Should public schools bring about change in society?

Educational change a prerequisite

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INTRODUCTION

A dilemma exists concerning public education's role in bringing about change within our social system. Should schools reflect the philosophies of the majority within a community, state, or the nation; or should they be instruments to bring about change within the system or even to change the structure of the system itself? In the past, the role of the public schools has generally been merely the reflection of the majority within its community whether this reflection was religion, politics, or whatever. This view was accepted by both educators and the public alike.

Changes seem to be taking place not only among educators, but within the public. Rarely does anyone go so far as to envision schools taking the role of changing the social structure, but they do see the schools taking the vital function of leadership, thus bringing about important social changes within the existing social system. In the past, this function was the prerogative of higher education; but now it is starting to seep into the secondary and elementary level of our public educational systems.

Certain conservative elements see this as a cause of great concern while most progressive groups applaud the change in direction. While not a rapid, overnight change, it is slowly beginning to permeate most of the public school system. Such a change in role definition, in itself, is neither good nor bad, because the school may be an extremely powerful force in bringing about desirable as well as undesirable change.

In redefining their role, it will be important for the schools to restructure their systems for obtaining information used in decision making. John I. Goodlad (1973) advocates, in order to satisfy the different realms of decision making which will become a part of the role of the schools, that differing data sources be brought into play for finding new solutions to problems. He suggests that educational institutions tend to draw their data from the safety of conventional wisdom, that schools are conservatively oriented, and that most controversial and potent thrusts of innovations are blunted.

Education has been generally conservative and slow to change when compared to other disciplines. McMurrin (1969) indicates that this is due to the natural conservativeness of such social institutions as education. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) indicate that recent changes in education reflect those of society, in general, which is now more open to change and also that resources are now available (still on a somewhat limited scale) to encourage change and innovation in education.

INNOVATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVE OF EDUCATION:

There is an unending controversy regarding the goals and objectives of the educational system. Extremists in either direction can be found in almost any program within the schools. There are advocates of only the "3Rs" and advocates of the completely "humanistic" program. Some would have the schools rigidly structured with no input by students, while others stress the only way a person learns is with complete freedom to choose not only the way in which he learns what he learns, but also whether or not he needs to learn at all. A complete range of opinions is found among educators and lay citizens in the community. Generally, a larger percentage of the educators, rather than other citizens, would favor more progressive goals of learning; but this varies from group to group. Those persons favoring the more progressive goals are usually better educated and upper-middle-class Americans; however, there is such a wide variation that generalizations, here, are dangerous.

Such controversy over the purposes of the educational system are healthy. Without differences of opinion, our schools would become stagnant and fail to meet the needs of our ever changing society. Lack of on-going dialogue would lead to control by a very few who would be able to indoctrinate the youth with their philosophies and, thus, in a generation would have one basic philosophy in complete control of the social system.

The American society is at a point in time when extremely important decisions concerning the future and direction of education must be made. Sterling M. McMurrin (1969) in **Schools and the Challenge of Innovation**, stated

"But if many of these decisions are to be made in the future—the very near future—at least one major decision must be made now. It is the decision on whether to cling to the established educational habits and customs and thereby perpetuate the past or seize the opportunities of the present to break through those habits and customs and move in new directions."

In any discussion of purposes and goals of education it is important to know what is involved. The purposes refer to (1) the individual, (2) the society and (3) the cultures. The goals are usually found in either the (1) cognitive nature, or (2) affective domains (McMurrin, 1969).

The schools are primarily concerned with two major types of learning—the cognitive and the affective. The cognitive domain usually involves the skills of achievement and the ability to communicate for the individual. It involves both sensory knowledge and abstract thought. The affective is concerned with the feelings and attitudes an individual forms, both about himself and about his fellow beings. Ginsberg (1973), in a lecture presented at Ohio State University, indicated that except for an athletic activity, American schools have concentrated almost exclusively on the development of cognitive skills, and that they are behind in their efforts to identify, train or reward young people with potentials for superior performance in non-academic, non-athletic pursuits.

In America, the individual is the focus of our culture and society. An opportunity is provided for individual achievement. Education is generally thought of as one of the most appropriate ways for achievement by the individual. The school, therefore, should produce an individual who is not only economically self-sufficient in the society, but also one who, as a result of his education, can find self-satisfaction in his pursuits.

Our educational system should perpetuate a society which is generally free in order that the individual may progress and attain his goals. It should perpetuate the culture and heritage of its people.

In order for the educational reformer to be successful, he must not be so drastically different that society will not listen to him and thus not accept his viewpoints. In order to survive in educational and political change, it is necessary to have what may be thought of as a map of the territory, together with some notion of the desirable direction and available paths. The reformer should also be aware of the practicality and applicability of reforms he advocates. Most of the present literature does not reflect this concern. In a review of the literature on training and change, Maurice Oliver (1971) indicates that little was reliable and dependable for use by the practicing school administrator in the tasks of administering for change. It is extremely important that those persons advocating educational change have clearly in mind the goal of society before attempting to initiate change in the schools. It should also be kept in mind that change for change sake should be avoided at all cost. Only those changes which have been carefully studied and that will help meet the purposes and objectives of the educational systems should be undertaken.

FACTORS AFFECTING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE:

There are a number of variables that will affect the type and amount of change that will occur in our public educational systems. Such forces can be found both inside and outside of the formal structure. Those from within will be discussed first.

Inside the School

School districts in America differ greatly and an exception can be found to any generalized discussion concerning them. School districts range from large urban and suburban school districts with thousands of students and numerous schools to extremely isolated one-room schools with few students. Many of the same forces which affect acceptance or rejection of change act within each district.

First, one must look at the system and those people who make up the system in predicting acceptability of change. Persons with larger amounts of education and higher socio-economic levels are generally more willing to accept change than those with lower levels of education and socio-economic status. Resources available to the district are extremely important. Those districts having difficulty meeting payrolls and obtaining adequate supplies and equipment are not likely to be innovative while those districts with ample resources and supplies will be more willing to initiate change. This is evident among the states. Those states providing more resources for the schools are more likely to have schools with changing, dynamic programs. With some of the more recent court rulings concerning equalization of educational resources within a state, we will probably see more equalization of innovativeness among schools. There is, however, a danger of bringing the more resourceful districts down to the average and thus, destroying their ability to innovate. It is hoped that new state funding formulas will reward the district that is willing to try new ideas. In the past, the urban and suburban districts have been able to pay higher salaries and, thus, to attract the more innovative type of administrator and teacher. Usually, those with higher levels of education have left the rural areas. Hopefully, any new funding formulas, brought about as a result of the court rulings, will make special allowances for small schools in order to alleviate this discrepancy.

O'Fallen and Doak (1973) found that small schools have been slow to respond to changing societal needs because (1) of their isolation, geographically and otherwise; (2) their smallness leaves little flexibility to innovate and explore; (3) staffing patterns are aimed at recruitment from within the community; and (4) information and communication is focused on local rather than cosmopolitan sources.

The lack of knowledge and skills of individuals within a system many times act as a deterrent to change. In his writings on educational programs in developing countries, H.S. Bhloa (1973) indicated that the general lack of knowledge among practitioners and educators concerning the how and why of organizational behavior will, as a lack of sensitivity on the part of the administrators and planners to the organizational aspects of technical assistance, slow down planned change.

The school administrators play a big role in encouraging change within schools. If they are open minded and reward those teachers who properly plan and initiate change, change is more likely to occur. If change is discouraged, the innovative teacher will either leave the system or become more like the traditional teacher in order to survive within the system. The community often looks to the administrator for leadership in bringing about change. Robert H. Anderson (1973), when discussing "Open Education" and the principal's role, made the following statement: "Public receptivity in open education as a specific example of school reform has sometimes been less than enthusiastic; for this reason, the would-be progressive school principal faces a challenging task of inquiry, information, persuasion and affirmative action. It follows then that unless principals do

commit themselves to the cause of open education, that cause may not flourish. Leadership in planning, provisioning and more imaginative exploitation of the school's physical environment is one of the important contributions a principal can make."

Outside the School

The community may include the local school area, district, state, or larger geographic area, such as the nation. There is a movement in education today wherein many groups and local communities are demanding more local control of their schools and yet are desiring more resources from state and national sources. As more school support monies come from outside the local community, more controls which may influence the changes that take place within the local school will come.

Community characteristics which influence change are closely related to characteristics of individuals who influence change. Thus, communities with higher levels of education and socio-economic status will be more likely to accept change. Communities that are more cosmopolitan in nature will be more willing to accept innovation within the schools. Communities with these characteristics will not only be more willing to accept such change, but will demand that improvements be made and that the schools be a dynamic force in the social structure.

Extremes of social unrest within a community may, in some cases, act as a deterrent to change. When school administrators are found to have locked gates at the schools and police in the halls to protect the students, staff, and property, it is extremely difficult to have a viable educational program. It is important that there be dialogue between the community and school personnel, although in some cases there may be confrontation. This confrontation should not be destructive in nature, but should involve issues that can be solved at the negotiating table or at the polling place during school board elections.

Generally, in the past, school board members have represented the power structure in the community or special interest groups. Such persons were content to maintain the status quo in the schools. State legislatures often represent the same groups of people. If others, in the various communities, want more of a voice in what happens in the schools, they must work within the system and get representation on both local and state legislative and policy making bodies. This change is beginning to take place in some communities, making the schools more susceptible to changes desired by the various people living within the school district. This may not always be advantageous for the schools. A great many school districts in retirement communities are in serious financial trouble and unable to provide adequate educational programs due to the conservative nature of the constituents.

Characteristics of Innovations that Affect Change

The characteristics of the innovation itself may determine its acceptance or rejection into a particular school system or classroom. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) listed five characteristics of innovations that are sensed by the receivers as being important and contributing to their different rates of adoption.

1. Relative advantage is the degree to which an innovation is perceived to have a greater advantage over the idea that it replaces.

2. Compatibility is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, needs and experiences of the receivers.
3. Complexity is how difficult an innovation is perceived to be.
4. Triability is the degree to which a innovation may be "tried out" on a limited basis.
5. Observability is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others.

In each case it should be noted that the determining factor is how the characteristic is perceived by the receiver. No matter what the actual situation is, if the receiver perceives it differently, then that perception is true for him.

RESTRUCTURING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR CHANGE

Contrary to the beliefs of some people, it is not necessary to have complete restructuring of the schools to make them more susceptible to desired change. In fact, there is a danger in completely dismantling an entire system. This is especially true when the system has a sound basic structure and is an integral part of the community, as are the public schools in America. Any change of the structure should follow the same basic principle of change in the program, that of working within the establishment rather than trying to destroy the structure and then building an entirely new system.

Alternative Schools

A "positive" rather than a "negative" approach to education is advocated by many people as a means of making schools more meaningful and thus being more successful in meeting the needs of students. The Glasser approach is one that advocates the positive school experience. Bruce D. Keepes (1973), in a presentation given at the American Educational Research Association, reported that after four years of operating on the Glasser plan, the school staff was noticeably more committed to creating a success-oriented experience for students as evidenced by the warm teacher-pupil relationship, the emphasis on individualized instruction, the absence of arbitrary universal standards, the problem-solving approach to discipline, and the general sense of joint effort observable both within the classroom and within the school as a whole.

New Role for Intermediate School Districts

An extremely exciting and promising practice in school organizations which has recently developed is that of redefining the intermediate unit and its function. The original intermediate unit, the office of the county school superintendent, was on the whole a failure and had outlived its usefulness. A majority of the states now have legislation which enables school districts to band together cooperatively into a regional unit (Bensen and Barber, 1971). This banding together enables districts to provide services to students, as a part of a larger unit which would have been impossible in a single school district. This type of organization has been especially beneficial to rural schools which have many times been unable to provide adequate educational programs. It also enables these schools, without consolidation, to provide increased services and to keep their own identities. School consolidation, in the past, often helped to destroy

small rural communities. Some examples of states with more successful programs are the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in New York, the Regional Service Center in Texas and the County Schools in California. In some states, there is much less structure and the schools band together in a cooperative arrangement to perform a number of special services. Each state may also have a different administrative structure for the intermediate unit. Such a system spreads out both the resources and the risks involved in implementing innovations into the schools.

Consolidation vs. Decentralization

The trend of consolidation of school districts and the making of larger and larger districts has tended to slow down in the past few years. Some people are now beginning to question whether or not some districts are too big to bring about desirable change and to provide adequate educational programs for the youth and adults in the community. This does not imply, however, that there are not some districts which are still too small and could still benefit from consolidation, but that some of the larger urban districts may have become too large to adequately perform their functions. Roscoe Brown (1973) points out that in New York City decentralization is being attempted in order to help meet the demands of the citizens for improved educational programs. He indicated that the main obstacles to decentralization of schools in New York City are the bureaucracies within the school systems, a large and powerful teacher union, and the political ramifications which accompany the process of decentralization. The main benefits are the lessening of administrative lethargy in the centralized bureaucracy and the ease of responsiveness in meeting the needs of local communities.

Each community should take a good look at the size of its school district and what it hopes to accomplish in trying to determine if the districts are too large or not large enough. Decisions for change should be made upon the needs of the youth and adults served by the educational system. This process is very agonizing in many cases, but each community needs desperately to do so.

Year-Round Schools

Another system which has shown some promise is that of the "year-round school." There are indications that school districts across the nation increasingly view year-round school operations as much for the opportunities to improve the educational program as for reasons of space utilization or economy (Olsen and Rice, 1974). A number of plans are in operation, but all basically involve having the schools open all year long with students taking vacations at different times to better utilize the facilities. A few, however, are not truly "year-round" schools in the strictest sense, offering only remedial or enrichment programs for the students in the summer.

The greatest problem with the year-round system has been adjustment for the parents and the community. It is difficult for working mothers to have children at home other than during the traditional summer vacations, and the system may also play havoc with traditional family vacation plans. There are some indications that such parental adjustments have been made.

Personnel

The most difficulty in structuring for change comes with personnel. It causes real problems for people who may be conservative by nature and who work within a traditionally conservative system to make major changes. But without some changes in the thinking and attitude of existing personnel or by replacing them with newly trained personnel, it will be an impossible task to implement lasting innovations into the school systems, especially innovative programs in staff development.

Administration

If the administration in an organization fails to see the need for change or lack the ability to initiate and carry out change, then there is little likelihood that change will take place. This is true at all levels of administration, from the superintendent and staff at the central office down to the principal at the individual school or building level. Their approval is needed for much progress to take place. The mere fact that an administrator does not encourage innovation indicates endorsement of a traditional program already in existence. Inactivity may be as detrimental to change as a strong stand against change itself. The administrator may either introduce change himself or act as a facilitator in the encouragement of teachers or students in such an introduction.

The present-day role of the school administrator is being seriously questioned by many groups and individuals at this time. Teachers often see administrators as being too far removed from the instruction and concerned primarily with "efficient management." Many times the goals of management may differ from those of the teacher or student in the classroom. Quite often the main concern of the administrator may be that of someone who does not "rock the boat." The administrator may view the teacher who is trying to develop a more progressive education program as a troublemaker. It should be said, in the administrator's defense, that not all of them fit such a mold. Enough do, however, to cause some serious concerns in the minds of many about what should be the true role of the school administrator and, in some cases, if the administrators should even continue to exist.

In an attempt to establish a hierarchical order of purpose for the elementary school principal, Gallo (1973) proposes the following: (1) clinical supervision for the improvement of instruction, (2) professional dialogue with staff in the planning of curriculum and the implementation of curriculum programs, and (3) management function. Because these functions are not performed in the above order and often the management function is given highest priority, many people are beginning to advocate the abolishment of the building principal.

All too often the administrative role is that of gatekeeper and the gate has been closed to desired changes in education. Change will occur only when the administrator perceives a need for change and sees himself as having the power to bring about the change. (Reynolds, 1967)

Teachers

Teachers must also have the proper attitude and desire if change is to occur. Teachers are the most important links in developing an adequate educational program for learning to take place. It is impossible to expect teachers to change by merely just telling them to do so. They must be motivated and see a need for the change and then receive help in the implementation.

One of the most important developments in education, in some time, is that of competency-based teacher education programs. The main thrust in teacher

certification would be the competencies and skills in which the teachers could demonstrate proficiencies. If this program is fully developed, the teachers will be personally involved in continual change and innovation in all areas may tend to become second nature. At least 40% of the states presently have plans for awarding certificates through competency-assessed teacher certification programs. (Maurer, 1973). The greatest resistance to competency-based teacher certification programs, at this time, seems to be coming from teacher organizations.

Teachers as a group will not be change-oriented until the system begins to reward them for being so. The present system which gives pay increases based primarily on longevity may tend to discourage the innovative teachers. Currently there is a tendency to reward those who do "not make waves."

The administration and teachers need to work together as a team if desired educational change is to take place. Each must have input into such change at all stages of its development—the conceptual, planning, as well as initiation and implementation phases.

Role of the Community

We are in the midst of an extremely serious controversy today concerning the role of the community in our public schools. There is little indication that the problems will soon be solved. There are, on one side, those who say that the schools belong to the community and that the students are products of the local communities. On the other side, there are those who advocate that the purpose of the school is to bring about change and that professional educators should have the ultimate voice as to what takes place in the school and curriculum. This controversy has even caused bloodshed and violence in some communities. A major problem often involves material found in textbooks over which the local educators or citizens have little or no control. Forces on a large (often even national) scale are having more and more effect on what goes on in individual classrooms. Parents and other citizens are becoming concerned and demanding more of a voice in what takes place in the schools.

Traditionally, it has been thought that local school boards represented citizens of a particular community. The board supposedly developed the policy, and the responsibility of the administrator and other educators was to carry out the policy. There are two major problems with this viewpoint: (1) School boards are generally non-paid persons with full-time employment elsewhere and rely very heavily on the professional educators for not only input into policy but also the development of the policy itself and (2) the boards are usually representative of the power structure or pressure groups and do not adequately represent the citizens of the community.

The first problem has led to a gradual wasting away of the board's influence. It is often impossible for a single lay board to collect all the information, analyze it and make policy decisions concerning the operation of many of our immense educational organizations. Board members often rely on the educators to do much of the information collecting and analysis. Without intentionally meaning to do so, the bias of the professional educator tends to dominate. This does not mean that school boards should become involved in operational decisions, but is included merely to point out the problems which now exist in many situations. Some communities have additional advisory committees to advise the board. Their advisory committee can greatly alleviate the information gathering and

analysis work of the board and free them for policy determination. Generally, such citizen committees are appointed for a special project and released when their work is completed. Probably the greatest outcome is that such a program involves more citizens in the schools. And citizens, by becoming involved, have a much greater understanding of the problems.

The second problem of inadequate representation of the citizens may not be as easy to solve. But the involvement of more citizens may tend to get them interested and thus run for the school board. A publication of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS, 1974) "How Well Do They Represent You?" describes this unequal representation: "about 100,000 Americans serve on school boards,—they have many occupations—dentists, lawyers, housewives, merchants, farmers, professors, managers and laborers. About four percent are manual workers; the professions and business contribute about 65 percent. Men outnumber women by a ratio of nine to one. In some states a person under 21 years of age cannot legally serve on a school board." There are indications in this statement of not only imbalance by occupation, but also of discrimination by sex and age, as well. In many places, ethnic discrimination can also be found; but this imbalance seems to be changing more rapidly than some of the other aspects.

If the schools are to provide services and make changes in order to keep the confidence of the citizens in the community, new ways must be found to involve a more representative group of citizens in the decisions and operations of the individual school systems.

The educator has the responsibility of helping the lay citizen to develop the ability to have more input into the schools. At this time, many educators view this idea as a threat, not as an aid. More and more groups of people, especially among minorities, are demanding this participation. Without proper training, however, it could become a complete failure. The professional educator should welcome the assistance and do everything within his power to see that the lay people are successful in this venture.

Influence of Social Forces

If the educational system is a reflection of the social system, then the major force in educational change should come from society itself. Such changes may take a long time, due to the fact that the major society is generally slow to change. Many such changes may take generations to occur.

Probably one of the most dramatic societal changes to take place which is affecting our educational system is the realization that the United States is not a "melting pot" but a pluralistic society. As a result, many changes were forced upon the schools, most of which were difficult to cope with. It was felt by some that legislation and additional resources would help bring about needed changes in the schools. Generally, both have failed miserably. Large amounts of money were spent on compensatory education for disadvantaged children. Even their strongest supporters will now admit that they were not completely successful. Evaluation after evaluation has shown that in those cases where increased learning did take place it soon disapperaed after a few years. The supporters argue that if the special programs had continued, learning would have continued to increase. Its critics contend that we cannot afford such massive

change in our educational system for the education of the disadvantaged.

The laws regarding forced integration continue to be ignored. In all sections of the country, there continue to be segregated schools and means to enforce the laws often bring violence. The conflicting demands of the separatists on one hand and the integrationists on the other have severely damaged education in many cases.

In a great many instances conflicts were resolved by much more peaceful means. Millions of youths are now attending integrated schools. Opportunities for disadvantaged youths to further their education are better than ever before. Thousands are attending institutions of higher education and advanced technical schools who would have found it impossible a few years ago.

Diversity of culture can be either a threat or an asset. The schools and the community together can use diversity as a destructive force or as a means of helping people grow and develop. Many ethnic studies programs have now developed beyond that stage to a more comprehensive "Ethnicity in Education" (Seifer, 1973) and are an integral part of curriculum aiding people to better understand one another.

The women's liberation movement has also brought about changes in the schools. Those in the "sacred sanctuaries" of men's athletics find now that resources must be shared and that equal programs must be provided for girls. Many occupational and professional training programs are also changing to overcome the sex biases that were previously there.

The schools, where change takes place at a slower rate than in "real life" are criticized for being behind and not relevant to the needs of society. This is a dilemma which will continue to be with us as long as the goals of society continue to change. It is remarkable how well our educational system has fared in the face of such rapid changes in direction.

The issue of staff development can never be adequately addressed until educational leaders deal with the issue of educational change. Administrators, teachers, community people, students, school board members and faculty in higher education all must grapple with the dilemma: Should public schools effect change or bring about change in society? Before implementing any specific strategies dealing with staff development in the public school systems, this dilemma must be resolved.

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