

Trends and Issues in the 1992 Professional Education Literature [trends3]

ANNA C. McFADDEN, GEORGE E. MARSH, II and RICHARD S. PODEMSKI

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Articles in the professional education literature show a diversity of influences on schools, reflecting indirect societal expectations and forces. School restructuring, at-risk students, problems of adolescents, and reform of education are familiar themes that continued to be important concerns to education writers and researchers in the 1992 literature. Library media professionals will be particularly interested in the significant increase in articles about information: literacy, networks, policy, and retrieval. The most important political event of 1992, with potentially significant implications for education and library and media specialists, was the election of a new president who was a leader in the National Governors' Association and urged the promulgation of the national goals for education in 1989 and apprenticeship education, and a vice president who, as a user of Internet, advocates a national electronic infrastructure for the nation. Any policies or leadership that advocate the development of electronic technologies and information access will be of intense interest to library media professionals. Several topics cut across all fields and classifications in the literature and can be easily identified as popular trends.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative learning, a method of organizing students for self-managed learning in small groups, has been gaining in popularity in elementary education, and perhaps because of its usefulness as an alternative to traditional classroom management, it is garnering acceptance throughout various fields and at all levels.¹ Although most secondary schools and college programs are based on a lecture format, cooperative learning may find acceptance at these levels as criticism of education and pressure for reform continue unabated.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Multiculturalism is a matter of great concern to administrators, teachers at all levels, counselors, and policymakers and textbook publishers. As immigration affects more states, it seems certain that this area will be a major topic of interest to professional educators.

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Portfolio assessment is a form of educational measurement that requires teachers to collect products (such as objects, video, writing, samples, papers, paintings) as indicators of student performance rather than test scores. A requirement in all primary and secondary schools of Great Britain, portfolio assessment seems to have jumped the Atlantic and gained rapid acceptance in several fields and levels,² particularly in preschool and elementary classrooms.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

Another trend that cuts across all fields is constructivism,³ a concept borrowed from cognitive psychology, which emphasizes student-centered learning. It is used in the literature to refer to programs and learning strategies that attempt to teach children “to think” and for self-learning through student-directed organization. It is the counterpart to the trends of indirect teaching methods such as reflective teaching. As a popular movement inspired by influential writers, it implies such innovations as empowerment of students and training in thinking skills. The learner is expected and encouraged to construct (or invent) knowledge as one who seeks and organizes information; plans and conducts learning activities, experiments, and research; and assumes responsibility for knowledge.

Articles principally about instructional methodology and curriculum are few compared to those reflecting social and economic problems that directly and indirectly affect students and their families, teachers, and institutions. During a time when there is widespread concern about the failure of schools to meet the learning needs of children, education's problems are far greater than concerns only about teaching and learning.

ADOLESCENCE

It is not surprising that concern about adolescence is a predominant interest in the literature, both as a field of study and as a specific area of concern under many headings. Problems of youth as they interact with education are numerous: Alcohol and drug abuse, self-esteem, gangs, minorities, delinquency, teen pregnancy and motherhood, suicide, family relationships, and sexual behaviors were heavily reported.

OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION

There is a growing body of work dealing with vocations, careers, and occupational training due to the economic recession and a structural change in the economy. The economy showed signs of moderate recovery at the end of 1992, but it was a “jobless recovery” because hirings were low and new jobs were not created. The new global economy, based on technology, has reduced or eliminated low-skill, high-paying jobs but increased the demand for high-skill jobs. However, technical training is more important than liberal arts degrees in the projected labor market.⁴ The population of youth is declining in the United States except for minority groups, which have the most difficulty in school achievement. Most jobs will be in areas where progress is made in new technologies, areas where current workers are not trained or schools yet fully prepared to provide adequate preparation. As the demand for technical skills is growing, “technical literacy” is becoming a concern to educators, transcending the erstwhile concern about computer literacy and complicating the traditional definition of literacy.

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

A major problem for education, and particularly education managers, has been separating what works from what does not from among a plethora of strategies for school improvement, or finding inherently relevant educational processes from among those that appear to be relevant. Many educational reforms have already been implemented with little noticeable change. It is

highly unlikely that effective schools will result from strict standards, procedures, or accountability measures alone, as advocated in the reform movement beginning in the 1980s. The interest in educational management literature has shifted significantly toward the new reality of school restructuring and reform:⁵ decentralization, empowerment, and self-management. Educational practice is shaped by economic and social factors, so the trends of teacher empowerment, decentralization, or debureaucratization of U.S. education, generally referred to as site-based or school-based management, imitate reforms that have been used in American business. There is a general belief that if teachers are empowered to make their own decisions they will produce higher achievement. For administrators and teachers alike, who have long worked in bureaucratic organizations, it is difficult to suddenly shift to self-management with no preparation and support.⁶

COUNSELING AND PERSONNEL SERVICES

Counseling, originally conceived as guidance for vocational preparation, has generated many articles about personal therapies but seems to have returned to its roots with more interest in job preparation and postsecondary adjustment. The pervasive problems of preparing for and finding jobs or suitable fields of work preparation in a restricted economy are obviously important factors accounting for these developments.

READING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Trends in research on reading and communication skills has remained relatively constant over several decades, punctuated occasionally by professional disputes about specific issues. The underlying theme for many years has been debate surrounding phonetic approaches to reading instruction. More recently, however, the field has been impacted by whole language instruction, a trend that now dominates attention in the field.⁷ This method incorporates several strategies of instruction that have been isolated in the past and combines them into a comprehensive approach to integrated language instruction.

The impact of technology and vocational concerns in education are noticeable in research and articles about reading and communications skills. Although many traditional themes are reported, such as research in process and characteristics of reading populations, there is a distinct tendency to examine technical writing and business communication and to develop suitable curricula.

HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

In many ways, the literature on handicapped persons is a microcosm of general education literature with all the categories subsumed for special populations, such as reading instruction, curriculum, economic concerns, and so forth. The literature is still predominantly concerned with learning disabilities, a field that is still struggling to develop an acceptable definition, but many articles concerned the needs of preschool children, who are now receiving programming in many public schools, and the implications of the new Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Stimulated by the mainstreaming movement and later by economic shortfalls, the trend to eliminate tracking, keep handicapped children in regular classrooms, and combine teacher

preparation of special and regular educators is unmistakable. The “regular education initiative” is the successor to the mainstreaming movement with implications for programming and teacher preparation.⁸ Current discussions advocate the full inclusion of mildly handicapped children in the regular classroom and the redirection of student services from special educators and support personnel to the regular teacher, who is to accommodate the needs of handicapped children within the content of a regular classroom.

LANGUAGES

In addition to a continuation of research on language learning and linguistics, there is considerable productivity and variety in the field of language instruction. A major area for U.S. schools concerns teaching English as a second language, and it seems reasonable to expect that this field will continue to grow with the influx of immigrant children in schools. Books, articles, and multimedia products in this area will undoubtedly grow in number and diversity.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

A significant number of articles appeared in the literature concerning information literacy, networks, policy, and retrieval. Library media specialists are familiar with the many issues pertaining to demands for storing, managing, and retrieving information. As more schools, elementary through college, have developed computerized libraries and installed communications networks, the demand for access to information retrieval services has exploded. Library media specialists and the general education community are concerned with issues regarding the electronic infrastructure.⁹ The new global economy permits access to world capital markets for anyone who has the technology. The most important domestic political issue for the future is wealth created by information and media, which are more important than land and resources. High-bandwidth fiber-optic exchange networks will soon permit massive real-time data exchange on PC networks. Computer/telecommunications synthesis, optical-disk systems with multiple read/write and multimedia capability, and microcomputers with some mainframe capabilities will redefine the informational landscape.

COMPUTERS

Research and professional interest about computers is stimulated by the rapid advances made in electronic technologies. New equipment, software, and peripheral devices offer many options for use in teaching, information retrieval, habilitation, and assistive, administrative, and other applications. The widespread use of computers in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools has created a demand for more research and assistance with each new innovation. Computers are being used to support several trends in the classroom: a shift from whole-class to small-group instruction and a shift to individualized learning, increased time on task performance assessment, and support for cooperative learning.

The first obstacle is to get teachers to accept computers. One approach is to provide teachers with computers over the summer to learn how to use them for a variety of personal tasks such as computerized grading, tests, and lesson plans, which sets the stage for teachers to incorporate

computers in classroom instruction.¹⁰

The principal targets of the Nation at Risk report of 1983, problems in science and mathematics education, remain relatively unchanged. There is continuing concern expressed about innumeracy and scientific illiteracy, and considerable interest in using computers in mathematics.¹¹ The federal support of “integrated” mathematics and science curricula such as that proposed by the National Science Foundation has not had much impact yet because, for the most part, science, mathematics, and other subjects are still quite separate in schools and university training programs. There is a trend away from teaching computer programming in elementary and secondary schools. The same problems that confront education in general plague science and mathematics education—how to improve achievement? Computers seem to be emerging as one strategy.

TEACHER EDUCATION

The preparation of teachers is one of the most important issues confronting the nation. The profession recognizes that changes in preparation programs are necessary if schools are to be reformed, but designing better teacher-training institutions is slow to develop. Despite criticism and questions about the general preparation and clinical experiences of student teachers, the literature in teacher education is remarkably silent about real efforts to change. Articles about teacher education seem constant but follow themes that have been popular for a number of years. Many issues that concern reforming teachers and public schools are largely ignored in teacher education institutions, judging from the literature. Literature in Europe and Canada reports some progress being made toward changing teacher education. Australia and New Zealand, which has had an impact on the whole language approach, are experimenting widely with teacher education innovations. There are so many issues that can affect teacher education that it is perplexing to consider them together: certification, behavior, attitudes, multicultural education, relations with administrators, global education, curriculum, school-university partnerships, and many more. The Holmes Group has been actively pursuing programs to change teacher education and may publish articles in 1994. For the meantime, teacher education seems to be coming to grips with the realities that affect public schools. It is difficult, for example, to promote empowerment and site-based management to teachers when teacher education programs remain stuck in elegant models of bureaucracy and the literature is preoccupied with articles about improving public schools but not higher education per se. There is real activity, according to the literature, in college and school partnerships,¹² which may bring about reciprocal changes over the next year. The excellent commentaries in a volume edited by Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves¹³ about problems in Canadian schools may be excellent primers for teacher-training institutions in the United States trying to come to terms with the problems of change.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting how the trends, directions, and interests of professional educators are shaped by economic and social forces in a self-organizing way in the United States. Unlike in Japan,¹⁴ Germany, or Great Britain, where significant control is exercised in a top-down way through national bureaucracies, the education system of the United States is much more influenced at the grass-roots level. Although some might contend that U.S. education should have national goals, a

national curriculum, and more uniformity, the diversity and flexibility of American education is unique and may represent its most outstanding strength. The professional education literature reveals this diversity. Library media specialists have a special, pivotal role as custodians of the professional literature and access to it.

NOTES

1. For example, Terry L. Bilderback and colleagues describe a program for adult students incorporating cooperative learning models in "Teaching Styles of the Fresh and Inventive," *Vocational Educational Journal* 67 (September 1992): 34-36, 57. Actually, cooperative behavior and teamwork are becoming important skills in the new work force, so there may be a reciprocal influence between the workplace and the classroom.
2. An example in the social studies is discussed by Dennis Adams and Mary Hamm, "Portfolio Assessment and Social Studies: Collecting, Selecting, and Reflecting on What Is Significant," *Social Education* 56 (February 1992): 103-5.
3. Barry J. Fraser and associates, in a study of nearly 800 high school students in Australia, note that educators should be cautious about constructivism unless there is also attention to effective teaching strategies. See "Learning Science with Understanding: In Search of the Holy Grail?" *Research in Science and Technological Education* 10 (1992): 65-81.
4. One problem for educators, parents, students, and other professionals is the inability to project job growth and requirements for the short term. Kristina J. Shelly defines the problem in an article entitled "The Future of Jobs for College Graduates," *Monthly Labor Review* 115 (July 1992): 3-12. Overall there will be fewer college-level jobs due to a structural change in the economy, and competition will be intense. Competition will exist also because most of the workers for the year 2000 are already in the labor market. Although higher levels of educational attainment are necessary, technical skills will be important for many jobs, even those in the service sector, that are not necessarily guaranteed by traditional college degree programs.
5. An excellent, comprehensive book on all the issues of school reform was written by Charles Reavis and Harry Griffith. *Restructuring Schools: Theory and Practice* (Lancaster, PA: Technomics, 1992) presents a thorough discussion of the background, leadership skills, and strategies for implementing site-based management and includes numerous forms and checklists that would be of use to any administrator interested in effecting real change.
6. See an excellent book entitled *Teacher Development and Educational Change*, edited by Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (Washington, DC: Falmer Press, 1992) concerning reform in North America.
7. For someone wanting a broad perspective of the whole language movement, Kenneth Goodman provides a useful overview in "Why Whole Language Is Today's Agenda in Education," *Language Arts* 69 (September 1992): 354-63.

8. Although special education presents itself as a separate field, in recent years there has been a tendency for special education and “regular” education to become recombined. The *Teaching Exceptional Children* 24 (Spring 1992) issue is remarkable for its coverage of articles that address regular classroom instruction and problems.

9. Alfred Sikes and Philip Verveer elucidate the issues on both sides of the argument about the Communications Competitiveness and Infrastructure Act of 1991, that have implications for the new age in communications. See the Communications Competitiveness and Infrastructure Modernization Act of 1991 reported in the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science* 18 (June-July 1992): 18-23.

10. See Jim Shoemaker et al., “The Classroom Manager: Computers to Go,” *Instructor* 101 (May-June 1992): 72-73, for a brief description of this strategy.

11. See Patricia Baggett and Andrzej Ehrenfeucht, “What Should Be the Role of Calculators and Computers in Mathematics Education?” *Journal of Mathematics Behavior* 11 (March 1992): 61-72.

12. One of many examples of articles about university and school partnerships is the work reported by Roger Bennett and colleagues in an article entitled “Effective Collaboration in Teacher Education,” *Action in Teacher Education* 14 (Spring 1993): 52-56, which explains the cooperative program between a university and a public school system.

13. Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves, *Teacher Development and Educational Change* (Washington, DC: Falmer Press, 1992).

14. For an intriguing comparison of Asian and U.S. education, see the excellent longitudinal study of Harold W. Stevenson and James W. Stigler entitled *The Learning Gap* (New York: Summit Books, 1992).