

[REDACTED]
Hudson, Fl. 34669
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C-Span
400 N. Capitol St. NW
Suite 650
Washington, DC 20001

005276 DEC 1 1991

Dear Sir:

Coming events do indeed cast their shadows! The educational morass has been foreshadowed for many years back. Where has every one been?

Let's face it, America is, and has been, anti-intellectual for many years, perhaps since its beginning. It makes sense to believe that a sham democracy along with market capitalism depends on a culpable and ignorant public for its survival. Only social catastrophe and intellectuals make revolutions!

Your program seems to be valid from an educational point of view, however, you cannot avoid your patronage. Some callers have sensed the slant of "business is business" repartee from many of your guest speakers, particularly reporters.

My fear as a teacher, and now, is that communication networks and their resources have been, and are, promoting manipulation, co-optation, and coercion of public opinion at the behest of moneyed interests. I hope your effort can prove me wrong!

Thank you,
[REDACTED]

Educational reform

By [REDACTED]

The ringing of the school bells which opened the [REDACTED] school year in Collier County signaled for me a finale in my 25-year teaching career.

I leave public education with a feeling of mixed emotions. On the one hand, I feel a sense of relief knowing that I will not be faced with another year of utter frustration in an attempt to educate American youth; on the other, a sense of leaving a job undone, a job that I know is essential to our survival as a nation.

I can state with some pride, however, that during the past 10 or 15 years, I have been in the forefront of, what I believed to be, positive educational reform in the public schools — a reform that is just now beginning to receive public attention through TV coverage, such as the recent CBS program "Is Anyone Out There Learning?" and other public formats.

I remain hopeful, but still extremely doubtful, that even this kind of penetrating coverage can overcome the murky, institutional inertia that exists in public education today.

If one is to find answers as to the "why" of the sad state of affairs in education (and there seem to be as many sources to blame as there are problems), I contend that we must begin to examine carefully the institution itself, particularly the power structure, i.e., the authority that controls educational policy in this country.

I have felt for some time (after careful consideration) that local control of education is an anachronism. Originated by historical accident, these educational satrapies (school boards) have far outlived any useful purpose that might have once served. Local control is a societal corpse, waiting only to be buried and replaced by a new and better method of control.

Most people (and this includes most educators) seem unaware of the non-public aspect of public education. The ordinary layman perceives education as a legal concept only, and tends to neglect it as an educational one. The ideal of education in a democracy must extend beyond the fact that some governmental unit — local, state, or federal — provides funds for its support. True education is an education in which the search for truth is carried on regardless of outside interests, public or private. I

believe it is largely because of our archaic system of control that true education is being obfuscated and thwarted.

First, local school board positions are non-professional ones. It is ironic that board members throughout the land are clamoring for, and demanding, competency tests for teachers when their only qualification for office is one of residency in their particular district.

I can recall a campaign speech made four years ago by an aspiring Collier County board member (who is now starting a second term) that was so incoherent and devoid of substance that it certainly would have rated a failing mark in eighth grade speech. Yet, these are the people who are supposed to establish educational policy in our schools.

Secondly, statistics will show that most board members are voted into office by a small minority (about 15-20 per cent) of the total electorate. Since the purposes of education are set forth locally, the predominate interest groups in the community tend to influence purposes which accord with their own particular religious, political, economic, and social points of view. This results in a kind of intellectual protectionism that is characteristic of schools in a totalitarian society.

Some of the most pernicious problems in the schools, i.e., segregation, equal opportunity, etc., have found solution only because of federal intervention. In our own county it took five years to rid the system of a tyrannical superintendent, and federal threats to right an injustice done to a teacher. School board members in each instance were reflecting the views of narrow community groups, rather than the general public's or its welfare.

To say that a diversity of school systems based upon intellectual protectionism for different dogmas constitutes a "democratic school system" is indeed a myth, if we are to refer to the principles of true democracy as opposed to a legal system which encourages one-sided actions.

School administrators (surrogates of the board) must comply with this catering to special interests in order to hold their jobs. The "modern" administrator believes that this segment of public opinion determines what is professionally defensible and justifies his actions on this basis. This, more often than not, leads to

invalid educational decisions; e.g., an over-emphasis on sports (certain elements in the community relate vicariously to the school through its sports programs) or, worse yet, to a selective policy for disciplining students (the teacher soon learns who the untouchables in each school are, and must act accordingly).

Administrators, from top to bottom, dread the most that event which brings a call or visit from an irate parent, be it rational or irrational. This is why teachers are intimidated into giving inflated grades, allowing carte blanche behavior to students in the classroom, etc. School administration has degenerated precisely because school administrators "ask" instead of "tell" the public what should be done in the schools.

Fundamentally, the confusion between public and professional decisions is one aspect of our failure to clarify the role of the expert in a democratic society. Unlike other professions in our country, the teaching profession (sic) followed, rather than preceded, the advent of education. This latent development of the profession has had a tendency to cause its members to accept without question the right of the public to control, not only the broad purposes of education (which is its legitimate right), but also the right to control the means by which these purposes will be attained (the right of the profession).

This anomaly is being further exacerbated because of the highly decentralized form of control which will not allow self-autonomy to the profession.

Professional autonomy does not mean the absence of any control over the professional workers. On the contrary, it means that controls requiring technical competence are exercised by persons who possess such competence. Professional controls are often more rigorous than those imposed by lay bodies; e.g., controls in the medical profession.

Under our present system of control (board members are politicians, hence vulnerable to supporting factions), the average citizen thinks of himself as an employer. This perception of himself leads him to believe that public servants as a group should be servile. The public (which is "I") puts up the money, so "I" have the right to tell the teachers what to teach, and how to teach it.

This public misconception is extended through a list of negative board actions: The

Speaking Out

[REDACTED] taught high school English and social studies in the Collier County school system for eight years. His main interest is educational research and program development.

He also has taught classes in the [REDACTED] and his wife have two children and have lived in [REDACTED] since 1971.

He holds bachelor's and master's degrees from [REDACTED] University.

The Star extends its thanks to Mr. [REDACTED] for this week's Speaking Out.

The Star always is willing to have readers speak out on any topic of local interest. Lively, provocative articles of 800 to 1,000 words are welcomed. However, The Star reserves the right not to publish Speaking Out offerings felt not in good taste nor of general interest.



teachers shall not control entry into their own profession; they shall not determine the subjects taught; they shall not be permitted collective bargaining or strikes; they shall not formulate and enforce a code of professional ethics, and so on.

If the medical profession, for instance, had been forced to operate under such a stultifying atmosphere, the life span of the average citizen would not be nearly as long as it is today.

If state and local efforts cannot supply us with an adequate system of education, where then does the answer lie? It is my belief that the answer to a viable system of education must come about through some kind of national control. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the NEA, the nation's largest teacher organization, is at this moment pressuring Congress and the executive branch of the federal government to establish a department of education at cabinet level.

As the disparity between imperative educational needs, on the one hand, and state and local efforts, on the other, grow wider and wider, our citizens will begin to realize the need for greater centralized control.

Consider these arguments: Federal aid is needed to equalize educational opportunity; to insure that we have an adequate supply of manpower; to equalize financial responsibility as well as educational opportunity; to eliminate the tensions and conflicts resulting from large numbers of uneducated citizens in a mobile society.

Our chief concern should be the way in which professional opinion is recognized and articulated. At present there is confusion in every direction. In education the line between professional and non-professional decisions has all but disappeared. The emphasis on local control of education has given school boards far more power to make educational decisions than their expertise would warrant.

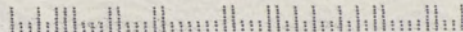
At this point, I can hear the critics of this proposal shouting their fears that a national take-over of education will lead to all kinds of insidious consequences, that the schools will be taken over by one political party or another. Of course, there is no ironclad guarantee that this would not happen, but the argument flies in the face of many other facts that the likelihood of such consequences are remote.

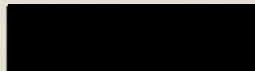
It is local control which provides a greater opportunity for groups to dominate educational programs. At the national level there will be many more and larger competing groups. There will also be the national media with its unrelenting scrutiny.

But perhaps the best argument for a more centralized school system, at least from the standpoint of academic freedom, is that teachers will finally organize into a unified and national profession to protect the integrity that is rightfully theirs.



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