EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

During the early years of the thirties educational institutions were engrossed in devising ways of economizing. However, during this same period it became evident that the number and the plight of unemployed youth demanded a new kind of attention and relief. At this juncture the federal government entered the picture and organized relief agencies, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration, which provided assistance for unemployed youth. During the latter years of the decade government assistance expanded to include the building of schools and the payment of wages to teachers, etc. Within the last few years the government has gone into sponsoring a program of vocational education. The past decade has also witnessed reform in the curriculums of the elementary and secondary schools. Most of such revisions have been devoted to the field of social studies. Many of the changes in education during the past decade have resulted from the work of various committees and commissions which operated during the period.

EFFECTS OF THE DEPRESSION

During the years immediately following 1929 educational institutions were engrossed in devising ways of economizing. Expenditures for books and supplies were either drastically reduced or entirely eliminated. Percentages ranging from 10 to 25 were cut from the salaries of administrators and teachers. The length of the year for public schools was very generally shortened by a month and in some cases by several months. The hope was entertained that the financial stringency would be of short duration, and it was assumed that, if institutions made temporary curtailments of their normal operations, they could return shortly to the full program which they had carried on during the preceding era of prosperity.

As time passed and the depression continued, further steps of economy were taken. Courses which duplicated one another were combined; others for which the demand was small were dropped entirely. When vacancies occurred in the teaching staff, no new appointments were made; the sizes of classes were increased. A few institutions closed their doors or merged with their neighbors, but surprisingly little occurred in the way of entire abandonment of institutions. Small colleges, which many thought would be unable to keep alive, showed a tenacity on life which was astonishing. A number of
these institutions survived by giving up entirely the effort to pay
stipulated salaries to the members of their faculties; they merely
divided whatever income they received from student fees and from
other sources. Some of them went so far as to draw on their sup-
posedly permanent funds. Public schools in some cases suspended
payments to teachers or gave in lieu of cash payments depreciated
credit warrants.

UNEMPLOYED YOUTH

While the happenings described in the preceding paragraph were
taking place within educational institutions, disturbing facts with
regard to unemployment of young people obscured themselves on
the attention of the nation. A great many youth who had left schools
and colleges either through graduation or through withdrawal before
graduation were unable to find employment in the industrial or com-
cmercial world. Educational institutions were wholly unaccustomed
to assuming any responsibility for those who had graduated or
dropped out. Most of them did not change their practices under the
conditions that arose. A striking example of the unpreparedness of
the educational system to meet the emergency was seen when in
many places graduates of public secondary schools went back to the
institutions which they had earlier attended and asked to be allowed
to pursue courses that they had not taken before. A few postgradu-
ate high-school pupils were allowed to register. In many congested
school systems, on the other hand, applicants were turned away be-
cause there was no space in which they could be accommodated.
Colleges were also unable to meet the requests made for scholarships
by students who could not afford to pay tuition fees but applied for
opportunity to attend.

In addition to those who were turned away by schools and colleges
there were many young people who had no desire to continue at-
tendance at educational institutions. They drifted about in idleness
or vagabonded back and forth across the country. The families and
even the communities to which these wanderers belonged were help-
less to provide for them. It became evident that the plight of youth
demanded a new kind of attention and relief. Gradually it was rec-
ognized that there was a national youth problem.
FEDERAL AID

At this juncture the federal government stepped in and organized relief agencies, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration, which provided work and wages for unemployed youth. Finally, the government also made possible through the National Youth Administration payment to students in colleges and secondary schools of small wages in return for work which could be carried on at the same time that the beneficiaries of the arrangement were pursuing their studies.

The fact that the federal government had financial resources with which to meet the needs of youth and of educational institutions expressed itself in many other ways. There were persons qualified to teach in schools who had been displaced because local school systems were unable to carry on. There were communities which had abandoned entirely the effort to provide schools. Relief funds were asked for and received in many of these cases from the federal government. Indeed, provision was made through federal subsidies for the organization of new nursery schools for the care of young children of poor families, it being the belief of relief authorities that it was more readily possible to take care of children when they were assembled in this way than to deal with them in separate homes. In the later years of the depression the federal government granted in addition to the kinds of aid thus far enumerated loan funds or direct subventions for the erection of buildings for public schools and public universities.

Before the onset of the depression educators had asked for federal aid for education. It had been pointed out in a number of reports that many communities and states are so poor that their children, future citizens of the nation, are not provided with the type of education that is essential to successful discharge of the duties of citizenship in a democracy. The demand for "equal educational opportunities" in all parts of the country which had been vigorously urged in the days before the depression was put forth with new emphasis when the depression resulted in curtailment of educational facilities. It was the hope of educators, however, that all federal money spent for the benefit of young people would be turned over directly to existing educational institutions.

The practice of paying with federal funds wages to pupils in high
schools, to students in college, and to teachers in districts unable to provide schooling served as nothing ever had served before to show that education is a national interest. Provision of employment by the federal government and payment of wages to young people who had left school and could not find jobs served as nothing ever had before to show that the care of youth outside of educational institutions is an inescapable obligation of organized society. Never again can the youth problem of the United States be thought of as trivial, temporary, or purely local. Investigations which have been made since the federal government first undertook to help young people to establish themselves in self-sustaining adulthood show that the youth problem has been maturing for long years. Subtle changes in the industrial system of the country and in the age characteristics of the population have been gradually dislocating youth, pushing them out of the status which they formerly occupied and raising materially the age at which they can become independent. The depression did not create the issue; it merely brought it to clear recognition.

**OPPOSITION TO FEDERAL CONTROL**

As soon as the federal government took a hand in the care of unadjusted youth it came into contact with the educational system. The American people have long been committed to the belief that the only public provision which has to be made for youth is made when schooling is provided. School administrators have shared in this belief and have developed the attitude that all public attempts to deal with young people should be under their supervision. It was inevitable, therefore, that sooner or later there should arise from school administrators pointed objection to administrative measures taken by the federal government paralleling or superseding those of the educational system. The clash of jurisdictions has become acute during recent years. School administrators no longer petition that all federal funds appropriated for the care of youth be turned over to them—they demand that this be done. It is not at all likely, however, that the demands of school administrators will be acceded to by the federal administration. Some kind of program of a federal public works is sure to be continued for a long time to supplement present-day education.
VOCATIONAL AND NONVOCATIONAL EDUCATION

One of the most vigorous educational debates of the past decade centered around the problem of the relation between vocational education and nonvocational education. In 1917 the manufacturers of the country with the co-operation of a few educators persuaded the Congress that there ought to be added to the curriculum of the secondary schools courses which would prepare skilled workers for factories. The Congress made appropriations with a view to stimulating the development of such courses and created an independent federal board to promote the spread of the vocational-education movement. The congressionally supported leaven worked slowly. By 1930 a considerable number of pupils were registered in vocational courses, but there was no really successful incorporation of these courses into the general plan of American education. The traditional subjects in the secondary-school curriculum still held preferred positions. The pupils who were most commonly advised to register in vocational courses were those who were thought by their teachers to be inferior in intelligence. There was a mutual attitude of antagonism between members of school staffs charged with the administration of vocational courses and those who conducted traditional courses.

The President of the United States, thinking to bring about a better co-ordination between vocational education and general education, transferred the independent board which had been created to promote vocational education to the jurisdiction of the United States Office of Education. This move was not effective to any great extent in combining the two types of education. The two divisions of the Office of Education remained aloof and lacking in the kind of unity that had been sought through the transfer made by the President.

In the meantime, the teachers of vocational subjects were making an effort to raise the average intelligence of the pupils in their classes and in so doing were emphasizing the more highly specialized forms of trade skills. The training of pupils in general skills received decreasing attention, and, as a result, vocational education became more and more a highly specialized branch of school work.

The defense program has given a tremendous impetus to a certain type of trade training. The demand for mechanics is so great that
short courses are being conducted not with a view to preparing individuals as all-round machinists but with a view to perfecting workers as rapidly as possible in the performance of single operations. The vocational education which is given as a part of the defense program is heavily subsidized by the federal government. Local school systems which are equipped with technical schools or shops are receiving new equipment, have the salaries of additional instructors paid, and are encouraged to operate twenty-four hours a day. Some of their effort is being turned to the training of adult workers.

The intensification of the program of vocational education has aroused many educators who are primarily concerned with what they regard as the higher forms of mental activity to conduct a campaign in favor of the literary subjects as contrasted with the vocational subjects. The controversy is being hotly waged by representatives of higher education as well as by those concerned with secondary education.

The adjustment of the school program so as to give proper place—whatever that is—to vocational education is by no means satisfactorily made. At the moment it can be said that vocational education is being accorded a far more hospitable reception than it has ever had before. A great many people who formerly were lukewarm or even antagonistic are now aligning themselves on the side of vocational education.

**Revision of the School Curriculum**

With the new emphasis on work that comes from the efforts of the federal government to provide young people with employment and the new enthusiasm for vocational education, the traditional subjects of the secondary-school curriculum are distinctly on the defensive. Another consideration which has opened up the school curriculum for reconsideration is the clear recognition that at the present time a great many young people are attending secondary schools and colleges because they have nowhere else to go. So long as privately controlled industry absorbed many youth on remunerative jobs it was common for anyone who did not have strictly intellectual interests to drop out of school and find a footing in the practical world. With the change in conditions which has been referred to in preced-
ing paragraphs it is no longer possible for most young people to complete their preparation for mature life by securing at an early age profitable employment. This fact raises at once the question: How far is the educational system responsible for meeting the interests of the multitude of young people who are now enrolled?

Advocates of change in the curriculum, in order to provide for the new enlarged population enrolled in educational institutions, point out that the courses which still constitute the core of instruction in secondary schools and colleges are those which were originally adopted when the chief purpose of these institutions was the preparation of a selected group of young people, the majority of whom were looking forward to careers in the professions. Professional and semi-professional callings are known to be overcrowded. It is calculated that more than 80 per cent of the pupils in secondary schools and a large number of college students are being directed by their studies into so-called “white-collar jobs,” which now offer no prospects of employment.

Discussions of the legitimate sphere of public education are leading to a new view with regard to the high school as a unit in the educational system. The free public high school has become since its organization in the 1870’s an institution very different from the secondary schools of earlier times and different from the corresponding grade of schools in other countries. It has come to be recognized during the past few years that the high schools of the country are now a part of the common-school system. The future will quite certainly see changes in instruction and organization which will bring secondary schools into fuller accord with the concept items expressed.

REFORMS IN ELEMENTARY-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The past decade has witnessed important reforms not only in the secondary schools but also in the elementary schools. The most comprehensive way of describing the changes which have taken place in elementary education is to say that formal teaching has been attacked and in some measure eliminated, and the curriculum has been greatly enriched. The beginnings of the reform which has gone on during the past ten years can be traced to earlier decades, even to the last decade of the nineteenth century. In recent years the reform has
taken on a momentum that has sometimes carried it out of bounds. There are extremists who advocate the complete abandonment of the conventional divisions of the curriculum. They would have no more courses in arithmetic, spelling, geography, or history. They would pursue such topics as arouse the interest of pupils and in so doing would fuse or unify all intellectual efforts by concentrating on projects or problems and dealing as occasion demands with such aspects of education as are commonly included in separate school subjects. The effectiveness of the movement to abolish all dividing lines between school subjects has been most marked in certain private schools and in sections of the country where in times past formal teaching was most common.

There can be no doubt that the country is passing through a period of widespread uncertainty as to methods and contents of instruction. One can be optimistic about the elimination of formalism that is thus being accomplished, but one must view with some anxiety present-day confusion. The most promising sign of the times is the very general undertaking by school systems of studies of their curriculums. In one way or another all the leading school systems of the country and many of the state departments of education are attacking the problem of curriculum revision. Committees of teachers are at work. Specialists in the supervision of the curriculum are being added to the staffs of superintendents. Consultants are being drawn from departments of education in universities and teachers' colleges to discuss with teachers and school supervisors ways of improving the contents and methods of teaching.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The field in which the most attention is being given to curriculum revision is the field of the social studies. The depression stimulated the general consideration of economic problems; the events in Europe, the defense program, and, finally, the war served to make clear the importance of cultivating in a democratic nation the highest intelligence that the schools can produce with respect to all aspects of social life. American schools have given little emphasis in the past to social studies. The only courses commonly taught that can properly be classified as belonging under this heading are history and cer-
tain sections of geography. A few courses in civics have been pro-
vided, usually in the program of the secondary school. These
courses, however, have commonly dealt with the anatomy of govern-
ment rather than with its functional activities.

The reasons why the social studies have been absent from school
curriculums are obvious. In the first place, the systematic social sci-
ences are themselves immature. They are of recent origin, and their
methods and findings are still largely in process of formulation. In
the second place, the social sciences relate so intimately to individual
life that parents and boards of trustees in control of educational in-
tstitutions are fearful that school courses will mislead young people
rather than give proper guidance to their thinking.

The past decade has seen a number of evidences of the difficulty of
introducing social studies into the school program. A commission
sponsored by the American Historical Association and consisting of
a number of school administrators and specialists in various social
sciences failed to arrive at an agreement on the general principles
which should guide schools in their teaching in this field. Four of the
leading members of this commission refused to concur in the report
adopted by the majority because they did not approve of the posi-
tion taken in the report that the United States is moving in the
direction of becoming a collectivistic society.

From time to time textbooks in history and related fields have
been attacked as subversive. One such attack couched in the most
sweeping terms was made by a man who had been employed by the
American Association of Manufacturers to prepare a report on the
contents of textbooks in the social sciences in use in schools. Other
attacks sometimes directed against particular textbooks have been
made by the American Legion, by the leaders of political movements,
by local school systems, and by associations of parents.

There can be no doubt that the future will see in public schools
much more attention to social studies than has been given to them
in the past. Numerous experiments are being tried in different school
systems to discover the best material and the best methods of dealing
with such studies. At the same time many schools are making the
effort to introduce social practices of self-government and pupil or-
ganization that are designed to cultivate social consciousness among the members of the school community.

EDUCATIONAL COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS

It is quite impossible in a paper of this length to enumerate all the committees and commissions which have operated during the past decade. It would, however, be a serious omission from any summary of educational doings to fail to mention several important bodies which have dealt with one or another of the problems of the educational system during this period.

Two national advisory committees on education were convened, one in 1930 by President Hoover and one in 1937 by President Roosevelt. The first was appointed by the President and the Secretary of the Interior to wrestle with the problems that were conspicuous early in the depression. The second was appointed for the specific purpose of advising the President on the problem of vocational education. Later the scope of consideration of this committee was enlarged, and it was asked to report on all aspects of education. Both committees prepared and published notable reports. The second committee issued in addition to its general report nineteen highly informing volumes on various aspects of education in the United States.

Most of the discussions carried on by these committees have been referred to in the paragraphs which constitute the early part of this paper. Both committees recommended federal subventions for public schools, expansion of federal participation in education, strengthening of state departments of education, and consolidation of the small school districts common in most of the states.

During the decade there were two White House conferences dealing with aspects of child life. One of the most important outcomes of these two conferences is an emphasis on child health. Health was by no means the only subject dealt with, but each of the conferences treated health as a matter of prime significance. The United States Public Health Service was also more active during the past decade than ever before in promoting popular interest in health. The result of the White House conferences and of the campaign carried on by the Public Health Service is that schools are doing more than they
have done in times past to cultivate health habits and promote intelligence among pupils with regard to health requirements.

In the middle of the decade the American Council on Education organized a commission known as the American Youth Commission. This Commission was made up of ten citizens not directly connected with the educational system and five educators. Its final report was adopted in September, 1941. Prior to the adoption of this report the Commission had during six years sponsored and published a series of reports which described fully all aspects of the youth problem. Its findings will supply the basis for the adjustments that are sure to be made in American schools in the near future. It recommended a public-works program to supply employment for youth when private industry is unable to do so, revision of the program of instruction in secondary schools, federal support for public schools, and correction of the deficiencies in school administration.

The National Education Association and the American Association of School Administrators appointed early in the period of the depression an emergency commission which made an effort to stem the tide of financial retrenchment that threatened the public schools of the country. Later, in 1935, a permanent commission, known as the Educational Policies Commission, took the place of the emergency commission. The Educational Policies Commission has acted as the representative of the public schools in demanding recognition of the autonomy of school administration. It has also during the past two years been very active in promoting education for democracy.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching sponsored in 1931 and 1935 two international conferences which dealt with the problems of examination. These conferences, held in England, were attended by representatives of the United States and of the leading European nations.

The Progressive Education Association organized a committee early in the 1940's to bring about a readjustment of entrance requirements of colleges. This committee proposed to some two hundred institutions of higher education that they try the experiment of admitting graduates of a number of selected secondary schools without regard to the specific subjects which these graduates pursued. The
purpose was to leave the secondary schools free to reorganize their curriculums in any way that they believed would contribute most fully to the cultivation of the intellectual powers of the pupils. The experiment has been in progress long enough to permit the observation of a number of students who have completed their college studies. The reports made by those in charge of the experiment are highly favorable to the plan of admission adopted.

The National Resources Planning Board published three reports which describe the rapid development of research activities in this country. The assumption is often made by those who are connected with academic institutions that their institutions are the major centers, if not the exclusive centers, of scholarly inquiry. The reports published by the National Resources Planning Board show that the federal government and the industrial and commercial corporations of the country now depend for the determination of their policies on a volume of research which in quantity far exceeds the research carried on in academic institutions. Graduates trained in American universities are now employed in such large numbers in governmental departments, in industrial laboratories, and in bureaus of research in commercial concerns that it can be said that the methods and results of scientific research are respected and employed in all branches of American life.

The defense program created such a demand for scientifically trained research workers that on the recommendation of the Science Committee of the National Resources Planning Board an agency was organized which in co-operation with the Civil Service Commission has prepared a roster of all the individuals in the United States who are trained research workers. In the preparation of this roster the learned societies and the four national councils of scholars have co-operated. There are now some two hundred and fifty thousand names on the roster showing the extent of preparation in this nation for scientific research.

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