

High School Reform

Excited But Frustrated

JAMES E. COLE

What a frustration it has been to read the major reports on schooling published during the past year! Most of them seem to call for "more of the same" wrapped in a different package, rather than promoting visionary reform that will better prepare students for the astounding changes predicted by futurists. Fortunately, a small number of these studies, such as Goodlad's *A Study of Schooling* and Sizer's *Horace's Compromise*, do propose recommendations that are not merely warmed-over practices of the past.

While I am excited about the attention education is receiving, my sense of frustration remains high for the following reasons:

- The studies ignore or only touch on such important issues as the role of vocational education in the high school, teacher training to ensure in-depth preparation in the principles of learning and child development, reasonable teacher-administrator ratios as a factor enabling effective supervision/evaluation, and the detrimental effects increased "requirements" may have on a dropout rate that already is alarmingly high.

- Most of the recommendations are not likely to be adopted on a wide scale because they either are too expensive, or they call for such drastic change that they will meet almost insurmountable resistance at the "grass-roots" level.

Regarding my first concern, it appears that the lack of attention paid to vocational education disregards the dilemma that districts throughout the nation are undoubtedly facing, that is, what role does the comprehensive high school have in preparing students for specific employment versus providing a general education, which includes transferable skills that enable students to make a variety of career and educational choices? Maybe it isn't an either-or question, but I believe that more districts than not are looking for guidance with this problem.

The rather limited treatment of the other issues I raised is an unfortunate oversight. To be effective, teachers must possess a solid foundation in the principles of learning and child development. Without this background, teachers operate intuitively rather than professionally, and schools of education must do more than provide a scant overview in an educational psychology course, which is the typical "bill of fare" in most universities. An in-depth understanding of these principles, coupled with ongoing supervision by a principal who also has expertise in the skills for effective teaching, and a reasonable number of supervisees (no more than 12-15),

should result in a qualitative difference in the instruction our youth receive.

Our nation cannot risk the impact increased requirements may have on a sizable number of teenagers who reject the content and approaches they currently encounter in school. Perhaps it is more appropriate to recognize individual differences, not only in *how* students learn, but in *what* they need to learn. I question the premise that *everyone* must possess a universal body of knowledge to the extent implied by requirements that are recommended in several of the reports.

Finally, I must express a somewhat pessimistic view about any true "reform" taking place. Certainly, there will be islands of individual schools, districts, or even states that will implement some of the "safer" recommendations, such as increased graduation requirements, longer school days/years, master teacher plans, more time-on-task, stiffer attendance policies, training in study skills, and extended work years for teachers. However, even the latter item will not be implemented in most districts because of the expense. I cannot imagine most school boards making significant budgetary provisions for staff development, massive pay increases, or other incentives any more than I envision the recommendations of Sizer or Goodlad, which require fundamental deviation from the way things "always have been done," receiving much favor from most educators.

The exposure of these reports has been good for education and only time will tell whether my pessimism is well-founded. I hope I am wrong! □

James E. Cole is Principal, Wausau West High School, Wausau, Wisconsin.

Rising Expectations

JIM MONASMITH

The alarm sounded by the Commission on Excellence merely confirmed what most professionals in our business have known for a long time: our schools are not as good as they should be or could be. But before they can change this situation, practitioners need clear-cut no-nonsense answers to the following questions: What needs to be done? Why should we do it? How should we do it? Is it within the scope of our local efforts to accomplish it? Several of the reports provide enough answers to serve as a road map for meaningful and lasting school improvement.

In *The Paideia Proposal*, Mortimer Adler recognizes and applauds past efforts to successfully provide equality of educational opportunity and urges us to go further by ensuring that all children receive equal quality in their schooling. Several reports tie needed improvement in schools to our national well-being. The ability to compete in the world marketplace, defend ourselves militarily, and sustain vital government programs all depend on improving educational systems and a growing national economy. Nor do any of the reports neglect the well-being of the individual. Ernest Boyer's description of the "enlightened citizen," in *High School*, puts forth an individual citizenship model for all schools to emulate.

Various curriculum approaches have been proposed to accomplish these purposes. Recognizing that the school curriculum at all levels must establish priorities and stop trying to be all things to all people, Boyer provides practitioners with the correct emphasis and common core of courses required for graduation.

TheodoreSizer's "essential schools" would simplify and cluster the curriculum into only four areas. Gordon Cawelti's national ASCD project, "Redefining General Education," reports a variety of core curriculum patterns developed on site by practitioners serving varying sizes of high school populations. For practitioners who are concerned about specific curriculum outcomes, the "Green Book" of the College Board tells schools what college-bound students need to know and be able to do.

The reports voice the universal demand of the times that schools at all levels go beyond mastery of the basics and teach students how to think. Nowhere is that process better spelled out than in Adler's "three modes of learning" paradigm. Mastery of Adler's approach to teaching knowledge, skills, and understanding should comprise the heart of both preservice and inservice training for every teacher in America.

The tide of rising expectations generated by all these reports, then, makes clear what schools should do and provide a host of methods for practitioners to use to do it. But just as education depends on more than schooling, school improvement depends on more than merely knowing what is to be done and why. Someone must be held accountable for carrying it out.

It is difficult for practitioners to accept the fact that our business has failed this past decade for many of the same reasons that our counterparts in private industry have failed: a lack of clear-cut and coherent purpose, leadership that has not been inspired toward quality and achievement, less than fully productive workers, and a failure to align scarce resources toward priority objectives.

Failure to recognize that each of us is part of the problem as well as the solution may be the biggest issue practitioners have to face. □

Jim Monasmith is Principal, Colville High School, Colville, Washington.

Displacing the Cardinal Principles

JIM HAAS

As educators search for ways to rise to the challenges posed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and by other groups and critics, one fact, at least, seems clear: *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* have outlived their usefulness as an accepted set of objectives for the schools. Indeed, these principles and the assumptions and practices that flow from them are partially responsible for the "rising tide of mediocrity" that the National Commission has decried. This is not a recent revelation, for the objectives of the *Cardinal Principles* have been the target of scholarly criticism for decades. Yet they remain pervasive in our schools because of our failure to replace them with some more productive framework that will fire public and professional imaginations.

Into the Wilderness

The Cardinal Principles, published by the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1918, was developed by the NEA Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, a group of 27 educators, government officials, and others interested in youth. No scholars were included. Seven objectives for school studies were described: health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home-membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character. These were not objectives designed to promote excellence in the traditional fields of learning; in his penetrating analysis, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Richard Hofstadter noted that "The Commission drew up a set of educational objectives in which neither the development of intellectual capacity nor the mastery of secondary academic subject matter was even mentioned."¹ The point of *The Cardinal Principles* was to train citizens in the then-current spirit of Progressive idealism, a point not hard to understand against the background of a war "to make the world safe for democracy" and a society struggling

Copyright © 1984 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.