Trends and Issues
in the 1993 Professional
Education Literature [trends2]

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The immense accumulation of professional education literature is becoming increasingly specialized. It is literally impossible to assess the thousands of articles contributed by writers in disparate disciplines who narrow their interests to certain aspects of preschool, K-12, college, graduate, postgraduate, or adult education. As in the past, the purpose of this chapter is to endeavor to identify major trends and shifts in the professional literature of the last calendar year. One major force, however, has been the relentless impact of the school reform movement upon K-12 schools, and less directly upon universities and professional organizations. Until the school reform movement is resolved, which may take another decade or more, it is certain that many trends in education will be related to the intentions of policy makers to improve education.

Many articles are beginning to reflect detectable trends and changes of direction in the nature of the school curriculum, teaching methods, and school organization that have resulted from an authentic, fundamental paradigm shift in the philosophy of education within schools. The influence of behaviorism, begun by Thorndike and reinforced later by Skinnerian behaviorism, has lost favor in education with the growing influence of cognitive psychology, especially constructivism. Constructivism, or post-Piagetian epistemology, may be the most significant recent trend in education, and it is clearly dominant in the 1993 literature. Other trends represent reciprocal influences of reform in K-12 schools on universities and professional organizations. Change in public schools—management, cooperative learning, performance assessment, and others—affect teacher training institutions, calling for higher education to change methods and strategies in order to address the needs created by restructured schools. In fact, as Alvin Toffler predicted in *Future Shock* in 1970, change has become constant, and is such a part of education that change itself is a topical category in education literature.

SCHOOL REFORM

Attention to education reform at the national level lessened significantly in 1993 due, mainly, to the preoccupations of the fledgling Democratic administration with its transition to power. Despite a lack of regular criticism of education from the administration in 1993, which had been routine in the previous administration, school reform pressures continued to mount because of policies initiated over the last 10 years. Demands for reform and fiscal limits caused policy makers to begin to scrutinize university programs in addition to K-12 schools, especially in states where funding of K-12 initiatives caused competition between state colleges and public schools for available tax dollars. And competition for money is also at the heart of attempts to create vouchers and other alternatives to public education.

A significant advocacy group is now attempting to secure public funds for private and religious schools using a "school choice" philosophy. The argument advanced is that public education is a gigantic monopoly run by the local school board. While the desire for school choice may be prompted by groups who want to remove their children to private schools at public expense, the arguments are based on the need for independence from the control of the local school board. Paradoxically, these same groups argued against other state-level reforms in 1993, such as outcomes-based education, on the grounds that local control of the board of education is weakened by rules dictated at the state level. If 1993 can be used as a benchmark, it seems certain that sweeping attempts at education reform, such as those in Kentucky, will encounter a growing opposition forged by groups who resist tax increases or who want public funds for private education. Opponents of reform will criticize teachers, teachers' unions, the curriculum, learner-centered models, and any other innovation that deviates markedly from a standardized curriculum or traditional instructional methodology. Privatization of schools has also surfaced in Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Dade County, Florida. In these districts the board of education has contracted with private management firms to operate individuals schools or, as in Minneapolis, the entire district. These efforts attempt to enhance efficiency and accountability in education.

OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION

Among the many facets of school reform, outcomes-based education (OBE) appeared in professional and news publications throughout the year, most notably in relation to developments in Pennsylvania. OBE, as a method of school reform, has attracted powerful critics and adversaries who depict it as the downfall of public education. Although most educators understand OBE to be a new iteration of a concept first introduced by Ralph Tyler in 1949 and revised at different times over the decades, critics are vehemently opposed to it, leaving many educators perplexed.

Some 34 states have either adopted or are considering OBE for school improvement. Essentially, an outcome is regarded as a statement about knowledge or skills that should be evidenced by students as indications of achievement. It is implied that less emphasis will be placed on the scope of content covered by teachers in class and more emphasis will be placed on what pupils can actually exhibit as knowledge or skill. There is scant research to support many of the sweeping changes occurring under the general heading of OBE, a circumstance that may lead to continued confusion and condemnation of a process that might otherwise benefit education, if effectively examined and improved.

Misunderstandings about OBE may be partly the result of a lack of clarity about what is meant by the term *outcome* and the use of similar but different terminology, such as *goal*, *objective*, or *standard*. Critics of OBE seem to be concerned that teachers can introduce individual outcomes for children that are superfluous or conflicting with religious beliefs or family values, and that local control of education will be lost to the state.

OBE will continue to be an area of major concern in both the professional literature and the state and national media. There are many articles about OBE, but each state has unique documents pertaining to implementation of OBE. A useful overview of OBE can be found in a conversation

between Ron Brandt and Bill Spady[1] who is the director of the International Center on Outcomes-Based Restructuring.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Pressed by school reform demands and reacting to state-level OBE adoptions, schools are returning to a child-centered model of instruction, which implies different assessment strategies than standardized tests. Child-centered movements have enjoyed popularity in Western education at different times over the last four centuries, and they were inspired by some of the most influential writers in education: Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey.

The "progressive movement" of the 1930s and "open schools" of the 1960s were efforts to return to child-centered programs, which were beaten back by standardized curricula, such as, for example, the so-called "back-to-basics" movement. Education seems poised again to attempt to develop a child-centered curriculum under the influences of outcomes-based education and constructivism and thinking-skills movements. In rejection of rote learning, most reforms seem to be directed at creating classrooms in which children are active participants in their own learning and responsible for their own achievement and conduct, a reversal of the process of breaking knowledge into isolated skill sequences dictated by the standard curriculum. Norm-referenced tests are considered inappropriate for the emerging child-centered models, and alternative assessment has become an area of growing interest.

The 1993 *School Library Medial Annual*[2] included three excellent chapters about alternative assessment. The reform of Kentucky's education system, which is being closely watched by many educators, has implications for alternative assessment methods because this is one of the core factors in school restructuring.[3]   Interest in this topic is widespread and articles about alternative assessment in the professional literature increased noticeably in 1993.

As in the case of outcomes-based education, there is considerable confusion about the terminology used to describe alternative assessment; many terms are often used interchangeably but have different meanings to different groups. *Authentic assessment*, *portfolio assessment*, *performance assessment*, and *direct assessment* are all terms reported in the literature that refer to some method of pupil assessment that is not based on the use of norm-referenced tests. The overarching philosophy of alternative assessment is that teachers must demonstrate exactly what a student does or does not understand, relate learning experiences to relevant domains or contexts, and combine assessment with teaching. Despite the fact that alternative assessment can be implemented, the greatest challenge is to reach agreement about what students should know. [4]

LEARNER-CENTERED SCHOOL

Though it is certainly true that educators have always spoken of child-centered education and teaching the individual child, not since the 1960s have most public schools attempted to develop such programs. Instead, research and teaching methodology have been dominated by a formula-driven concept of effective, direct group instruction. As constructivism has made advances, the teacher is regarded more as a "guide" who helps children construct their own

learning rather than a lecturer. Developmentally appropriate instruction is being advanced today by many advocates who come to educational reform from many different perspectives. The child-centered emphasis, spawned by constructivism, is the major scaffolding for the architects of school reform who reject a standardized curriculum and direct instruction.

THE SCHOOL AS FAMILY

Educators and writers in other disciplines are advancing the notion of the school as an alternative family, an emerging trend in the literature. This has followed a logical progression. The movement toward a child-centered school focuses attention on needs and problems of children outside the realm of achievement test scores. Poverty, gangs, drugs, crime, and hunger plague many poor, immigrant, and minority youngsters. The need for prevention and intervention is so apparent, according to this view, that in order to meet the academic needs of children it is first necessary to meet needs that have traditionally been beyond the purview of the school or *in locus parentis*.

In the process of examining a child's needs, educators are beginning to conceive of the school as a place to centralize services, create community support and recreation, and to go beyond simply teaching children a common curriculum. The increasing emphasis on preschool and early childhood programs is helping to shape programming for children that includes their families, often using the school as the locus of community services, especially social services to assist children and their families who have social, physical, economic, and emotional problems.

Unquestionably, it is critical that young children develop a sense of self-worth and self-esteem if they are to succeed academically. This is apparently accomplished by young children who have a supportive family environment and a correspondingly supportive school, but difficult for many children who do not have supportive families. For these children, the classroom may be the most supportive environment they have, one which may be enriched further with planned activities, meals, health services, and other ingredients that may be lacking in the home and the neighborhood.[5]

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

K-12 school experiments with site-based management concepts have shifted toward experimentation with total quality management (TQM), inspired by the work of Dr. W. Edwards Deming. While site-based management never really took hold in the university environment, TQM is quite popular in community colleges and universities as it is in K-12 schools.
Far from a panacea, however, application of TQM practices to academic settings has different implications than in a business or manufacturing context where products are more important than processes. A recent publication of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement describes the following key factors of TQM as they apply to schools: constancy of purpose, customer-driven service, concentration on quality, school and district culture, collegial leadership, decentralized decision making, comprehensive perspective, and continuous improvement.[6] Evidently, TQM will be a popular movement in education as institutions at all levels strive to improve their public image, if not their efficiency.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum research and development have followed the trend away from behaviorism to constructivism, as indicated by the many developments at the national and local levels to promote reflective teaching, constructivism, cooperative learning, problem-solving skills, and higher-order thinking skills. Most national professional organizations and many state departments of education subscribe to curricula based on principles of cognitive psychology. In order to effectively teach students thinking and problem-solving skills, there is a concerted effort to eliminate decontextualized curricula and instruction, and to move toward other modes of organization such as multiage grouping.[7] But while constructivism is used for design of curricula, the traditions of behaviorism in the form of lesson plans, objective tests, and direct instruction, which are based on several decades of process-product research, remain in most teacher training curricula, state educational standards, and even legislation.

The "effective" teaching methods, derived from the process-product research tradition, have been recommended as generalized methods to be applied in any classroom, regardless of content. Constructivism is incompatible with process-product models, philosophically and structurally. The introduction of constructivism into the traditional classroom encounters significant obstacles that, without considerable rethinking of the entire process, set up competing philosophies that may result in an amalgamated corruption of both approaches to learning. Thus children may be taught critical thinking skills but remain largely engaged in information retrieval to satisfy traditional test requirements. Teachers are likely to be concerned about skills of analysis and synthesis and may keep portfolios, but testing will remain fact-centered.

Also, there is a trend to integrate curricula at the elementary and secondary levels,[8] meaning that traditional subjects are combined. The National Science Foundation has stimulated integrated projects that combine mathematics and science, and there are projects, such as that of the National Center for Social Studies, seeking bridges between social studies and other traditional subject-matter areas.

TECHNOLOGY

The promise of computers in education has been predicted for many years, and some writers envision a future in which children will have the ultimate in school choice—whether to go to school at all or stay home and learn everything via technology. As predicted in our chapter last year, the Clinton administration has promoted technology—specifically the information highway—as critical to the future of the U.S. economy. Many companies are scrambling to develop services for homes and schools, and telephone companies are running commercials about the information highway and the services to be expected in the future.

K-12 schools are buying computers at a steady rate. While hanging on to their old Apple II machines, schools are splitting their new purchases rather evenly between Macintoshes and DOS computers. Moreover, schools are using more multimedia and installing local area networks and beginning to use the Internet for a variety of instructional activities in elementary and secondary schools, with modems being one of the fastest growing purchases. In a national study of school districts, 51 percent of school districts reported that they planned to increase purchases of

hardware and software despite cutbacks in education funding.[9]

DISABLED STUDENTS

Special education had been a self-contained field that was little noticed until 1975 when P.L. 94-142 required all schools to provide a free, appropriate public education for handicapped children. For many years the demands of this law caused considerable concern and complications among educators in K-12 schools. It seems that special education will once again present challenges to schools because of a spreading trend called *inclusion*.[10] For economic and philosophical reasons, many states are adopting a policy of inclusion that goes beyond the former meaning of mainstreaming, causing a need for greater collaboration among special education teachers and regular classroom teachers.

Most regular educators are hostile to the movement and special educators are also opposed, believing that disabled children are better served in special classes of one sort or another. The additional costs of special education, especially the costs associated with special classes for learning-disabled students, has caused many states to consider ways to retain disabled students in regular classrooms. The challenge to school administrators will be to redefine "ownership" of disabled students, and this will be difficult because of the collateral trends of teaching critical-thinking skills and accountability for achievement, which focuses teacher attention on the most academically talented pupils. Thus, there will be philosophical debates about the underlying assumptions of inclusion of disabled students, especially those with severe disabilities. The reverse argument may arise that serving disabled students in regular classrooms detracts from the quality of services for other students.

TEACHER EVALUATION

Another detectable trend is the shift toward alternative assessments of teachers. If education is viewed in the broadest sense as an ecosystem, many of the forces that impinge on teachers and students create new, and sometimes unpredictable results. This seems to be the case in teacher evaluation. Though most of the literature reports that teacher evaluation is haphazard, ineffective, or irrelevant, the trend to use portfolio assessment with students has been adopted for use with teachers and is said to have the potential to make teacher evaluation relevant.[11] One reason is that the principal or other evaluator can establish criteria and set about a plan wherein the teacher is responsible for collecting supporting evidence. According to some, teacher evaluation may be a major concern in the future, because teachers who are employing different evaluation strategies in their classrooms will be hesitant to accept traditional approaches to their own evaluation, and evaluation may be a motivational tool.[12]

MIXED-AGE GROUPING

The only apparent reason schools are graded is because of the influence of German immigrants who brought their age-grade system with them to the Americas. Seeking better ways to group children for instruction, experiments in mixed-age grouping are attracting considerable interest. Terms used to describe mixed-aged grouping in the literature are *nongraded*, *ungraded*, *combined grades*, *continuous progress*, and *mixed-age* or *multi-age grouping*.

Mixed-age grouping of preschool and primary children has increased in recent years, inspired partly perhaps by the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1989 and the provincial mandate in British Columbia, Canada, for ungraded classes in the primary years.[13] Reasons for the trend include concern that too many children are retained, and retention does not help children overcome developmental delays and may actually damage children who believe themselves to be failures at such an early age. The advantages of a student remaining with the same teacher or team of teachers for two to three years and the peer mentoring that occurs in multi-age classrooms have led many elementary schools to pilot mixed-age classes.

URBAN EDUCATION

The problems of inner-city schools seem to attract attention in the popular press on a daily basis because of the intrusion of guns into schoolhouses. Though research and articles can be found in abundance describing the problems engendered by drugs, crime, violence, gangs, and other problems, there is no simple remedy. A thoughtful, well-written volume by Lois Weiner with solid ideas about urban education is *Preparing Teachers for Urban Schools: Lessons from Thirty Years of School Reform*.[14] Including perspectives of both children and teachers, this book provides insights that help the reader put the research, the social context, and the educational challenge into a singular perspective.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

It seems that some writers have a pervasive impact on American education. Piaget was one such writer, although it took him several decades to be discovered by American educators. Howard Gardner is another whose writings have impacted all levels of education, and lay people as well. The concept of multiple intelligences is compatible with many trends in education, including the thinking-skills movement, constructivism, and general school reform.[15] The literature in many diverse areas—preschool education, graduate education, curriculum development, instructional methods, psychology, and school reform—refers to the concept of multiple intelligences. This response is so widespread that it seems to have the earmarks of a major influence on educational theory and practice.

CONCLUSION

In reflecting over the professional education literature, it seems reasonable to believe that 1993 may someday be regarded as a banner year in education because many trends were solidified. Clearly, research and "wisdom pieces" indicated the near abandonment of the tradition of process-product research that underlies direct instruction. A fundamental assumption in direct instruction, owing to both influences of behaviorism and process-product research, is that knowledge exists separately as an entity to be decontextualized and broken into small pieces to be learned. Constructivism rejects this notion entirely, leading to the many evolutionary changes in education: learner-centered education, critical-thinking skills, the changing role of the teacher, grouping of students, assessment procedures, and many other interrelated trends. Most states have incorporated reflective teaching and constructivism into the school curriculum, as indicated by the outcomes-based education movement. State educational standards and even legislation

reflect this change.

It remains to be seen if these trends can withstand both the efforts of policy makers to reinforce a standardized curriculum and the resistance of powerful advocacy groups that ridicule public education. There seems to be a consensus that higher educational standards and a crowded, disintegrated curriculum have not been successful forms of school improvement. Inversely, the high hopes and great expectations of the advocates of the new education models remain to be realized.

It remains unclear at this time what influences the Clinton administration might have in sustaining these trends, but it is likely that education will move to the limelight of the national agenda, once health care issues have been decided.

NOTES

1.   Bill Spady covers definitions, differences between OBE and previous assessment models, and a number of philosophical issues related to educational measurement. The article is printed in "On Outcome-Based Education: A Conversation with Bill Spady," *Educational Leadership* (January 1993): 66-70.

2.   See the chapters by Delia Neuman, Daniel Callison, and Barbara Stripling, all of which combine for an excellent coverage of the essential concepts, opportunities, and problems in alternative assessment methods.

3.   Betty Steff describes the reform of Kentucky education in "Top-Down-Bottom-Up: Systemic Change in Kentucky," *Educational Leadership* 51 (September 1993): 42-44.

4.   James Asletine described an attempt to implement performance assessment to measure achievement of middle school students (see "Performance Assessment: Looking at the `Real' Achievement of Middle Level Students," *Schools in the Middle* 3 [1993]: 27-30). The central challenge, according to Asletine, is to decide what students should know and do, a problem complicating school reform at all levels.

5.   Although there are many articles from several fields that approach the concept of the school as an alternative family, B. Belck and J. Jinks address the question directly in "Will Schools Become Families of the Future?" *Clearing House* 66 (January/February 1993): 146-50.

6.   "TQM at Virginia Commonwealth University: An Urban University Struggles with Realities of TQM," by Deborah Cowles and Glenn Gilbreath, *Higher Education* 25 (1993): 281-302, provides a glimpse of the challenge and the problems of applying a manufacturing quality-control technique to an institution that is neither based on productivity nor marketplace quality measures. See also the 1993 publication, *Toward Quality in Education: The Leader's Odyssey*, published by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

7.   Most national professional organizations have promoted a constructivist perspective on

teaching and curriculum development. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science are just a few of the organizations that have advocated a shift away from direct instruction toward active, inventive instruction.

8.   A number of interesting articles about integrated curricula appeared, including "Concept to Application: Development of an Integrated Mathematics/Science/Methods Course for Preservice Elementary Teachers," reported by Carol Stuessy in *School Science and Mathematics* 93 (February 1993): 55-62. Donald Schneider described "The Search for Integration in Social Studies" in *Momentum* 24 (September/October 1993): 34-39.

9.   See "Update: The Latest Technology Trends in the Schools" by the editors of *Technology & Learning* (February 1993): 28-32.

10.   While there are certainly many journals and newsletters that maintain current information about inclusion and other topics in special education, the ERIC resources seem to be particularly valuable for a compilation of articles, research, and papers about inclusion. Many school-based projects, those that may not be published in professional journals controlled by editorial boards staffed by professors, are reported in ERIC documents and can be very informative and useful.

11.   Peggy Perkins and Jeffrey Gelfer provide a description of an alternative to traditional teacher evaluation in "Portfolio Assessment of Teachers," *The Clearing House* (March/April 1993): 235-37.

12.   Daniel Duke argues that one obstacle to professional growth is the system of evaluation in which teachers play it safe by setting goals so low they know that they can meet them. Improved instructions may results from changing evaluation, as described in "Removing Barriers to Professional Growth," in *Phi Delta Kappan* (May 1993): 702-12.

13.   Barbara Nye provides a thorough discussion of this topic in the *ERS Spectrum* (Summer 1993): 38-45, in an article (with a question-and-answer format) entitled "Some Questions and Answers About Multiage-Grouping." Also, this subject is covered thoroughly in Topic #131 of the RES Info-File. Pressures may begin to mount on upper elementary grades and secondary programs to adopt similar models, with an age cohort attending school from entry to graduation. Models in Germany and other European nations may be used to justify such grouping of older students.

14.   The book is published by Teachers College Press (1993), New York.

15.   Howard Gardner has written a number of books about cognitive psychology. The most influential concepts and underpinnings for his theory can be found in the older volume entitled *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, published in 1985 by Basic Books, New York.