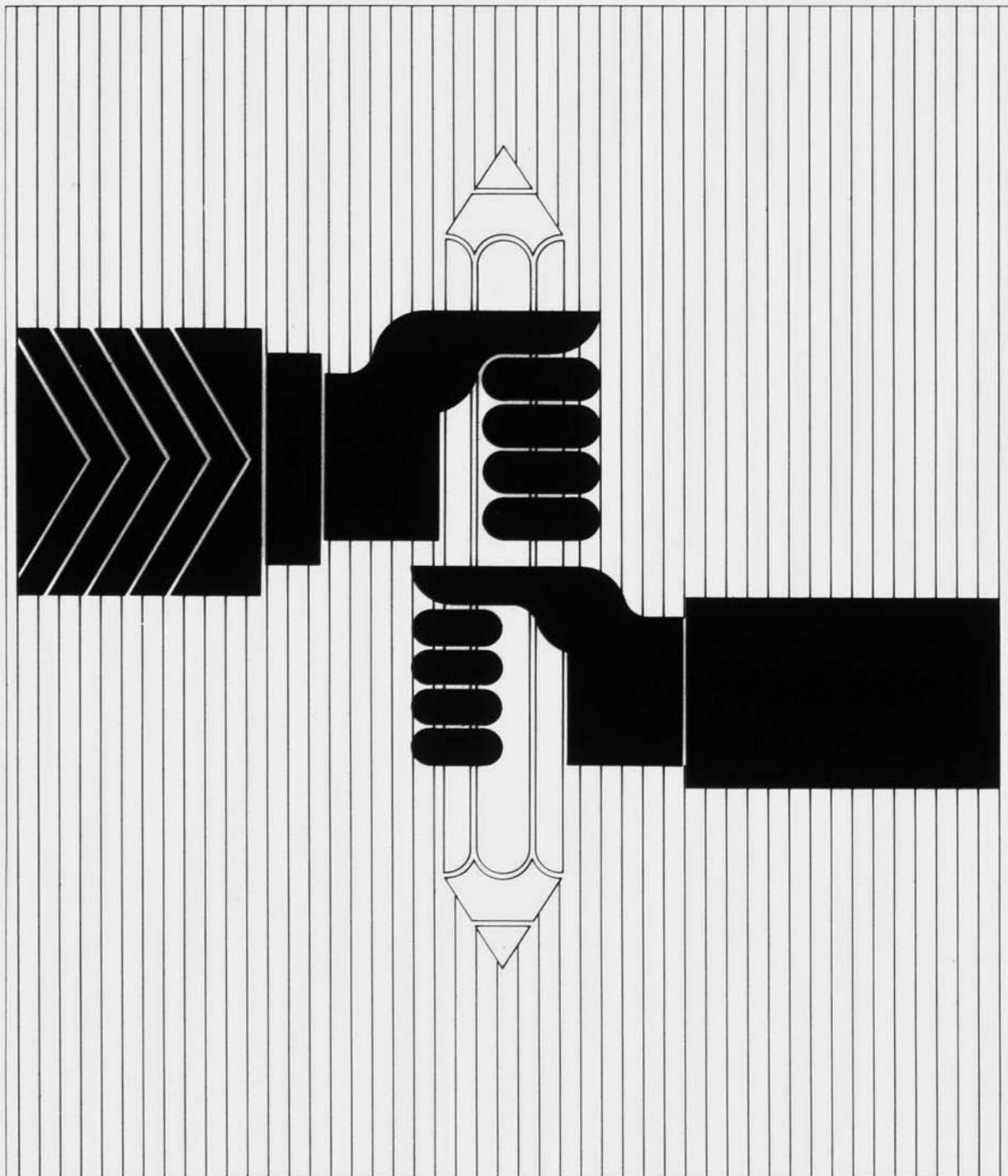


“Federal policy on schools is formed in quiet battles among forces and players far removed from classrooms and children.”



Galapagos on the Potomac—or the Evolution of Federal Policy

The research on effective schools provides an opportunity for federally supported school improvement, but electronic schooling presents a new challenge to policymakers.

DALE MANN

Darwinism may be an apt metaphor for federal education policy. Evolution is hard to observe—especially when you are being chased across the rocks by something bigger—but it was said of Darwin that he saw what everyone saw and thought what no one thought.

Darwin would have loved Washington, D.C., in the 1980s. Federal policy on schools is formed in quiet battles among forces and players far removed from classrooms and children. As we watch that ferocious competition and its effects, we might well speculate on two ecological shifts that have unknown consequences—the emergence of the instructionally effective school and the “school in the sky.”

In a formal sense policy is handed down on xerox tablets from some

superordinate. Informally, as Lieberman indicates, practice makes policy.¹ In a messy federal system both are partly correct. If we think of policy as both formal and informal guidelines that influence schooling, then commissioners and secretaries are one source of policy—but so are the 1.8 million teachers behind as many closed classroom doors. Still, everyone's contribution to policy must struggle against social, economic, and political forces.

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Competition and Its Effects

The federal government has traditionally served needs that others cannot (regulating airplane traffic) or will not (maintaining lighthouses). Because local schools cannot or will not provide adequately for poor children, the needs of poor children have been a staple of federal policy. The needs of poor children, however, are only one of many competing needs. Their fate is influenced by discussions in the Office of Management and Budget, in the Pentagon, in Washington restaurants, and possibly in ASCD's editorial decision to feature policy matters in this issue of *Educational Leadership*. In the policy game, it makes a difference who the players are and who determines the rules and the stakes. There

are winners and losers, as Figure 1 reveals.

Certain factors are beyond the reach of federal policy about schools; for example, the majority-in-the-minority composition of big city public school enrollment or the unlikelihood of a new baby boom. With the federal deficit running a billion dollars *each working day*, we encounter another seemingly immovable cap on federal programs. Since 1930 the percent of the gross national product (GNP) devoted to social programs at *all* levels of government rose from 8 percent to 13.5 percent in 1960 to 24 percent in 1976. The percent of the GNP spent by the *federal* government on social programs over the same period grew from 1 percent in 1930 to 4 percent in 1960 to 8 percent in 1976.¹⁹ The public climate and political will necessary to effect another doubling of the federal share in social welfare do not exist.

Federal Lessons Learned

The federal establishment learned three lessons from the 60s and 70s. First, the attempt to drive improvement or services from the top down does not work. For change to happen, states, LEAs, teachers, education associations, parents, courts—all must get involved.

But this "user-driven system"²⁰ (in contrast to the previous federally driven one) also has limits, especially where the users are themselves the source of the problem to be solved. Thus, the second lesson contradicts the first: targeting is necessary to ensure that those who are supposed to be helped are helped. But the targeting that helps the clients reduces ownership and self-determination and thus the support of the professionals. The paradox arises because federal purposes are legitimate, but so are the purposes of the other players.

Administration rhetoric about disestablishing the Department of Education, with money and authority returned to the states in block grants, turns out to have levered wholesome initiatives by states. An original feature of constitutional design, that education is the responsibility of the states, is now clearly on display as California tries out teacher mentors, Florida rewrites teacher certification, Texas looks at curriculum requirements, North Carolina experiments with state-wide residential schools, and so on. Instead of waiting woodenly for Wash-

ington, states have become so much the fulcrum of improvement that many chief state school officers have declined federal posts, preferring to stay where the action is.

The fiscal picture is less clear. The administration set out to decentralize power and reduce costs. The Reagan Administration wanted power returned to local governments, but the states kept what they were supposed to distribute. Fifty-four social programs were included in the block grant Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981.²¹ Most have been continued by the states, in large part because the need to help poor people continues and because lobbyists switched their aim from Washington to state capitals. The willingness of states to continue and even experiment with programs is welcome news. What we

do not know much about is the outcomes of those state-run programs. In many jurisdictions black, Hispanic, and handicapped youth remain underserved because they are thought to be undeserving. The effect of state-delivered programs upon their needs remains undetermined.

The third lesson learned by some federal policymakers is that pedagogy has gotten better and schooling is more powerful than it used to be. Since 1965, the Department of Education's biggest programs have dealt with children from low-income families. Early evaluations of government programs—at least Title I of the old Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—indicated that they could not compensate. However, public schools have recently begun to succeed with compensatory programs. For example, Secretary of Education

Figure 1. Selected Effects of Competition.

The Reagan Administration budget request for the National Institute of Education was \$48 million.²

More than half the black and Hispanic students living in American cities have not been vaccinated against polio.⁴

By the government's own definition, 24 percent of all children six years old or younger live in poverty.⁶

Payroll and income taxes for families of four at the poverty level have been increased by 50 percent.⁸

The number of two parent families in poverty has risen 64 percent in the last three years. Even including noncash income (food stamps, medicare) between 1979 and 1982, the number of poor people in the United States has increased 47 percent.¹⁰

We provide federal compensatory programs for fewer than half the eligible children.¹²

While every other group has progressed in the last 20 years, black youth between 14 and 24 have fallen behind on five of six critical indicators: unemployment, juvenile justice, substance abuse, unwed teenage pregnancy, and suicide.¹⁴

More than a million children a year are involved in divorce (8 million in 1981), and three out of four black children will spend at least part of their lives in single parent homes.¹⁷

Forty-eight million dollars will buy the first 30 feet of a single B-1B bomber.³

Nuclear aircraft carriers cost \$3.4 billion each.⁵

The richest families have gained \$8390 from tax cuts; poor families, only \$20, while at the same time being deprived of almost \$400 in cash and noncash benefits.⁷

The Reagan Administration has reduced federal corporate income taxes by one third, to their lowest level since Pearl Harbor.⁹

The federal share of local public school budgets, which for the last decade had been stable at 7 or 8 percent, has now been cut to 3.21 percent.¹¹

The Reagan Administration wants to increase money for prisons, veterans, and the Internal Revenue Service by \$400 million.¹³

Measured in constant 1985 dollars, federal education expenditures have shrunk by 7.3 percent a year, every year since 1980.¹⁵

The Office of Management and Budget projects an additional 29 percent decrease in federal elementary and secondary programs for 1989.¹⁶

The invasion of Grenada, not including salaries and operating expenses, cost \$75.5 million.¹⁸

Terrel M. Bell has remarked: "After being away [from Washington, D.C.] for five years and coming back, I can tell you that American education has learned how to educate disadvantaged children."²²

With respect to schooling policy, the federal government is destined to continue existing programs. The Reagan Administration has raised education to a national priority; one of the unintended consequences has been to multiply education's political clout. The Department of Education will not be disestablished, and the existing panoply of programs is unlikely to be substantially changed. Congressional interest, organized educators, and the merits of the case will help assure business as usual most of the time.

Federal policy may also come to reflect more accurately what has been learned. The three lessons are (1) that a top-down system is insufficient to ensure change, (2) that targeting resources on child needs remains necessary, and (3) that the practice of teaching and learning has improved, especially for those groups who are the traditional beneficiaries of federal policy. The third proposition is the key to all else. As we have become able to help particular children toward particular goals with particular practices, we have begun to rethink our laissez-faire system in which each teacher does whatever that teacher wishes.

Ecological Shifts in the Context of Policy Making

My own perspective is that the tenets of the instructionally effective school, sometimes called the Five Factor Theory,²³ are the basis for a new generation of school improvement efforts. Federally supported programs of school improvement, using multi-role networks of trained persons collaboratively with needy schools or districts could incorporate much of what has been learned about successful federal policy. In the 98th Congress, Augustus Hawkins (D., California) introduced the Effective Schools Development in Education Act of 1984 (H.R. 4731). The bill would cost \$100 million and contends that compensatory education is now possible. The struggle is to get the Congress to care more about the latter than the former.

Our ability to improve schools, however, should not preclude attention to the gathering revolution in electronic learning. The most serious

threat to the continuation of the American public school may be the school in the sky. The school in the sky will be radically different from Educational Television and Sesame Street, which because of their passive technologies never made much difference to the schooling establishment. While the school in the sky will most likely be delivered by satellite to subscribing homes beginning in late afternoon, it will go beyond the current small-muscle involvement of video games to a large-muscle involvement in a totally engineered learning environment.

Currently 43 million homes are wired for cable. Test marketing for the school in the sky indicates that the first sale on the block influences the other families to subscribe. If subscriptions cost about \$9.95 a month, we can easily see how much curriculum development money can be raised how quickly by the private sector. When profit motives and technology chase each other in this society, things happen. Corporate America is not going to ask school boards or state departments for permission as this curriculum is developed. And, since it is likely to be developed by our best and brightest classroom teachers bought away to the private sector, who will be left to keep the public school from being more than a shadow of its former self?

The question here is less whether we educators think this is a problem than whether venture capitalists think it is an opportunity. But is the school in the sky a problem for federal policy? One can search the existing players in vain for concerted and thoughtful action. Establishing policy is concerned with doing good; and that has three parts—first, to know what is good; second, to know what causes that good outcome; and third, to get people to work toward good outcomes. The second and third parts are the province of educators, curriculum specialists, and administrators. The first is the province of politicians (including educational politicians). It remains to be seen what values will be discovered through the next turns of the federal policy process. □

²²Ann Lieberman, "Practice Makes Policy: The Tensions of School Improvement," in *Policy Making in Education*, 81st Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Vol. 1, eds. A. Lieberman and M. W. McLaughlin (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1982), pp. 249-270.

²³Jo-Anne Basile, "The Reagan FY 1985 Budget and Education," Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Educational Leadership and the Federal Budget Report, Inc.

²⁴*The New York Times*, January 29, 1984.

²⁵Interview, Allen B. Rubin, Director, Program Services, American Lung Association, Miami Beach, Florida, April 22, 1984.

²⁶*The New York Times*, January 29, 1984.

²⁷"Sharp Rise Is Seen in Poor Children," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1983.

²⁸Robert Pear, "Budget Study Finds Cuts Cost the Poor as the Rich Gained," *The New York Times*, April 4, 1984.

²⁹Sheldon Danziger and Eugene Smolensky, "Abrupt Changes in Social Policy: The Redistributive Effects of Reagan's Budget and Tax Cuts," DP 725-83, (Madison, Wis.: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin), December 1983.

³⁰Robert S. McIntyre, "Companies Enjoy Too Many Loopholes," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1984, pp. 3-4.

³¹Institute for Research on Poverty, "Poverty in the United States: Where Do We Stand Now?" Vol. 7, No. 1 (Madison, Wis.: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin), Winter 1984.

³²"Local School District Budget Items by Type of Community: ERS Special Tabulation," *Spectrum, Journal of School Research and Information*, Vol. 1, No. 33 (Arlington, Va.: Educational Research Service), Fall 1983.

³³Basile, *ibid*.

³⁴"Text of the Budget Message Sent to Congress by the President," *The New York Times*, February 2, 1984, p. D8.

³⁵Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, "Black Adolescents and Youth: An Endangered Species," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 54 (January 1984): 6-21.

³⁶Basile, *ibid*.

³⁷Basile, *ibid*.

³⁸"Number of Divorces Reached Records in 1981," *The New York Times*, February 2, 1984, C5; "Sharp Rise Is Seen in Poor Children," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1983, p. 8.

³⁹*The New York Times*, March 29, 1984, p. A24.

⁴⁰Dale Mann, "Education Policy in the Carter Administration," *Phi Delta Kappan* 59 (September 1977): 65.

⁴¹Dale Mann, "The User-Driven System and a Modest Proposal," in *Making Change Happen?* ed. Dale Mann (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978) pp. 285-307.

⁴²Richard P. Nathan and Fred C. Doolittle, "Effects of the Reagan Domestic Program on States and Localities" (Princeton, N.J.: Urban and Regional Research Center, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University).

⁴³Rochelle L. Stanfield, "If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It," Sav Defenders of Compensatory Aid, *National Journal*, January 30, 1982, p. 201.

⁴⁴R. Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," *Educational Leadership* (October 1979): 15-24.

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