



## Reclaiming Traditional Values in Education: The Implications for Educational Research

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*The study of education is inseparable from the study of humankind; members of the National Council on Educational Research took this perspective as they established missions for NIE's research centers and regional laboratories.*

### ONALEE MCGRAW

In his State of the Union address, President Reagan urged the nation to return to "traditional values" in education. He said:

Excellence must begin in our homes and neighborhood schools, where it's the responsibility of every parent and teacher and the right of every child. . . . [We] must do more to restore discipline to schools; and we must encourage the teaching of new basics, reward teachers of merit, enforce tougher standards, and put our parents back in charge.<sup>1</sup>

The same philosophy guides the National Council on Educational Research (NCER), appointed by Presi-

dent Reagan to formulate general policy for the National Institute of Education. The greatest challenge facing the NCER has been the prospective 1985 competition on the research centers and regional laboratories supported by the Institute as mandated by Congress. Since early 1983 I have served as Chairman of the NCER Com-

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mittee on Labs and Centers. Our task in regard to the competition has been threefold:

1. To articulate a philosophy of educational purposes underlying our policy.
2. To identify criteria to guide us in selecting research priorities on which NIE should focus.
3. To formulate a policy to implement President Reagan's views on education and, at the same time, to reflect a consensus on federally supported educational research priorities among all those who have a stake in the outcome of that research.

### **Philosophical and Practical Considerations**

As one who was active in the Civil Rights movement of the early 60s, having marched around the White House as an exchange student to Howard University in the last year of the Eisenhower Presidency, I share with my fellow Council members and the great majority of Americans a commitment to the proposition that all men are created equal in the sight of God and under the law.

What is at issue, however, is the vast

array of educational policies and programs put in place under the label "equity" to accomplish this goal. As education historian Diane Ravitch commented, our schools came to be treated like "sociological cookie cutters." She said that during this era, the "forgotten questions" were rarely asked in professional circles: "What does it mean to be an educated person? What knowledge is of most worth? Are the graduates of our schools educated people?"<sup>2</sup> Now these same questions, asked by many parents over the years, are at last being discussed by those in the education community. "Excellence" has become the new catch phrase for education reform; it has replaced "equity" and the notion of educators as "agents of social change."

We might ask whether it is possible to combine the two often conflicting goals of equality and excellence into one coherent philosophical proposition. I believe it is. Both of these goods are combined in the fundamental affirmation that every person has dignity and value. For me this tenet, so prominent in the Judeo-Christian ethic, is a satisfactory resolution of the question, at least at the theoretical level.

We make a serious mistake if we try to avoid the questions of philosophy that underlie all education issues, including those items now on the excellence agenda. Education issues can never be separated from life's deepest questions regarding man and his place in the world. H. Thomas James, President of the Spencer Foundation, observed that "because the study of education is hardly separable from the study of the nature of man, many of the questions now under investigation have deep intellectual roots in philosophy and theology."<sup>3</sup>

Yet our most prominent spokesmen on education reform avoid discussion of first principles. Such questions as parental rights and the exercise of religious freedom are of paramount importance to the public. Surely more professionals have positions on these questions than have been invited to participate in the establishment forums addressing education reform in the 80s.

In education, as in all other fields, underlying philosophical assumptions are determinative. It really does make a difference whether one believes with B. F. Skinner that the measure of man is completely determined by scientific laws of human behavior; or whether one agrees with Carl Rogers that the only reality that can and should exist is inside people's heads; or whether one concurs with C. S. Lewis that "certain attitudes really are true and others really false to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are."<sup>4</sup>

Surely, education is never value-free. Recently Ernest Boyer stated:

We cannot have a value-neutral education... Communicating values is at the very heart of education, whether it takes place in a Catholic school, a Jewish school, a military academy, a Baptist institution, or Public School 118.

Boyer went on to say:

The social and moral imperative of education is to help all students see the connectedness of things, an insight that touches the very foundation of morality—social, personal and religious.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, "seeing the connectedness of things" involves understandings about the cosmos, the nature of humankind and morality. However, these fundamental topics, which are the basis for human conduct, can only be addressed superficially in public schools if consideration of the transcendent order is excluded by judicial edicts that decree public schools to be strictly secular institutions. The words of C. S. Lewis again apply:

In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and demand of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.<sup>6</sup>

Part of the difficulty is that because of previous education practices there is a dearth of Renaissance men and women who can address education issues in public debate drawing on philosophy, history, literature, and theology, as well as the findings of social science. The mistake has been to view education primarily in terms of social science and then, further, to view it primarily in terms of what can be verified through quantitative measurement. To attempt to reverse this trend, the NCER has called for representation from a wide variety of disciplines in the personnel makeup of the labs and centers and in the peer review process that selects them.

Louise Kaegi, Editor and Public Relations Coordinator of the American Bar Foundation, addressed this issue in testimony at the NIE-sponsored hearing in Chicago in 1983. Kaegi argued that many educators see educa-

tion as "fundamentally a process of planned change where the overriding purpose of education is therapeutic, socialization, adjustment, social problem-solving, or simply moving through a 'time and place' process that must be managed and studied."<sup>7</sup>

The public attentive to the patterns of federal funding in the educational marketplace of ideas in the 60s and 70s is, by and large, in agreement with the views expressed by Kaegi. Many parents may not be able to state these views as eloquently as she does, but they know what questions are worth asking because nothing is more important to them than their children.

#### Selecting Research Priorities

One antidote to the problems outlined above may be not only to restore literature and history to today's students, as Diane Ravitch has so persuasively argued, but to restore the entire liberal arts curriculum to today's educators.

Moreover, there are some strong indications that the parameters of educational research have deepened and widened in the recent past. A landmark development in this regard was the publication of Michael Rutter's *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children*,<sup>8</sup> which focused on the importance of *ethos* in schools. The popularity of case studies, such as Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* demonstrates that excellence in literary prose and a comparative nonscientific approach to describing important questions in education are back in style.<sup>9</sup> Gerald Grant, in his essay, "The Character of Education and the Education of Character," addresses neglected questions about authority, coherence in transmitting moral values to the young, and school climate.<sup>10</sup>

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## **“The rediscovery of the importance of shared values as more important than abstract flowcharts and bureaucratic mandates arrives none too soon.”**

In arriving at its criteria for missions of the research centers and laboratories in the upcoming competition, the Council took into account several considerations:

1. Recognition of the primary rights and responsibilities of parents in the education of their children.

2. The importance of the principle of subsidiarity with a focus on studying private and parochial, as well as public schools, and concentrating on those research questions that would have greatest application for decisions made at the school and district level.

3. To recommend missions for centers that all those who have a stake in the outcomes—parents, practitioners, education researchers, Congress, and the Reagan administration—can agree represent appropriate and useful utilization of taxpayers' money at NIE.

Bearing this in mind, the Council approved the following missions for NIE's research centers: Literacy; Professional Development of Teachers; Improvement of Elementary Schools; Improvement of Secondary Schools; Improved Learning of Mathematics and Sciences; Acquisition of Second Languages; Student Testing, Assessment, and Standards; Education and Employment; and Postsecondary Education.

### **Shared Values**

Although many of the major decisions regarding the initial phases of the lab and center competition are currently being made, the NCER will, of course, continue to address educational re-

search directions at NIE. Chester Finn of Vanderbilt University has discussed the tension between school-level autonomy and systemwide uniformity; he made the persuasive argument that effective policies in education depend on an authentic understanding of the real nature of schooling.<sup>11</sup> Michael Cohen expressed it this way:

Community in schools is dependent upon more than shared instrumental goals. It requires the creation of a moral order, which entails respect for authority, genuine and pervasive caring about individuals, respect for their feelings and attitudes, mutual trust, and the consistent enforcement of norms which define and delimit acceptable behavior.<sup>12</sup>

The rediscovery of the importance of shared values as more important than abstract flowcharts and bureaucratic mandates arrives none too soon, for as Allan C. Carlson, Vice-President of the Rockford Institute, reminds us:

The experience of the 20th century suggests that the roots of modern evil lie in institutionalized public amorality. Liberty, in fact, depends on a widely shared conception of the desirable society, a value scheme against which we can evaluate normalcy and deviance, define our heroes and villains, reward merit, dispense demerit, ground our laws, and resolve those myriad conflicts that arise in daily life.<sup>13</sup>

This kind of rediscovery is something that must be done by everyone, not only those who consider themselves enlightened liberals, but also by those who call themselves conservatives and who think that mere adherence to conservative political principles can be a substitute for the hard work of restoration of our public philosophy.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn discovered this truth for himself and offered the following insight:

Gradually it became clear to me that the line separating good and evil runs not through states, nor between classes, nor even between political parties, but right through the center of each human heart. And every human heart.<sup>14</sup>□

<sup>11</sup>Tom Mirga, *Education Week*, February 1, 1984, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup>Diane Ravitch, "Forgetting the Questions: The Problem of Educational Reform," *The American Scholar* 50 (Summer 1981).

<sup>13</sup>"President's Comments," from the 1980 Annual Report of the Spencer Foundation, 875 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60611.

<sup>14</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup>Ernest L. Boyer, "Teaching About Values Called Key Part of Schooling," *Education Week*, March 14, 1984.

<sup>16</sup>"If Only a Secularist Religion Is Taught," C. S. Lewis as quoted in E. Earle Ellis, *Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 1984.

<sup>17</sup>See also "The Person in the Process: The Medium Is the Message," a commissioned paper by Louise Kaegi prepared for National Institute for Education for the Role of the Schools Project Planning Conference, February 22-23, 1983.

<sup>18</sup>Michael Rutter, *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>19</sup>Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>20</sup>Gerald Grant, "The Character of Education and the Education of Character," *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 110 (Summer 1981).

<sup>21</sup>Chester Finn, "Toward Strategic Independence: Policy Considerations for Enhancing School Effectiveness," *Phi Delta Kappan* (April 1984).

<sup>22</sup>Michael Cohen, "Instructional Management and Social Conditions in Effective Schools," in *School Finance and School Improvement Linkages for the 1980s* (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1983), p. 33.

<sup>23</sup>Allan C. Carlson, "The Rotting Core of the American Experiment . . . and a Possible Cure," *Persuasion at Work*, a publication of the Rockford Institute, 934 N. Main St., Rockford, IL 61103.

<sup>24</sup>Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

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