

*Education and the Cult of Efficiency**
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**Chapter 10:
An American Tragedy in Education**

The study of various aspects of the actions administrators took between 1910 and 1929 in applying business and industrial values and practices to education, together with an attempt to explain *why* they took these actions has formed the substance of this volume. It seems in retrospect that, regardless of the motivation, the consequences for American education and American society were tragic. And when all of the strands in the story are woven together, it is clear that the essence of the tragedy was in adopting values and practices indiscriminately and applying them with little or no consideration of educational values or purposes. It was not that some of the ideas from the business world might not have been used to advantage in educational administration, but that the wholesale adoption of the basic values, as well as the techniques of the business-industrial world, was a serious mistake in an institution whose primary purpose was the education of children. Perhaps the tragedy was not inherent in the borrowing from business and industry but only in the application. It is possible that if educators had sought “the finest product at the lowest cost” — a dictum which is sometimes claimed to be a basic premise in American manufacturing — the results would not have been unfortunate. But the record shows that the emphasis was not at all on “producing the finest product” but on the “lowest cost.” In all of the efforts which were made to demonstrate efficiency, it was not evidence of the excellence of the “product” which was presented, but data on per-pupil costs. This was so partly because of the difficulty of judging excellence but mostly because when school boards (and the American people generally) demanded efficiency they meant “lower costs.” This fact more than any other was responsible for the course of events in educational administration between 1910 and 1929.

But to understand the full impact of the business influence this concern for economy has to be placed in its historical context. It is clear in retrospect that part of the tragedy was in what proved to be the unfortunate timing and sequence of events. First, by 1910 a decade of concern with reform, stimulated by the muckraking journalists, had produced a public suspicious and ready to be critical of the management of all public institutions. Second, just at this time Taylor’s system was brought dramatically before the nation, not with a mundane label such as “shop management” but with the appealing title of “scientific management.” Very quickly the alleged mismanagement of the railroads was transferred to the management of other institutions, especially public institutions. By 1912 the full force of public criticism had hit the schools. Third, by 1912 the prestige of business and of businessmen was again in the ascendancy and Americans were urging that business methods be introduced into the operation of government and were electing businessmen to serve on their school boards. Fourth, and of basic importance, was the fact that the “profession” of school administration was in 1910 in its formative stage, just being developed. If America had had a tradition of graduate training in administration — genuinely educational, intellectual, and scholarly, if not scientific — such a tradition might have served as a brake or restraining force. As it was, all was in flux.

Space for Notes



These facts must be coupled with an understanding of the great force of public opinion (especially opinion marshaled by the profit-motivated popular press) on the one hand, and, on the other, the almost pathetic vulnerability of public school administrators. The situation was one of a "profession" of school administration, vulnerable to the pressures of the community and with no solid tradition behind it to counteract these strong pressures, being criticized for inefficiency at the very time when the community's most influential group, the businessmen, were adopting a new panacea for this very problem, the panacea of scientific management. No wonder that schoolmen sought to emulate the efficiency of business and use whatever methods business had used to attain it; and no wonder that "scientific management" appeared in the forefront of these methods. Its appearance, however, was an unhappy one for our educational system. For instead of approaching the study of administration through the social sciences, school administrators applied the "science" of business-industrial management as they understood it.

In the years after 1912 criticism still remained strong, and the actions by educational administrators in utilizing business and industrial practices helped them to maintain themselves and even to gain status in a business society. It is true that the adoption of the business-managerial posture backfired at times. In 1920, for example, the editor of the *American School Board Journal* complained that school boards "frequently manifest a brutal disregard for the rights and prerogatives of the professional men with whom they deal," and he added that they "resort to the hiring and firing methods of the factory and the store without proper regard for the equities involved." As a case in point he cited a superintendent from Indiana who had been fired for being inefficient.¹ This practice, of course, was exactly what administrators had urged so far as teachers were concerned. On the whole, however, the adoption of business procedures strengthened the position of the superintendent and year by year the movement gathered momentum and was applied to more facets of the educational endeavor, until by 1925 the business-managerial conception of administration was firmly established and efficiency seemed to have been accepted as an end in itself.

¹*American School Board Journal*, LX (May, 1920), 56.

There is the question of whether under the circumstances there was any alternative to the development of this business-managerial conception of administration. I think not. Superintendents in local districts were too vulnerable and the strength of the business ideology — as manifested on school boards, in the press, and in the public generally — was too strong. The men who had an alternative were the leaders in the universities, Strayer, Cubberley, Bobbitt, and others. They could not have resisted completely the business influence, and the demands for efficiency and economy and for the emphasis on the immediately useful and practical, but they could have tempered the influence and achieved more balance in graduate programs — they could have been a restraining force. Unfortunately they moved with the tide, with the results that have been recorded. And once the movement had gained momentum it was too late. The younger men coming into administration, say after 1918, accepted the prevailing conceptions and training as natural (as most students do, after all) and they in turn carried the business orientation to all corners of the nation and to their students, who did the same.

The tragedy itself was fourfold: that educational questions were subordinated to business considerations; that administrators were produced who were not, in any true sense, educators; that a scientific label was put on some very unscientific and dubious methods and practices; and that an anti-

intellectual climate, already prevalent, was strengthened. As the business-industrial values and procedures spread into the thinking and acting of educators, countless educational decisions were made on economic or on non-educational grounds. The actions of Spaulding in eliminating Greek come to mind instantly, as do the actions connected with the platoon school and with increasing class size and teacher load.

The whole development produced men who did not understand education or scholarship. Thus they could and did approach education in a businesslike, mechanical, organizational way. They saw nothing wrong with imposing impossible loads on high school teachers, because they were not students or scholars and did not understand the need for time for study and preparation. Their training had been superficial and they saw no need for depth or scholarship. These were men who in designing a college provided elaborate offices for the president and the dean and even elaborate student centers but who crammed six or eight professors in a single office and provided a library which would have been inadequate for a secondary school. This done, they worked to have the college entitled a university and planned to offer a variety of programs for the Ph.D. They saw schools not as centers of learning but as enterprises which were functioning efficiently if the students went through without failing and received their diplomas on schedule and if the operation were handled economically.

Partly for the purpose of defense and partly for the purpose of gaining status the leaders in administration claimed the label "scientific" for their accounting procedures. They were not equipped through their training to ask or answer the really basic questions in education. But they were energetic, capable men and they rushed into the vacuum that existed and built an empire of professional courses on a foundation of sand. They had to have the mantle of science to claim professional status and they worked to obtain it in the only way they knew. The early leaders taught their students how to do "research" in education and these men in turn carried out "research" studies and taught their students as they had been taught. All that was overlooked was the basic training which they needed. Dewey, writing in 1929, saw the problem clearly. He warned educators that it was "very easy for science to be regarded as a guarantee that goes with the sale of goods rather than as a light to the eyes and a lamp to the feet. It is prized for its prestige value rather than as an organ of personal illumination and liberation."² He pointed out that there was no such thing as an independent "science of education" but that material drawn from other sciences furnished the content of an educational science when it was focused upon the problems in education.³ Recognition of this fact, he said, *would compel educators to attempt a mastery of what these sciences had to offer.*⁴ Failure to understand this fact, he said, led to a "segregation of research which tends to render it futile" and accounted for the tendency of educators "to go at educational affairs without a sufficient grounding in the non-educational disciplines that must be drawn upon, and hence to exaggerate minor points in an absurdly one-sided way. . . ."⁵ Where training in these disciplines did exist as in the cases of Thorndike, Bagley, and Judd in psychology, and Counts in sociology, the most effective educational research was done. Even these men, however, able as they were, were handicapped by the relatively primitive state of development of the disciplines in which they worked.

²John Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education* (New York, 1929), p. 15.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 42. (Italics mine.)

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 50.

There were, of course, strong manifestations in this whole development

of the anti-intellectual forces which existed in America. And it is true, as Newlon pointed out, that administrators operated “in a climate of opinion that at once distrusts experts outside the purely business and scientific realms and demands of the schools that they be practical and efficient.”⁶ The tragedy was that instead of counteracting these tendencies many of the leaders in educational administration actually contributed to them. Despite all that was spoken and written about science and the scientific method these men were not really interested in inquiry. They made frequent references to “mere book learning,” and studies showed that their reading habits were narrow and limited.⁷ They were impatient with “philosophical” discussions, and they regarded the scholar as a harmless but inept fellow. Their models were not the thinkers such as the Deweys, the Beards, or the Veblens but the men of action — the Fords and the Carnegies.

The Great Diffusion

⁶Jesse H. Newlon, *Educational Administration as Social Policy* (New York, 1934), p. 127.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 134.

It would be pleasant to report that by some magical arrangement the developments in educational administration which have been described were suddenly brought to a halt. Unfortunately the influence of powerful social movements can never be stopped so quickly and permanently even by violent revolution. It is true that after 1930 the forceful opposition of educators such as Jesse Newlon and George S. Counts, plus the partial disenchantment with business leadership which accompanied the great depression, helped to reduce the extreme overemphasis upon business and industrial management in educational administration, at least at the major institutions. Thus the large basic courses in administration at Teachers College began to emphasize (of course under Newlon’s direct influence) educational administration as social policy and Harvard dropped from its catalogue the description of the superintendent as a manager of the school plant. But the damage had been done. Between 1915 and 1929 thousands of men had received professional training at the master’s degree level and had gone into important educational positions all over the country. More important, hundreds had received their doctor’s degrees in educational administration and had gone into even more important positions as superintendents of large cities, as officials in state departments of education, and most important of all as professors of education in teachers colleges and universities where they taught teachers and other student administrators and directed research studies even for the doctor’s degree.

In order to document this great diffusion, career studies were made of forty-three individuals who received their doctor’s degrees in educational administration between 1910 and 1933. The individuals were taken from the list compiled by Newlon and selected on the basis of those whose thesis titles indicated that the studies were most directly concerned with the less important financial or mechanical problems (e.g., those on school supplies, plumbing, janitorial service, accounting, etc.). By far the greater majority of the forty-three became associated with some institution of higher learning at one time or another. Thirty-nine of these men held positions as professors of education in colleges or universities, thirty-three on a full-time basis and the others part time or in summer school. In administrative posts, five became chairmen of a department of education, nine became deans of schools or colleges of education, two were college or university vice-presidents, while one was an acting president and three were presidents. Within individual school districts, eighteen of these men held administrative positions (including some whose job

it was to conduct a survey or surveys of the type already mentioned in this book) and seven became superintendents. Twelve held at least one administrative post on the state level. Six of the forty-three men held positions in the U.S. Office of Education and four were on national, government-sponsored committees studying educational problems. Three held positions in the National Education Association. Eleven held educational research posts (outside of governmental positions) and one worked in an educational capacity for the Russell Sage Foundation. There were seven who held some type of editorial post with an educational journal or other professional publication, some of these holding more than one such position. Four engaged in "private practice" as educational consultants.

In addition to the direct influence these men had upon their students and upon the school systems in which they worked some of them wrote books through which the business-managerial conception of administration was conveyed to the new generation of administrators. One of the most prominent of these men was Fred Engelhardt, brother of Nikolaus Engelhardt, who had taught administration at Teachers College, Columbia since 1917 and who had teamed with George Strayer on many surveys. Fred Engelhardt had finished his doctoral work in administration at Teachers College in 1925 and had written his thesis (under Strayer's direction) on forecasting school population, in the course of which he adapted the Bell Telephone Company's technique for predicting population trends to education. Shortly after he received his doctorate, he became professor of educational administration at the huge state University of Minnesota. In 1931 his book *Public School Organization and Administration* was published — a book in which the keynote was sounded in these opening lines of the preface: "The characteristic which distinguishes a successful enterprise from others is management. Businessmen hold that the success of a corporation is dependent nine parts on management and one part on all other factors, including luck, a maxim equally applicable to a public-school system."⁸ As with Cubberley's text and the others examined by Newlon the entire volume of some 600 pages was devoted to the legal, financial, organizational, and mechanical aspects of education. In the Cubberley pattern the school "executive" was treated in the grand manner while "the Teaching Corps and Other Employees" were dealt with under "Personnel Management." Significantly, in the section on the "Training and Personality of the Superintendent," no mention was made that knowledge (e.g., of history, philosophy, psychology) would be needed. But the student of administration was told that he "must meet professional, industrial, and financial men and women, and he must cultivate and retain their confidence and respect."⁹ Occasionally, after Newlon's indictment, short introductory chapters were included in these books on the relation of public schools to a democracy but the remainder of the texts were much the same as Cubberley's or Engelhardt's.

Another means through which the business-managerial conception was spread throughout the country was through certification of school administrators by the states. As early as 1921 administrators were complaining about school boards who hired men who "never took graduate work in administration" and whose "work did not have the endorsement of educational experts."¹⁰ Through the twenties the complaints continued along with strong recommendations that certificates with specific requirements for professional work in administration be established and made mandatory. In 1925 a professor of education from the University of California urged the special certificate as a means of "professionalizing educational leadership." He pointed out that 37 per cent of city school superintendents had had no courses in educational administration but reported that progress was being made. For example, California and some other states, he said, had recently enacted regulations governing the granting of certificates in administration. These

requirements — which eventually became the national pattern — were that the applicant have a teacher's certificate, that he have some teaching experience (sometimes administrative experience was also required) and that he have "completed not less than fifteen semester hours of collegiate work in school administration subjects in addition to the minimum requirements in education for the highest grade of general teacher's certificate held."¹¹ By 1932, twenty-two states had definite certificates for administrators while ten others had "special requirements not developed to the point of a special certificate."¹²

⁸ Fred Engelhardt, *Public School Organization and Administration* (Boston, 1931), p. vii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁰ H. O. Dietrick, "Human Waste in Education," *American School Board Journal*, LXII (February, 1921), 46.

¹¹ Frank W. Hart, "Special Certification as a Means of Professionalizing Educational Leadership," *Teachers College Record*, XXVIII (October, 1925), 127-28.

¹² "Educational Leadership," *Eleventh Yearbook* of the Department of Superintendence of the N.E.A. (Washington, D.C., 1933), pp. 281-82.

Undoubtedly the motivation behind the certification movement was mixed. Some educators supported it because they believed that the administration of schools would be improved thereby, while others were establishing and protecting a vested interest. But whatever the motive, certification made professional courses in administration a legal requirement and insured a captive audience for administration courses in the colleges and universities. The unfortunate aspect of this development was not the *idea* of certifying or controlling the men who would administer the public schools but the *nature* of the work they were forced to take. And the end result was that the certification of administrators operated to diffuse the business-managerial conception of administration throughout the nation.

Evidence that the great diffusion did take place and that the developments in educational administration which occurred in the age of efficiency are still potent in American education in the 1960's is abundant. In the 1960 Yearbook of the American Association of School Administrators an account is given of the search of a school board in a community of 25,000 (fictitiously labeled Riverdale) for a new superintendent. The board interviewed eighteen candidates and selected one. After the decision had been made the board members were asked to evaluate the "graduates of our preparation programs" and they obliged with these comments:

We are told that because of our salary and the kind of community we have, our job attracted a group of candidates considerably above the average in preparation and experience. If this is true, the ranks of well-prepared school administrators are very thin, indeed.

We were shocked to see how poorly educated in the humanities and in the arts were some men who now hold significant administrative positions. Most administrators prefer to talk more about buildings and budgets than about curriculum and the learning process.

We were painfully aware how many school administrators fail to be articulate either in speaking or in writing. There is a clear need for more preparation in the area of communications.

Some board members reported "a lack of firmness of conviction and determination to stick by one's ideas and defend them against criticism" on the part of candidates. Other board members said that they felt that some of the candidates "were trying to sense the right thing to say during the interview in order to get the job, regardless of how it might fit in with their own philosophy of education."¹³

The commission which prepared the yearbook wrote a brief description of the

graduate preparation of the eighteen candidates. Twelve of the eighteen had doctor's degrees and all had a "heavy concentration" in courses labeled "school administration." Lists of the courses taken in undergraduate and graduate school were available for some of the men and two of them were included in the year-book. A study of the graduate programs of these men will indicate that the patterns which Jesse Newlon found in the early thirties were still prevalent and that very little work was taken in the social sciences, in history, or in philosophy.

¹³ *Professional Administration for America's Schools*, p. 15.

There are other kinds of evidence of the persistence of the patterns handed down from the efficiency era. In some of the present-day text-books in administration much more attention is still being given to finance, business administration, school plant, and organizational problems than to the instructional program. One such volume published in 1957 begins with chapters on "Getting the Job," "Starting the Job," and "Running the Office." One of the four major sections of the book is entitled "The Administrator Runs an Industry" and within this section there are chapters devoted to such matters as "Where Is the Money," "Buying Supplies and Equipment and Providing Insurance," "Providing Services," and "Putting Up Buildings — Operating and Maintaining." Fortunately the last major section of the book has the title "The Administrator Is an Educator."¹⁴

The persistence of the patterns is observable also in the journals in school administration, which, except for the modernity of the plumbing and school equipment advertisements, are very similar to those of 1920. For example one of the feature articles in the October, 1960, issue of *School Management* is "How To Design a School Office." The brief description under the title informs the reader, "the heart of a school is its office. Too often it is poorly planned and jammed into second-class space. Here are some guides to keep in mind when designing your own school 'command post.'" Daniel E. Griffiths, professor of educational administration at New York University, a man who has been leading the fight to improve the quality of graduate work in his field of competence, after reviewing the major journals in administration says that none of these journals can compare with the standard journals in other fields such as the *American Sociological Review* or even the *Harvard Business Review*, just to mention two. There are no recognized research journals for our profession comparable to those available for historians, political scientists, psychologists, and the like. This is a major and disastrous weakness in our field, and although we have been talking about this for at least the past ten years, we are no closer to a solution to the problem than we were when we started talking.¹⁵

¹⁴ Albert L. Ayars, *Administering the People's Schools* (New York, 1957).

¹⁵ *Research in Educational Administration* (New York, 1959), p. 32.

Further evidence of the persistence of the business-managerial conception of educational administration in our time was provided by one of America's largest publishing houses. In the spring of 1958 this firm, in advertising one of its new books on the school principal, used the following job description in an effort to appeal to schoolmen:

This REVIEW salutes one of the unsung heroes of modern times — a man who is a true "Captain of Industry" in terms of the importance of his product, the size of his plant, the number of employees, the number of consumers, and the social, economic, legal and political aspects of his operations — the Principal in the American Public School. Primarily the executive in charge of improving the quality of the product, he is

obviously *a man of parts*; that is either his accolade — or his undoing. Too often he may wonder, “*which part?*”

Maybe he needs a new title; the one he has makes him wear “too many hats.”

The dictionary says “principal” is really an adjective — teacher is understood; and so emphasis on educational leadership is lost. . . .

Still, only “principal — a *chief person; one who gives orders*” — can describe one who simultaneously holds office as Employment Manager, Purchasing Agent, Accountant, Payroll Supervisor, Office Manager, Personnel Counselor, Building Counselor, Building Superintendent, Chief Clerk (or Clerk), Head of Library, Consultant on Construction Design, Methods Expert, Research Analyst, Interpreter of Educational Law, Specialist in Public Relations — and Head of the Complaint Department.

So the emphasis on the business and mechanical aspects of education and the neglect of the instructional side, so strong in the twenties, is still with us in the sixties. Considering the professional training that administrators have been receiving in the last four decades, is it so surprising that the leading school administrators in Miami, Florida, in 1960 had not even heard of, much less read, George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*? This fact came to light when a parent complained because such “filthy books” were required reading in a senior English class. After reading the books, the administrators decided to bar them from the Miami high school curriculum. The *Commonweal*, in reporting the incident, felt that the “final turn of the screw” occurred when the U.S. Commissioner of Education, questioned about the affair, was reported to have answered “I’ve never heard of those books, and I don’t think it would be prudent of me to discuss them.”¹⁶

Is it so surprising that, despite the thousands of men with graduate training in educational administration, Professor Griffiths reported in 1959 that few men were trained in research and that very little quality work had been done?¹⁷ Could not one have predicted what the “River-dale” school board would find? Is it so surprising that Professor Neal Gross in his study of school administrators in Massachusetts would find that both board members and superintendents themselves reported these educators were doing their best work in finance, personnel, and school plant management and their poorest work in instructional direction?¹⁸ Should any eyebrows be lifted when a research team after a careful study of the basis upon which elementary principals judged teachers found that the personality of the teacher and pupil activity were emphasized and that the teachers’ goals were ignored?¹⁹ Should we be surprised to learn that in many school systems in 1960 teachers spend much time on clerical work and bookkeeping? (And it is understandable that once the teachers of New York City gained the power to bargain collectively with their employers and had a chance to air their grievances they would make public their strong resentment against having been forced to punch time-clocks, to monitor lunchrooms, and to spend their time on paperwork for the benefit of administrators.) Is it surprising that in 1959 when students just entering the teaching profession were asked what knowledge they thought they would need to be a teacher, a doctor, a typist, or a machinist that their responses for the job of teacher, typist, and machinist were quite similar?²⁰

America Reaps the Whirlwind

¹⁶ *Commonweal*, LXXII, No. 4 (April 4, 1960), 80-81.

¹⁷ *Research in Educational Administration*, pp. 6-31.

¹⁸ *Who Runs Our Schools* (New York, 1958), pp. 103-105.

¹⁹ *The Behavior of the Elementary Principal*, A Report of the Development of Criteria of Success Staff (New York, 1961).

²⁰ *New York Times*, April 15, 1962, p. E9 (Section IV); Jeanette A. Vanderpol, “And What’s Your Concept of Your Profession?” *Journal of Teachers Education*, X, No. 1 (March, 1959), 49-50.

The persistence of the unfortunate patterns in educational administration in the 1960's, with all of the harmful educational consequences that they have entailed, is partly a result of the diffusion of ideas and practices from the leaders in administration in the age of efficiency through their students in the schools and colleges of education down to the present time. But their strength in the 1960's is also due to the fact that the same societal factors which were responsible for their adoption in 1912 — 29 are still operating in the 1960's. The legacy from the age of efficiency has not been limited to school administrators and education.

As a result of their graduate training administrators have developed a kind of protective coloration that has enabled them to keep their jobs, and evidence that this is so is provided in the 1960 Yearbook of the American Association of School Administrators.²¹ But the basic facts of life so far as educational administrators in the public schools are concerned are much the same in 1960 as they were in 1912. They are still vulnerable to public opinion and to all kinds of pressures, and their perennial problem is how to get enough money to operate the schools from a nation that is reluctant to spend money in the public sectors of the economy. Since 1957, for example, superintendents have been under great pressure to emphasize science, mathematics, and foreign language and they have responded quickly to that demand. They are also being urged, often with the hope of economizing, to introduce new panaceas such as teaching machines and educational television. Unfortunately their training does not enable them to understand the *educational aspects*, advantages and limitations, of these devices; so if they are adopted it is apt to be for public relations purposes. In American education it is important to be able to say that one's school system is abreast of the latest developments.

In addition to these new demands superintendents are still being subjected to various kinds of pressures which have come to be an accepted part of the job. Gross tells the pathetic story of one superintendent who reported that in one day he was: first, informed that a group of prominent citizens had been expressing concern over the rise in the tax rate during his tenure of office; second, urged by the chairman of the school board to award the school bus contract to a friend of his despite the fact that the company doing the job had better equipment, better drivers and provided the service at a lower rate; third, asked by another board member to appoint his niece as a teacher; and fourth, urged by prominent members of the Boosters Club to fire the football coach who admittedly was a competent man but whose team had not been winning games. In all these instances the threat against his job was clear.²²

²¹ *Professional Administration for America's Schools*, p. 23-24.

²² *Who Runs Our Schools*, p. 45-47.

Administrators are also under pressure as they were in the efficiency era to apply business and industrial values and practices to education. One of the most prominent manifestations of this pressure was an article which appeared in *Fortune* in October, 1958, entitled "The Low Productivity of the Education Industry." The author conceded that it was more difficult "to put a firm figure on the value of the output" in education than it was in industry but he said there was "still something to be learned from the cold figures on quality." "For the schools," he said, "no less than the automobile industry, have an inescapable production problem." The schools were no different from General Motors for their job was to "optimize the number of students and to minimize the input of man-hours and capital." The main point of the article was to show that whereas the productivity per worker had increased in the steel industry and others, the

productivity of the education industry had declined. Like Spaulding, the author could reach no conclusion as to the difference in the quality of education (in this instance between 1929 and 1958) but the per-pupil costs were easily available so they were used as the “most relevant measure of productivity.” For this unfortunate state of affairs the author had a happy solution — introduce new techniques such as television, audio-visual aids, teaching machines, teacher aids, and more efficient utilization of buildings and classrooms — this latter incidentally was entitled “scientific programming,” a label which somehow did not occur to school administrators in the age of efficiency. The author’s crowning achievement, however, was his recommendation that schools could improve their efficiency by hiring management consultants — the modern term for efficiency experts. “*The schools,*” said the author seriously, “*have just begun to discover scientific management.*” (Italics mine.)

Of more importance in forcing the continuation of the emphasis on the financial accounting aspects of education is the chronic problem of inadequate support. In most school systems in the United States there is an annual financial crisis. Each year unless a major publicity campaign is carried out (and this sometimes entails having teachers ringing doorbells to solicit votes) there is a possibility that, at best, school programs will be curtailed and, at worst, that the schools will be closed or placed on a double shift basis. In either case there is apt to be an exodus of the good teachers from the system. The evidence that finance is the major problem is abundant. It comes out clearly in the educational journals and it is borne out by research. For example Gross in his study found that more than two-thirds of the superintendents he interviewed considered lack of money as the major obstacle in their efforts to provide a good education for the children. Consider some of these comments by superintendents:

The biggest obstacle I face in carrying out my job is the unwillingness of [name of his community] to provide adequate financial support for a decent school program. With our salary schedule I cannot attract capable teachers and without a good staff you can’t develop a good educational program.

In order of importance, my major obstacles would go like this: Number 1 is just plain community apathy. The great majority of the people just don’t care what goes on in the schools, and I’m including most parents too. They’re awfully concerned about keeping the town debt-free. In fact that’s what they take great pride in.

The major obstacle I face is money. That’s all there is to it. We don’t have the property base in our town to provide the revenue for a decent educational program.

My big problem here is the devotion of the town fathers to a debt-free philosophy.

The mayor is one of our major blocks. He believes the schools are getting too much [money]. His main concern is with keeping the tax rate in line. . . .

The person who does most to block the educational program is [name]. He’s a member of the City Council and he has blocked our building program in the Council. He’s the watch dog of the tax-conscious crowd and always pushes to have the budget slashed. . . .²³

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-20.

These statements could have been made by public school officials at any time since the establishment of our public school system. Certainly they could have been made in any year between 1911 and 1962. And while the overt pressure to economize is not as strong today as it was in the age of efficiency, the resistance to increasing expenditures in proportion to the national need creates a situation that is more critical in terms of our survival as a free society. The fact is that a concern for a balanced budget and a resistance to taxation for public services has been one of our basic values.

Certainly these developments are an understandable product of the

Protestant ethic. Americans who grew up in the years after the Civil War were nurtured on the laissez faire economic philosophy, and they were taught by William Holmes McGuffey and the success story writers to avoid debt like the plague. Only in times of great national emergency such as the period of the great depression have Americans been willing to spend large sums of money for their social welfare and then only with reluctance and to the accompaniment of predictions of doom because the budget was unbalanced.

In recent years Americans would appear to have lost their reluctance to go into debt. Indeed the vast majority use credit regularly while a large percentage are heavily in debt and lose no sleep as a result. But we are willing to spend money and go into debt, if necessary, without excessive anxiety only for consumer goods, not for public services. This attitude, together with the increase in material wealth since 1945, has produced what historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., calls our "greatest present anomaly" which is that "the richest country in the history of the world, cannot build an educational system worthy of its children, cannot build as many I.C.B.M.'s as the much less affluent Soviet Union, cannot have a proper resources policy, etc., etc., indeed, cannot even run a decent postal system. . . . While we overstuff ourselves as individuals, we let the national plant run down. This condition of private opulence and public squalor has always led to the fall of empires."²⁴

²⁴*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, August 9, 1959.

The great initial thrust for efficiency and economy against a young weak profession in the years after 1911 started the unfortunate developments in educational administration and fifty years of inadequate support of our public schools has continued to extend their influence. It can be said that the American people have reaped a proper harvest for the seeds they have sown. It is true that many administrators, including most of the leaders, embraced the business posture and enjoyed the prestige of being labeled an executive. Perhaps, too, more of them should have put up more of a battle to achieve the quality of education the nation needed. To assess the difficulty of doing this, however, it is necessary to remember that American educators (naively perhaps but certainly humanely) have undertaken the most ambitious educational task in history — to educate all the children in a mass industrial society to the best of their ability. Furthermore they had to attempt to do this in a nation which wanted as much education as it could get for its children but was unwilling or did not understand the need to pay for it. In retrospect, America might have been better off in the long run if American educators had taken a realistic look at what was expected of them and the means that were being provided and had closed the schools. Perhaps in the ensuing crisis and debate a firm decision would have been reached either to make the necessary effort and sacrifice or to abandon our grandiose notions about education. As it was, we wanted to have our cake and eat it too and some of the results have been recorded in this volume.

Did the American people get what they deserved for forcing their educators to become bookkeepers and public relations men instead of educators? I think they got more from their educators than they deserved. Inadequate as most of our public schools have been as measured against an absolute standard of excellence, they could have been much worse if a great many teachers and administrators had not been dedicated to their country and its children. Go back to chapter iii and read again the irresponsible attacks made on the schools by the popular journals and follow these criticisms and demands down to the present time and you will learn what happened not only to the classics but to the emphasis upon intellectual development in our

schools. Educators and especially the leaders in administration have to accept part of the responsibility, of course. Many joined the loudest critics, jumped on the various bandwagons and outdid themselves in bowing to the dominant pressures. Others capitulated too easily. But many worked patiently and silently to provide the best education possible. At the mercy of every arrogant editor, every self-seeking politician, and every self-righteous protector of the public money, they and their families had to believe strongly in what they were doing or they would have left the field. These men deserve our sympathy and our gratitude. The tragedy in education was part of a greater tragedy in American society.

A Look Ahead

Americans who are concerned about their schools and who understand that the future of our free society depends upon the quality of education our children receive must realize that as a result of the developments in educational administration since 1911 we are, in the 1960's, caught in a vicious circle. The continuous pressure for economy has produced a situation in which many men with inappropriate and inadequate training are leaders in our public schools. Aside from the effect this has had on the quality of work within the schools in the last forty years their training has left them ill-equipped to understand what needs to be done in education and therefore unable to communicate this to the public. On the other side the American people, partly because of the inferior education they have received which makes it difficult for them to understand educational problems, and partly because of their continuing commitment to economy in public endeavors, refuse to allocate enough of their wealth to the education of their children and continue to force their superintendents to spend a disproportionate share of time on accounting and fund-raising. That this is so comes out clearly in Professor Gross's study. It is also borne out by the fact that superintendents from all over the country, when asked in 1960 which fields of study were of most importance, placed school finance at the top of the list and public relations, human relations and school business management within the first five.²⁵

²⁵ *Professional Administration for American Schools*, p. 47.

To break this vicious circle a major effort will have to be made by both educators and laymen. On the professional side it is important that we as educators set our own house in order. There are too many institutions which even at the doctor's level do not require students to have a knowledge of areas such as history and philosophy, or of the social sciences and especially psychology, social psychology, and sociology. There are too many institutions which do not require serious, disciplined study and high standards of scholarship for their highest degrees. To develop the kind of human beings who will be equipped to maintain and improve our free society will require hard intellectual work, especially in the secondary schools. But to understand that this is necessary, as well as to lead the American people to understand that it is necessary, will require that our teachers and our administrators have been properly educated. We must require that our school administrators have an excellent education at the graduate level and this cannot be done on a mass production basis. Residential study in which students are required to read and study seriously in the social sciences and in the humanities as well as in their professional work is essential. It will be expensive and will impose a hardship on some individuals, although scholarships and assistantships can provide some help. But we must realize that there is no easy path to genuine professional competence, as the medical profession will confirm. The future of

our free society requires that our schools be centers of learning and not factories or playgrounds. To make them so will require educators who are students and scholars, not accountants or public relations men.

The quality of graduate work in educational administration must be improved.²⁶ But this step will be largely a waste of effort if Americans continue to force their superintendents into the same old role. There are some universities that have high standards of admission and that offer a high quality of interdisciplinary work in educational administration and if school board members are interested and will take the time and effort they can get intelligent, educated men. These men must then be given a reasonable degree of job security and provided with adequate funds to enable them to develop a fine educational program. By adequate funds I do not mean necessarily money for elaborate new buildings complete with magnificent gymnasium, swimming pool and home economics equipment. I mean money to attract and keep excellent teachers and to provide them with books and laboratory equipment and, most important of all, reasonable teaching loads. Job satisfaction is just as important as salary in attracting excellent teachers and there is little job satisfaction and much frustration in trying to teach 175 students a day.

²⁶ I have been dealing here only with administration. It is of course equally important to improve quality across the board in teacher education. To do this the teaching profession must control entry into the profession and see to it that only able and well-qualified persons are allowed to teach. In too many instances standards for getting into and out of the institutions which prepare teachers (both public and private, graduate and undergraduate) are so low that it is possible for almost anyone to qualify to teach our children.

The question of providing adequate financial support will, of course, not be a simple matter. There is no doubt that more money is needed. Testimony in this regard is not limited to educators but has been given forcefully by prominent Americans such as Walter Lippmann, Nelson Rockefeller, John Kennedy, and Richard Nixon. Nor is there any doubt of our ability to provide adequate support. Any nation that spends almost three times as much on the purchase and operation of automobiles as it does on education has a problem in values, not in economic capability. The problem is partly a matter of our willingness to pay and partly a matter of using new sources of revenue. It is clear that in many communities real estate taxes are too high already and cannot carry more of the load.

To solve these problems in education we must get bold and vigorous leadership from the education profession and from prominent persons in public life, including the President of the United States. We must realize the seriousness of the situation and approach the question as we would any other major national problem. After a careful study (beyond the number of classrooms needed, etc.), we might decide that it was essential for America's future to get our most intelligent and socially responsible young *men* into the teaching profession and then work out ways and means for achieving this goal. In any case we must get strong financial support from the federal government because many local districts and even many states do not have the necessary resources. If there is danger of federal control with federal support, there is greater danger in having inadequate schools. Besides, the record shows that it is possible to place control in the hands of qualified persons who can exercise it intelligently at the policy level so that it in no way interferes with local initiative. This procedure has been followed in the Cooperative Research Programs of the U.S. Office of Education and in the National Science Foundation. There is no reason why it cannot be applied to other federal aid programs. And in the debates over this issue we have too often overlooked the fact that federal aid might provide the superintendent with a little more independence from the local taxpayers associations.

But even vigorous leadership from the federal and state governments and from the local communities will not insure adequate support on a permanent basis unless educators can show that the additional funds are necessary and that the money is spent wisely. This problem is of course directly related to the nature and quality of the education of our administrators and teachers. Our leaders in education will have to have the kind of education in the humanities and the social and natural sciences to enable them to understand the great problems of our age, so that they can make intelligent judgments about the kind and quality of education which our children will need. Then they will have to have not only the professional competence necessary to implement this education but also the knowledge and skill to determine whether the desired outcomes are being achieved. This latter problem, that of evaluating our instructional efforts, has been the most neglected aspect of education from the elementary school through the university. Even in instances where relatively large sums have been spent on "experimental" programs, not enough time and effort have been devoted to determining the effectiveness of these programs. Until this is done we will not be able to make a strong case for the federal support we think we need.

Most English teachers believe that they could do a much better job of teaching writing to four classes of fifteen students than they can to five classes of thirty students. Obviously they would have more time for individual instruction, but how *much better* is the *quality* of the work done under the lighter load? The same is true for teachers in history, in science, and in mathematics; or suppose the question is how effectively, in terms of the kind of human beings we want to develop, can we use teaching machines or television? There are many aspects of our educational work upon which careful, systematic research is needed, but none is more important and none has been more neglected than that on measurement and evaluation. This is especially true when we go beyond the measurement of simple skills and attempt to evaluate our success in developing certain understandings or attitudes or behaviors.

All of this work cannot be done by the superintendent or his teaching staff. It can be done best by men who have been highly trained in psychology, social psychology, and sociology, and who have become interested in basic educational problems. Such men, and increasingly their students, are available at schools and colleges of education which have been reconstituting their faculties by appointing men from these disciplines to work closely with their regular faculties. Superintendents need to have enough knowledge of the problems of research design and operation to know when these specialists need to be called upon to work with them and their teachers in obtaining data which is reliable.

It is hoped that this study will provide both laymen and educators with knowledge which may be helpful in directing the future of American education. Certainly it shows that there were other more powerful forces at work than "progressive education" in undermining the intellectual atmosphere of the American schools. Many Americans, including Admiral Rickover, have accused John Dewey of being responsible for the emphasis upon practical and immediately useful subjects when the record shows that Dewey, along with Bagley and a few others, stood almost alone in opposing the watering down of the curriculum. But beyond this it is hoped that the American people will see that the introduction into education of concepts and practices from fields such as business and industry can be a serious error. Efficiency and economy — important as they are — must be considered in the light of the quality of education that is being provided. Equally important is the inefficiency and false economy of forcing educators to devote their time and energy to cost

accounting. We must learn that saving money through imposing an impossible teaching load on teachers is, in terms of the future of our free society, a very costly practice.

American parents who are really interested in improving the quality of the public high schools might investigate the size of classes and the teaching load that is characteristic of the excellent private schools such as Exeter or St. Pauls or the Country Day schools. The function of these schools is more limited and the curriculum problems less difficult than in the comprehensive public high school, but the essentials of the teaching-learning process are the same in both types of institutions.

It is true some kinds of teaching and learning can be carried out in large lecture classes or through television but other vital aspects of the education of free men cannot. Until every child has part of his work in small classes or seminars with fine teachers who have a reasonable teaching load, we will not really have given the American high school, or democracy for that matter, a fair trial. To do this, America will need to break with its traditional practice, strengthened so much in the age of efficiency, of asking how our schools can be operated most economically and begin asking instead what steps need to be taken to provide an excellent education for our children. We must face the fact that there is no cheap, easy way to educate a human being and that a free society cannot endure without educated men.