The Necessity for Every School-Age Child to be Educated

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Is there really a need for every child to be educated? Why should school-age children go to school? What is the future of the public schools? Honest answers to questions like these require more attention than they would have twenty, and even ten, years ago. For recently the legitimacy of the the public school has been challenged with a seriousness that has not occurred since they were first instituted.

The story of the American public school in the first half of this century, as every schoolman knows, is a story of triumph. The public school promoted democracy, improved individuals, and was good for business besides. If this was not wholly and always true, at least it was widely believed to be true! This belief was seldom debated, though often proclaimed. Everyone, it seemed, had faith in the public school system—employers, parents, citizens, educators, and even the students.[1]

Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. There is now a widespread and rather outspoken feeling that attendance at a public school is no longer necessarily a benefit, and an even more widely diffused sense of dissatisfaction among students, parents, and citizens. Of course, every teacher today will be familiar with the virtually new genre of school protest literature associated with names like John Holt, Edgar Friedenberg, and Paul Goodman. The development of the movement toward national assessment is symptomatic.

The sixties have also witnessed the development of a number of alternatives to the public school, and the serious advocacy of many more. A number of large industrial corporations have begun to set up their own schools—for example, the Singer Company in New Jersey. Companies such as Westinghouse and General Learning have begun to provide teaching on contract on a large scale. There has been a large swing to private schooling in the South because of desegregation. At the opposite end of the political spectrum is the enormous and accelerating growth of the Free Schools movement. Educational and training models provided by the Job Corps, Peace

Corps, Neighborhood Youth Corps, even the Army, are being considered with increasing seriousness. And men as far apart politically as Kenneth Clark, the activist black psychologist, and Milton Friedman, the Goldwater economist, have advocated the deliberate promotion of further alternatives, such as parent- or trade union-run schools. Proposals to provide parents with vouchers so that they may seek and purchase educational opportunities of their own choosing for their children are further indications of malaise in the public school system.

What should we make of all this? Certainly we should not conclude that the public schools have failed, nor that they are less worthy of our energy and commitment than before. But, equally, we cannot ignore the fact that the questions asked at the beginning of this paper have become genuinely open issues for the first time in this century. Serious and open-minded proposals and formulations are much needed.

For this purpose we shall reformulate our opening questions, and ask instead: What are the reasons why all children should be educated? What goals should education seek? And, are these reasons and goals sufficient for compelling all children to go to school?

The Goals of Education

Let us begin by summarizing the commonly accepted goals for public education during the last one hundred years. They might be divided for brevity into four major kinds, which we will call personal, productive, social, and intellectual. In addition, each was regarded as offering advantage both to the individual and to society at the same time. One might portray this in a chart such as the one shown which indicates that eight cells are generated for discussion purposes, though not every cell will be considered in the discussion to follow.

	1 Advantages to Individual	2 Advantages to Society
1. Personal	A	E
2. Productive	B	F
3. Social	C	G
4. Intellectual	D	H

The personal goals of education rest simply on the notion that education promotes both personal development and individual

self-fulfillment. These are among the simplest and most important goal statements to be made about education. They provide one avenue of justification for schools—especially if there is confidence that schools are paying off handsomely in goal achievement. Until recently, there has been little questioning of the importance of the school's contribution to the personal development of learners in terms of the following basic dimensions: (a) *physical* (bodily health and development), (b) *emotional* (mental health and stability), (c) *ethical* (moral integrity), and (d) *aesthetic* (cultural and leisure pursuits). Until the last decade, most Americans believed that the schools were doing well in promoting personal development and individual self-fulfillment for all children—regardless of social class, color, and individual abilities.

The idea behind the productive goals of schooling is that universal education is necessary to ensure a working population with the skills and understanding necessary for a growth economy fueled by constant technological advance. The level of these skills and understandings has constantly risen, until we are told that it will not be long before training and retraining will be a lifelong need for many people. One should notice that, despite the universal faith in the public schools already alluded to, it was not important until recently that everyone should finish high school. Society invented the "drop-out problem" sometime in the fifties, when it became unlikely that a drop-out could be reasonably employed throughout his lifetime. And, curiously, the development of facilities for lifelong education may relieve this situation again, as an early drop-out will be able to pick up his education later in life as he sees the need. It seems that the economic need for universal education will in the future be as much a matter of learning to consume wisely as of learning to produce efficiently. This will be for the health both of society and the individual.

The importance of careful planning (and clarity in relation to productive goals in education) in periods of rapid transition and change were highlighted several tyears ago by Michael:

> The long-range stability of the social system depends on a population of young people properly educated to enter the adult world of tasks and attitudes. Once, the pace of change was slow enough to permit a comfortable margin of compatibility between the adult world and the one children were trained to expect. This compatibility no longer exists. Now we

have to ask: What should be the education of a population more and more enveloped in cybernation? What are the appropriate attitudes toward and training for participation in government, the use of leisure, standards of consumption, particular occupations?[2]

The social goals of education are more complex. Generally speaking, schools have delineated learnings related to social goals in terms of four basic dimensions: (a) man-to-man relationships (cooperation), (b) man-to-state relationships (civic rights and duties), (c) man-to-country relationships (loyalty and patriotism), and (d) man-to-world relationships (interrelationships of peoples).[3] Moreover, it has always been assumed that universal education, especially in the public school, would promote democracy in a great variety of ways. Thus it would tend to provide an intelligent electorate, able to make more objective choices at the polls; it would give everyone more of an equal chance economically, and so promote social mobility; it would foster the arts and promote a healthy popular culture; and it would ensure common understandings by mixing the classes. At least this latter, it will be noticed, could only be done by the public schools, and it remains one of the strongest arguments public schoolmen can urge against the Free Schools. Nevertheless, if we cast a critical eye over these items and bear in mind the typical developments of the sixties, we find ourselves in doubt whether the schools have succeeded with any of these items. More on this later.

In addition to the above social goals, it is also well to note the unifying function of the school, promoting an awareness and love of America (especially among the immigrant groups early in the century). Thus the public schools taught patriotism and were an essential part of the "melting pot." To these has been added (from the fifties on) the notion that the schools should provide a supply of scientists and technological experts for the national defense effort, and later for the national economic competition with Russia. Today we are all familiar with the language of the National Defense Education Act.

The last comment above leads us naturally to the fourth set of educational goal dimensions: Those encompassing the intellectual domain. Among the important outcomes sought by schools in this area are the following: (a) possession of knowledge (a fund of information and concepts), (b) communication of knowledge (skill

to acquire and transmit), (c) creation of knowledge (discrimination and imagination), (d) desire for knowledge (a love of learning). Recent developments cited earlier (the contract system, the voucher system, training of dropouts, etc.) tend to indicate a measure of dissatisfaction with schooling outcomes even in this (the most important?) area of learning outcomes associated with public education.

These are, according to our categorization, the four kinds of goal areas which have been variously stated and lengthily elaborated in many different ways. They are all reasons for advocating the education of all school-age children, and some of them (especially in category three) are also reasons for wanting that education to take place in the public schools. As we have said, it was not usual to make this distinction earlier in the century, since it was widely assumed that, if education was to be supported, it would best be in the public schools. This faith has now weakened and the position today needs to be supported by rational argument if it is to be maintained.

Contemporary Search For Goals

Another way of looking at the goals enumerated above is to think of them as statements of ideals for the public school system. That is to say, it was probably never supposed that they were to be perfectly achieved; rather they represent tendencies that the schools should try to promote, and are accepted as goals or guides as long as they seem both plausible and worthwhile. In the United States they have long seemed both plausible and worthwhile. They have constituted in effect the core of the philosophy of the public schools in this century. The question that our present social situation raises is this: Which of these qualities have these goals lost in part—plausibility or attractiveness?

The optimistic answer is the first—that the present dissatisfaction with the public schools is due to a sense that these goals, though valuable, are not being met in sufficient degree. This is optimistic because the problem is then largely one of finding better ways of meeting them, and the alternatives springing up can be construed as diverse experiments from which the public schools can learn. The pessimistic answer is that the traditional goals of schooling outlined above have lost their attractiveness and that the alternatives are really setting themselves quite different goals. This is

pessimistic because we know that in the present political atmosphere the chances of reaching consensus about traditional old values, or emerging new ones, are small. The most plausible answer, in our judgment, is a mixture of the two, but heavily stressing the first. We think that, although some groups in some places are rejecting some of these goals, most current dissatisfaction with the public schools springs from a sense that they are not being successful in terms of these goals. This is in one sense a healthy sign, since it implies a reaffirmation of the goals, though *not* of the public schools.

If one puts this in terms of systems analysis, one might say that we have increasingly held up our products against the statements of objectives, and found serious discrepancies. This has, for most people, cast doubt on the means and processes (i.e., the typical public school procedures) rather than on the objectives. There is an increasing clamor that we take our traditional objectives more seriously, by questioning our traditional methods—a position which, it will be seen, is essentially conservative in the best sense. The question then becomes our second: Are there good reasons for supposing that the public schools can provide that education for the majority of our youth? Again, on this question we will advance some reasons for cautious optimism.

Before doing this, however, we must offer some justification for our optimism with regard to the first question. This can only be brief, but we hope it will be suggestive. With regard to our third category of aims, for example, there has, it is true, been some outright rejection of the use of the schools as instruments of the Cold War or for economic competition. This is especially true of college students. At the same time, however, conceptions of what the national goals are have been changing at all levels; and, though the debate continues, one may reasonably claim today that it is as much in the national interest to work for international peace as it is to prepare for war, as much to help wipe out poverty as it is to enlarge the Gross National Product. And, one is tempted to add, the schools have probably done as much with the former of these pairs as with the latter. The schools, in other words, have in general been moderately flexible in interpreting these objectives, enough not to have alienated large numbers in this area.

Consider also category two where again the question of flexibility of interpretation arises. Increasingly, as we have said, the pressure

has been rising to get more schooling so as to have a better job. As this pressure has increased, so has the reaction to it, a reaction which might be interpreted as an outright rejection of this set of economic motives, springing from a sense that categories one and two are not truly compatible. One of the assumptions of the Public School Movement[4] was that these four kinds of goals were compatible with each other, and were even complementary. This is best spelled out and justified in the work of John Dewey. Today that happy conjunction seems, to some, to have fallen apart. Thus, the Organization Man does not seem a good model for the self-actualizing person, any more than the work of Madison Avenue seems likely directly to further a democratic society. In the same way, given the economic motive for grading and the way schools have of mirroring the important features of society, the achievement of good grades in school is no longer a necessary sign of significant learning. But, of course, this is not the whole story. The Organization Man has been the target of many attacks. The artificiality of his reward system has been mirrored in the artificiality of the school grade system, but at the same time there have been numerous attempts to revitalize or remove the grading system. This indefinitely stratified status system has been copied in complex tracking and streaming systems and in the peer group structures of high schools, but there are also movements that cut across this. The same may be said of the impersonal, secondary group behavior (appropriate to bureaucracies) that our high schools have been teaching. The schools have been at least as flexible as the larger society in interpreting economic and productive goals, and they cannot easily be blamed for being no more decisive. Moreover, as the productive aspect of the economy begins to require a lifelong education, the severity of the pressure to graduate from high-school may relax. One can hardly doubt that this will be to the schools' advantage.

One area where our third category of traditional aims of the schools seems to have been challenged is in relation to minority groups The traditional thought seems to have been to promote democracy by assimilation, and to destroy diversity of people. The schools, for example, have made deliberate efforts to foster English instead of the native tongues of Spanish-Americans, Indian-Americans, French-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and so forth. Of course, the policy of the melting pot has now been openly rejected by many groups (notably including rednecks, and many suburban white

parents and some of the minority groups themselves). But this is also true of many school men and even schools. The debate between integrationists and separatists continues both within and without the schools, and here again the public schools seem capable of re-interpreting the notion of democracy to include diversity of culture and language, and perhaps even of class. What this amounts to is that the country as a whole is debating these issues and values, and that the schools also are, generally, uncertain. But they do not appear to be inflexibly wedded to one set of interpretations, as they might have been.

Can The Public Schools Respond?

So, much as an indication of what is meant by the claim that the traditional goals of education are being re-interpreted rather than rejected, we pass to the question whether it is plausible to suppose that the public schools will be able to meet these goals, however interpreted. We start by noticing that for many it is not clear that the public schools are any longer actually promoting traditional American ideals of democracy. The various minority separatist movements are fueled by our failure to achieve a meaningful integration in the echools, and in society in general.

To many, the schools appear to have been perpetuating class and ethnic barriers, and we are only slowly coming to understand the mechanisms involved in this. The curriculum, for example, has been heavily dominated by white middle-class concerns, and needs heavy injections of bi-cultural materials such as Black history, Spanish language, Indian cultures, etc., if it is not to disadvantage every one but the white middle class. Again, concepts of the neighborhood and of local control seem increasingly to separate rather than to mix different classes and ethnic groups as the differences between the suburb and the inner city grow. Equally, the doctrine of local tax support has the effect of maintaining the gap between rich and poor school systems. In like manner, it may be questioned whether the public schools really promote the development of an informed, critically-minded, citizenry. With the rise of the mass-media, manipulative psychology, and the consumer society, political elections look more (and not less) like popularity contests. Authority patterns in the schools have tended to produce conformists. Often, teaching methods have produced acceptance rather than critical questioning. School peer groups have been a powerful influence in promoting uncritical consumer-mindedness, and so on.

But as one mentions these various points, it is clear that a great deal is already happening in the public schools to remedy them, and the vigor of the public schools is displayed in the great variety of experiments currently going on along these lines. Tendencies here that are relevant include the non-graded school, the individualization of teaching, the use of new media, T-grouping, self-evaluation, team-teaching, increasing involvement of the school with the community and vice-versa, and accountability procedures. All of these tend to make the achievement of self-actualization goals possible while promoting both social and national interests. For, in the long run, it is no more possible than in the days of John Dewey to regard these various categories of goals as normally in conflict. Only specific and too narrow interpretations of them can be incompatible, for it cannot be in the national interest to have anyone less skilled or competent than he might be since the economy needs more and more highly developed skills. For parallel reasons, the social and political scenes need more self-actualizing, non-neurotic, critically-minded citizens. The actual achievement of this harmony involves not only reconceptualizing theory, but the successful establishment of school practices such as these. We do not doubt that some combination or variation of practices like these will eventually come to be accepted as the norm in the public schools. The questions seem rather to be, exactly what combination or variation, and when?

Here again, we find ground for optimism, especially in the conception of educational change as consisting of the supplanting of one normative model by another.[5] Educational change is often thought of as a gradual, evolutionary process of slow adaptation. It is more plausible, however, to see it as a process in which a model of educational practice dominates the schools for a while and is then supplanted by another with relative suddenness. During the reign of such a model, it provides a framework for thinking about methods in the fields, set limits to change within it, and relies on a number of unspoken assumptions. The model that has been reigning for the most part of this century is one where one teacher is assigned to a classroom, sets the goals within it, performs the evaluations, and relies heavily on talk and books.

We have been discussing some of the assumptions that this model relies on, though there are many more specific ones that do not relate directly to goals. The continued dominance of such a model obviously depends on a widespread confidence in it, which

our model has now clearly lost. It will not be decisively replaced, however, until its successor has emerged with sufficient definition and promise to capture the imagination of large numbers of educators. This has not yet happened. The present is a kind of interregnum, in which we may expect a great deal of experimentation, dissatisfaction and even defection, while the old model remains the basis of practice in many places. Yet when the new model emerges (as it surely must do) promising to fulfill our previous goals in the new conditions, it may rally support with surprising speed. This is a hopeful theory, in that it explains the present conjunction of growing dissatisfaction and apparent lack of solutions as a normal, if not necessary, part of the process of educational change.

To sum up our discussion, we have said that perhaps more than ever, there is reason for all children to be educated in America today, and that this need can be elaborated in terms of personal, productive, social, and intellectual benefits. These terms are largely still the traditional ones in which the public schools have set their goals. It is more doubtful that the public schools are presently doing well in terms of these goals, and this explains much of the current dissatisfaction with them. At the same time, we have given some indication of reasons for believing that the public system can be more successful, if it is willing to change enough. The threat of defection, therefore, should be seen more as a challenge than a threat. Numerous responses have been made already to this challenge, and the continuing vigor of the public school system is evident in them. Alternatives have been, and will be, increasingly offered and suggested, but we think there is reason for confidence in the long run in our public school system.

FOOTNOTES

1. Historians of education have begun to re-evaluate these beliefs. See, for example: Henry Parkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea, American Faith in Education, 1865-1965* (New York: Random House, 1968).

2. Donald N. Michael, *Cybernation: The Silent Conquest* (Santa Barbara, California: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1962), p. 41.

3. Further research elaboration of dimensions discussed in this article may be found in Lawrence Downey, *The Task of Public Education* (Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, 1960).

4. See James E. McClellan, *Toward an Effective Critique of American Education* (New York: Lippincott, 1968), ch. 1.

5. This conception derives from T. S. Kuhn's work in the history of science: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), and is more fully spelled out in Ch. III of Hencley, S.P., McCleary, L. E., and McGrath, J. H.: *The Elementary School Principalship* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1970).