberal educators like Stanford professor Paul R. Hanna.

In the 1940s there was the same agonizing over sex education as there is today. Efforts in this field have been countered by every argument there is; the enduring one is that it takes away the prerogatives of the family, though the family today is not what it used to be, nor have families, yesterday or today, told their children the truth about sex. Parents have always been too scared to touch it. And they still are.<sup>14</sup>

The recurrent argument over the teaching of evolution shows how long it takes for acceptance of those ideas that require readjustment of other basic belief systems.<sup>15</sup> The sad story of "Man: A Course of Study" reminds us that science is still a newcomer to human thought.<sup>16</sup>

"Values clarification," an effort to translate our avowed interest in a pluralistic society into educational terms, is denounced as an invasion of privacy and manipulation of children's values. It is nothing of the kind. In fact, it is a procedure ideally suited for developing respect for cultural value differences<sup>17</sup>; yet the schools are not supposed to be teaching anything except mainstream American values.

It has been an uphill battle for

multicultural education; we were teaching all about this in the heady days of the 1940s during the founding of the United Nations and UNESCO. The lessons didn't stick; we seem to be teaching the same things all over again.<sup>18</sup> We teach about the contributions of all races and the pictures in our schoolbooks are integrated, but racial segregation and separatism in America are still as much a problem today.

Many of us have given years of our lives to the research, the study, and the work that goes into curriculum development and curriculum innovation. Our beautiful materials gather dust on the shelves of storerooms. I worked for three years on "Subject to Citizen," the curriculum material which was to continue what "Man: A Course of Study" started.<sup>19</sup> I firmly believe that some of that material is the most exciting I have encountered. Who knows about it? Where is it now? Why do such innovative materials disappear from the educational marketplace?

#### The Fate of Innovations

Some major innovations flounder against the intractable institutional structure<sup>20</sup> and some are plain wrong.

In a most interesting study, probably the first one to ask teachers why innovations were dropped, Marker discovered nothing mysterious: "The abandonment of innovations is a normal part of the cycle of change. . . . Teachers, student bodies, administrators, and the society in general change over time. . . ." and therefore what was appropriate at one time is inappropriate a few years later.<sup>21</sup> Other causes, such as the loss of funding, the departure of the original innovator, general staff changes, are of course all responsible.<sup>22</sup> And an innovative text or curriculum package may be exchanged by a teacher not out of dissatisfaction with the material but out of a very human wish to do something different.

Even more fundamental, however, are two factors that inhibit the responsiveness of schools to the big unanswered questions facing us in the future: nuclear war and the women's movement. One factor is inherent in the school system and one is societal.

What is remarkable to me as an observer of schools for 40 years is the astounding resistance of the system to outside forces. In my school

days educational radio was touted as the new classroom teacher. The only time I heard a radio in school was for the last games of the World Series. Educational film plays a modest but persistent role in illuminating the dull chapters of the text or saving the teacher's nerves on Friday. And now when students spend so much time absorbing the marvelous and dubious messages of the tube, the school acts as though TV doesn't exist. TV may have made a quantum difference in the way children grow up, their values, self-concepts, understandings of reality, but one would never know it in the schoolroom. The system is as well insulated now as it was in 1941 when I started to teach left-over 7th and 8th graders in an overcrowded junior high school in San Leandro, California.

Why hasn't the quality of schooling improved?

Some time we college types who produce research, train researchers, and bow down daily before the god of statistical significance must face the fact that about 99 percent of school practice derives from folk intuition about what works rather than the findings of our most careful experimental studies. Why are educational practitioners so disdainful of educational research? Why are educational researchers blithely uninterested in whether their research makes any difference in practice at all?

The societal reason that schools change so little is not one that I can do much about, however, because this is a function of the kind of society we have and what that society wants of its schools. The public looks to the medical profession and to medical institutions for new answers to old diseases. The same public looks to educators and to the schools for old answers to new problems.

The public will allow a certain amount of modest tinkering. Soon we will see word processing machines in typing classes and aerobic dancing in physical education. And it was the vociferous criticism by the public which shamed the schools into a closer look at student performance, resulting in the "back to basics" movement. Since the schools had not really left the basics but had only neglected to see if students in fact had learned them, the return to the basics has been relatively painless. It will be interesting to see how the

development of exit-competencies for high school graduation will be manipulated so that the essential sorting function of the school<sup>23</sup> will not be affected.

Despite the baffling nonresponsiveness of the system, the resistance to basic reorientation or restructuring towards a more humane or socially responsible model, one can have some modest hope for the schools. For one thing, something has to be done, if only to deal with what I believe to be a true crisis: hostile students, defeated and burned out teachers, administrators hiding behind state and federal forms, and massive shifting of undergraduates from education as a career.

Hope exists in the continued faith of most of the public that education and educators can and will be good for the next generation. We still believe there are ways of developing better teachers and designing better school social systems for more students in more benign environments.

If this backward look seems to show few substantive changes, and those only in response to a few selective events or inventions, perhaps the future may be different. We have the capability of re-creating our institution to deal with challenges of the future; I hope we have the necessary commitment, vigor, and true grit. ■

<sup>1</sup> John E. Pfeiffer, *The Emergence of Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association, *Learning the Ways of Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1939).

<sup>3</sup> Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> J. Charles Park, "Preachers, Politics, and Public Education: A Review of Right-Wing Pressures Against Public Schooling in America," *Phi Delta Kappan* 61 (May 1980): 608-612; Barbara M. Morris, "The Real Issues in Education as Seen by a Journalist on the Far Right," *Phi Delta Kappan* 61 (May 1980): 613-615.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Warren Wind, "The Sporting Scene: The Heart of Kokomo," *The New Yorker* LVI, April 14, 1980, p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Courtney B. Cazden, "What We Don't Know About Teaching the Language Arts," *Phi Delta Kappan* 61 (May 1980): 595-596.

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Gerhard, "The Emergence of the Credit System in American Education Considered as a Problem of Social and Intellectual History," *AAUP Bulletin* 41 (Winter 1955): 647-668.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>9</sup> Paula S. Fass, "The I.Q.: A Cultural and Historical Framework," *American Journal of Education* 88 (August 1980): 431-458.

<sup>10</sup> "Reversing the Trend of Foreign Language Illiteracy," *NASSP Curriculum Report* 9 (May 1980): 1-12.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony G. Oettenger, *Run, Computer, Run: The Mythology of Educational Innovation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

<sup>12</sup> Henry M. Levin, "The Economic Implications of Mastery Learning," in *The Limits of Educational Reform*, eds. Martin Conroy and Henry M. Levin (New York: David McKay, 1976), pp. 156-170.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Graham, *Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe: A History of the Progressive Education Association* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> John Passmore, "Sex Education," *The New Republic* 83 (October 4, 1980): 27-30.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Wade, "Reactionists and Evolutionists: Confrontation in California," *Science* 178 (November 17, 1972): 724-729.

<sup>16</sup> George Weber, "The Case Against 'Man: A Course of Study,'" *Phi Delta Kappan* 57 (October 1975): 81-82.

<sup>17</sup> Richard D. Solomon, "The Effect of Values Clarification Instruction on the Values of Selected Junior High School Students" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Jean D. Grambs, "Multicultural Education: Issues Without Answers," Illinois Association of Colleges of Teacher Education Monograph, Number 1 (Urbana, Ill.: The Association, University of Illinois, January 1979).

<sup>19</sup> *Subject to Citizen* (Newton, Mass.: Educational Development Corporation, 1965-1969).

<sup>20</sup> Seymour Sarason, *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971).

<sup>21</sup> Gerald W. Marker, "Why Schools Abandon 'New Social Studies' Materials," *Theory and Research in Social Education* VII (Winter 1980): 35-58.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Nachtigal, *A Foundation Goes to School* (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> Barbara Heyns, "Social Selection and Stratification Within Schools," *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (May 1974): 1434-1451.

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