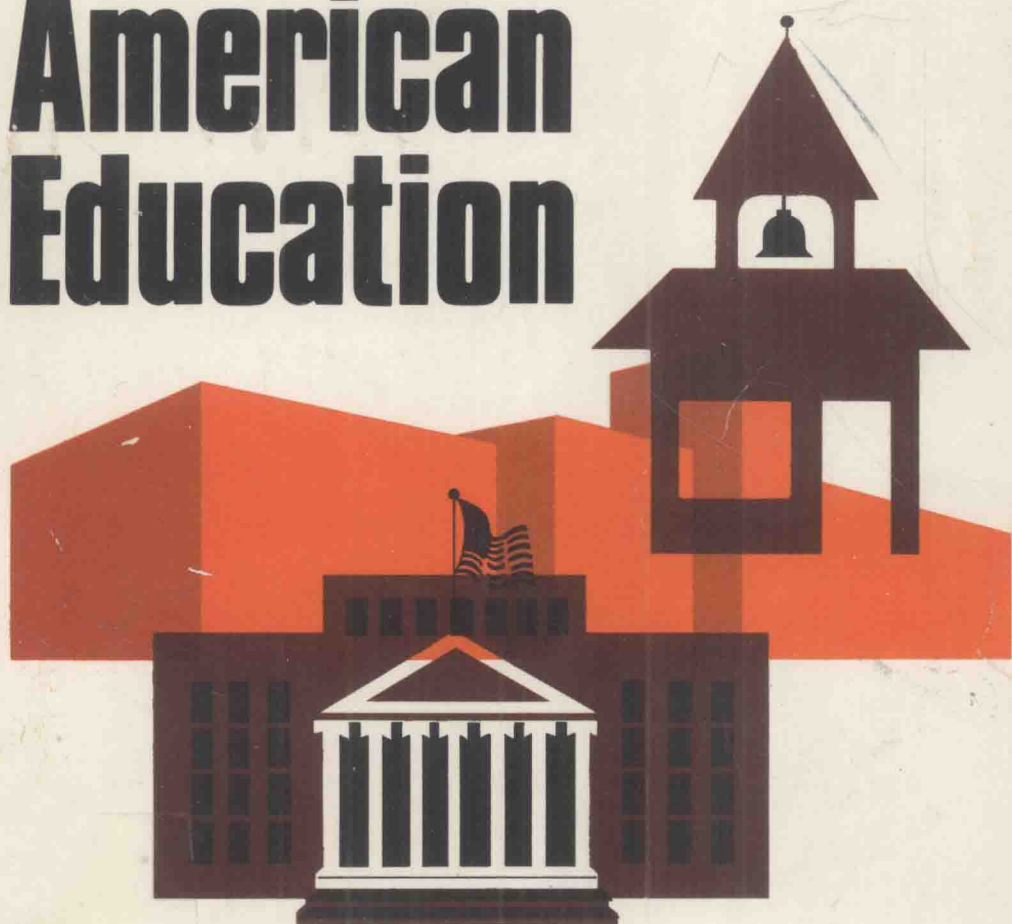


An Historical Introduction to American Education



Gerald Gutek

AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN EDUCATION

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To My Wife, Patricia

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AMERICAN EDUCATION

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Preface

The condition of American education is frequently discussed and often debated by both the professional educator and the interested layman. Too many times, these discussions have been carried on without the benefit of historical perspective. Written with the point of view that many current educational issues are rooted in the past, *An Historical Introduction to American Education* is intended for both the prospective teacher and for the interested layman. While not written as a definitive history of all phases of the American educational system, the significant developments are treated.

An Historical Introduction to American Education evolved from a series of lectures that I presented to students enrolled in the American Education course at Loyola University of Chicago; these students read and discussed much of the material included in the book. Subsequent revisions of the material bear the mark of their criticism, suggestions, and difficulties in dealing with the history of American education. I am much indebted to my students who in many ways helped me to restate and reorganize my thoughts on the history of the American school. Since the book grew out of classroom discussion, I feel that it is suited for readers who desire an overview of the American educational experience in historical perspective.

While the work is suited for use in classes in professional education, American educational history is viewed as a part of the broad sweep of the American past. As such, American education has been related to the economic, religious, social, and political currents that influenced its development. Throughout the book, the cultural and humanistic impulses affecting the American school have been stressed.

The organizational pattern of the book treats the Colonial and Revolutionary origins of American education; traces the development of the common school, secondary school, and college; discusses the evolution of teacher education as an area of special interest to prospective teachers; and deals with John Dewey and the progressive movement. The problem of racial integration is discussed as an area of crucial concern which faces the educational profession. Selected documents illustrating the subject

Preface

treated in each chapter have been included so that the student of the history of education, as any student of history, can become familiar with some of the primary sources upon which history is based.

In the preparation of this book, I am much indebted to many people. I am grateful to Professor Archibald W. Anderson, late Professor of the History of Education of the University of Illinois, who first interested me in the history of education. Appreciation is extended to Miss Susan Breen, Miss Belinda Lam, and Mr. John Breault, who assisted in the preparation of materials in the early stages of the work. Special acknowledgment is due to Mrs. Beatrice Van Cleave and Miss Esperanza Abrajano, who typed the final draft of the manuscript. Most of all, I am appreciative of my wife, Patricia, who through her sustained interest encouraged me to write the book. To all these individuals, I am grateful. Final responsibility, however, is mine because what has been said is what I wanted to say.

G. L. G.

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The Role of the History of American Education in Teacher Education

THE AUTHOR'S POINT OF VIEW

At the outset of any book, it is helpful for the reader to be aware of the point of view of the author. In historical writing, the facts, or the data, are only the raw materials of the narrative or exposition. The data may be judged as valid or invalid, genuine or false, relevant or irrelevant on the basis of historical method; but its selection and interpretation always reflect the historian's beliefs and values.

The author believes that the history of education is valuable in its own right as a subject for study. As the history of the human race, or the history of a particular civilization or a particular nation, provides insight and perspective for each individual as a participant and recipient of a culture, the history of education also offers insight and perspective for the teacher. As the study of his nation's history contributes to the loyalty and appreciation of a citizen for his homeland, so a knowledge of educational history builds professional loyalty and commitment among teachers and educators.

In recent times, Americans have become increasingly aware of education as a powerful instrument of civilization. More than a few observers have termed education one of the most vital factors in a race between civilization and catastrophe. Contemporary American schools and teachers have thus shouldered enormous challenges. In the light of this increased awareness numerous critics have raised questions regarding the quality and quantity of American education. Since it offers a practical perspective

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on a subject of national interest and concern, the history of education is worthy of study by both the professional educator and the American public.

Throughout the history of education, various philosophers and theorists have offered conflicting definitions of education. In fact, it is the task of the educational professional and the public to re-examine and re-assess the meaning of education. To aid him in this continuing process, the reader is invited to view education as the means of cultural transmission and cultural reconstruction; as a process of change; as an instrument of survival; and as a personal right and obligation belonging to every man simply because he is a member of society. The reader may then test the adequacy of these various perspectives in the light of the historical development of American education.

EDUCATION IN THE CULTURAL MATRIX

Education is the process by which the immature members of society are introduced into full participation in their culture. Although many social agencies, such as the home, church, state, and mass media, aid informally in this process, advanced cultural groups such as our present form of civilization have established an agency specifically designed to facilitate the process of cultural transmission. This specialized agency is the school. As a carefully constructed environment, staffed by specialists in education, the school transmits the cultural heritage from generation to generation. In this way, the school exercises a preserving or conserving function, by drawing on the culture's tools, skills, and knowledge and passing them along to the immature.

In its role as a specialized cultural agency, the school cannot exist isolated from the culture it serves, but is intimately related to that particular society and cultural heritage. Because it is a vital agency in the structure of the society, it is also subject to pressure from a number of forces: social, economic, political, religious, and moral. American education, for example, draws its substance from the cultural heritage which is particularly American.¹

In addition to the preservation or conservation of a society's cultural heritage, the school also exercises the function of social improvement or reconstruction. The heritage the school is designed to transmit is vast and complex, and within it there are elements both worthy and unworthy of

¹ For a further elaboration of the view that education occurs in a civilizational context, the reader is referred to George S. Counts, *Education and American Civilization* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952).

transmission. To the school falls the immense problem of selecting some parts of the heritage for transmission and rejecting others. To the extent that it is selective, the school also serves a moral purpose. Those charged with introducing the immature to full participation in their culture must make their selection according to some criteria generally agreed upon within that culture. American educators at all levels have usually chosen these cultural elements according to a democratic social philosophy.

Although the American school has been committed to the education of a democratic citizenry since the days of Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, it has never been a simple task to define the criteria that underlie a democratic education. In contrast to the rigid formulas and prescriptive definitions of totalitarian systems, democracy is purposefully open; that is, it is sustained by freedom of inquiry and experimentation. Since its ultimate authority rests in "government by the people," each generation of Americans must redefine the democratic criteria and democratic education in light of the exigencies of its own time. Thus, the American teacher has the twofold responsibility of introducing each generation to its democratic heritage, and providing it with the knowledge and skills needed to continue to reformulate and sustain the democratic ethic in the face of contemporary challenges, both domestic and foreign.

In the continuing task of defining the democratic criterion of "government by the people," each generation of Americans must reconfirm its heritage. Though not located in any one specific document, nor fully expressed at any one time, the democratic criterion has evolved as part of that heritage. Such documents as the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution demonstrate its political origins, and the philosophical and legislative efforts of such men as Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Wilson, and Roosevelt have contributed to its legacy. In the rough "one man, one vote" egalitarianism of the frontier can be found the origins of social democracy. These origins have been described by Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Sandburg, and many others. Although the sources of the American democratic ideal are diverse, together they provide the basis for a democratic education. While such diversity makes precise definition difficult, it facilitates pluralistic freedom. Although they may disagree on specific social, political, religious, and economic programs, the vast majority of Americans share a general commitment to the democratic ethic and process—the idea of political and legal equality for all citizens. Subscribing to the principles of freedom of speech, press, assembly, and worship, they believe that their elected representatives can best achieve the common good through the democratic methods of discussion, debate, deliberation, and decision. Because they believe that an in-

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formed citizenry is necessary for the functioning of both the ethic and the method, they have made education the right of every American child. Equality of educational opportunity is not only a political necessity; it is also essential for intellectual, social, political, and economic opportunity.

Despite the theoretical commitment of most Americans to the democratic ethic, they have not always applied it practically. There have been and continue to be occasions when racial, religious, social, and economic discrimination have deprived Americans of their guaranteed rights. Some people have disregarded the democratic methodology and resorted to violence. Not all American children have enjoyed equal educational opportunity, either. In this area too, discrepancies exist between theory and practice, but Americans have become increasingly aware of these discrepancies and are attempting to put democratic theory into action. As public education strives to fulfill the promise of equal educational opportunity for all children, it fulfills its commitment to the democratic ethic.

As part of its task of selection, the school tries to balance the students' environment by choosing elements of the culture most likely to produce integrated individuals within an integrated society. An integrated society is not necessarily a monolith characterized by a common level of conformity, but is rather a harmonious blend of divergent elements in a unified social fabric. For example, the United States has been termed a nation of immigrants of various ethnic and religious persuasions. Although they share a common commitment to the democratic process, American citizens enjoy a wide range of political, social, and religious beliefs. A democratic society may include many forms of pluralism and at the same time conform to basic ethical and methodological precepts that serve as an integrative value system. The school communicates these values in a graduated environment by selecting cultural elements, skills, and knowledge according to the maturity level of the learner.²

Education as Past, Present, and Future

In the foregoing discussion, the conservative and reconstructive functions of the school as a social agency have been suggested. It is also clear, however, that, as a social enterprise, education does not occur in a vacuum. It is a dynamic and on-going experience which has its roots in the past, but which also actively affects the present situation and influences the future as each new generation is educated. If the course of education in America were plotted on a continuum of past, present, and future, the function of educational history could be more clearly indicated. First, the

² For a philosophic discussion of the specialized function of the school see John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916).

problems of education today have grown out of the past and are intimately connected with it. In order to understand contemporary issues, the student of professional education must be aware of how they developed. Instead of anchoring himself securely in the safety of finished events, he should use the past as a means of interpreting the present and as an instrument for shaping the future. Second, a total program of teacher education must concern itself with current problems. It is necessary for the education student to examine contemporary philosophies, social views, theories, methods, curricula, organization, psychology, and administration, since these are the working tools of the educational practitioner and theorist. Third, the educational experience is a means of controlling the course of future events. Educators must think in terms of the future in order to prepare society to cope with whatever events and issues may develop to affect it. Both the educational leader and the student must take all three of these elements into consideration. The history of American education presented here is intended only as an introductory foray into the first area in the continuum. It is designed to prepare the student for a more mature examination of the other two areas of the continuum and to serve as his point of departure for more intensive study of American education.

The viewpoint taken in this work is opposed to what might be called the "four walls philosophy" of the school. Some educators have continued to view education as a process that goes on inside a school, apart from the social order of which it is an intimate part. The "four walls philosophy" is narrowly confined to the mechanics of education—buildings, books, desks, blackboards, audio-visual aids—to the point that it neglects the substance of education as it is supplied and sustained by the culture. This is not to say that the materials and technologies connected with the educational enterprise are unimportant; they are indeed, but only as instruments and tools which will advance the purposes of education, not as ends in themselves.

The history of American education is a valuable tool in assessing this culture for its influence on the course of education, and education for its influence on the course of the culture. In *Experience and Education* John Dewey discusses the close relationship between the issues and problems of contemporary life and the past:

. . . the achievements of the past provide the only means at command [sic] for understanding the present. Just as the individual has to draw in memory upon his own past to understand the conditions in which he individually finds himself, so the issues and problems of present social life are in such intimate and direct connection with the past that students cannot be prepared to understand either these problems or the best way

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of dealing with them without delving into their roots in the past. In other words, the sound principle that the objectives of learning are in the future and its immediate materials are in present experience can be carried into effect only in the degree that present experience is stretched, as it were, backward. It can expand into the future only as it is also enlarged to take in the past.³

Dewey warns against taking a myopic view of the present that would ignore the context of past experience. If present problems are to be solved through action based on intelligent reflection, then the reconstruction of experience requires a survey of conditions already existing. These conditions are products of the past. According to Dewey:

The institutions and customs that exist in the present and that gave rise to present social ills and dislocations did not arise overnight. They have a long history behind them. Attempts to deal with them simply on the basis of what is obvious in the present is bound to result in adoption of superficial measures which in the end will only render existing problems more acute and more difficult to solve.⁴

Education as Change

The American historical experience has been characterized by profound changes which have transformed the original simple, rural, agrarian social order into a highly complex, urban, and industrialized technological civilization. The ramifications of this transformation have affected all facets of American life—religious, economic, social, political. In fact, it has been a continuing process, one that is still producing great changes in our life. As part of the fluid social order the schools, too, have been profoundly affected. In the same way that a static and stratified society is alien to the American tradition, the idea of a rigid, closed school system and curriculum is also alien to the American educational experience. Mechanical invention and scientific discoveries of the twentieth century have not only produced technological change but have also had a social impact. For example, the invention and mass production of the automobile has facilitated travel, reduced geographical isolation, and contributed to a more mobile society. The discovery and harnessing of atomic energy not only poses scientific and technological problems, but raises crucial ethical issues on which may hinge man's very survival on this planet. To meet these new challenges, American teachers must be aware of the full impli-

³ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 93. Originally published in 1938. Copyright by Kappa Delta Pi, an honor society in education. Reprinted by permission of Kappa Delta Pi.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

cations of the inter-relationship of technological and social change, and of the impact of change upon educational patterns. As members of a mobile society, teachers must be willing to experiment, to seek more effective methods of education. To adequately introduce the immature generation to participation in society means that the educational profession must not be content to educate for the current condition of society; it must also be concerned with how that society will be and should be in the future. In practical terms, this means that the education of teachers, too, is never finished, never completed, but is a continually active process.

In the past, some educators have been concerned only with the difficulties of transmitting a cultural heritage as if that heritage had been fully developed. While this is one function of a teacher, it is only half of his task. Too often, teachers have introduced young people to a way of life that has already become obsolete because the curriculum of the schools has lagged behind people's real needs.

The changes wrought by technology are constantly confronting the teacher and the educational profession. Racial and social integration, survival in a nuclear age, massive poverty, functional illiteracy, and worthy use of leisure time are only a few of the complex problems they must deal with in the crucial decades ahead.

EDUCATION AS A PERSONAL FUNCTION

Thus far we have been concerned with the social aspects of education and its specialized agency, the school. However, at a time when society's emphasis is on the mass, it is important to remember that the business of education is always with the individual: the specific child, man or woman being educated. Although it is a socializing process, education remains fundamentally a unique, individualized, and personal matter. When education is considered as a process of induction into society, it is clear that individualization and socialization need to be properly balanced.

As the immature member of the group or society masters the cultural tools of reading and writing, he attains the freedom to participate and make decisions within the social framework. As he acquires more sophisticated skills and knowledge he continually increases both his framework of decision-making and the freedom to exercise it. As a participant in the group process, his freedom is thereby increased. Thus the process of participation is one of a reciprocal relationship between an individual and society.

However, it denies individual personality to insist upon the same kind and degree of socialization from everyone. Each man is different, a unique

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individual. Education should be a personal instrument by which he fulfills his own possibilities. At the same time it should aid him to estimate and achieve self-determination and self-realization.

In order that teachers may better evaluate the development of their profession, it is necessary to examine the American educational experience in terms of its strengths and weaknesses over time. Further, since most problems of any kind tend to be rooted in past experience, it is necessary for us to study its history as a part of the process of solving the problems now facing American schools. The following survey of the history of education in America is intended to provide a better understanding of our educational system today by presenting its history, development, structure, and problems.

PLAN OF THE WORK

In this study of the history of education in America I have deliberately focused attention on its origins and institutional development, the rise of educational methodology, and pressing problem areas. The book first describes American education during the colonial and revolutionary periods, and then traces the evolution of the common school, the high school, and the college, and the growth of teacher education. Education as a process or methodology is discussed in relation to the European reformers Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Herbart. John Dewey's experimentalism and the progressive movement are treated as a unique American contribution to education. From among the myriad conflicts facing American education today, the problem of racial integration has been selected for historical treatment.

Following the descriptive analysis in each chapter, source readings have been appended so that the reader may examine the significant primary material for himself. It is hoped that these documents may offer greater insight into the particular historical development being discussed. At the conclusion of each chapter, further selected references are listed as sources for reading and study.

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- COUNTS, GEORGE S. *Education and American Civilization*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952.
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The Colonial Educational Experience

INTRODUCTION

The history of American education begins with the efforts of the English colonials to recreate in the New World the school system they had known before. When a school is established, it is a clear indication that the group sponsoring the school means to perpetuate itself by providing its children in a systematized way with the knowledge and values it deems necessary for survival. The colonists' schools thus reflected their desire to stay and conquer the wilderness.

The patterns of settlement in North America varied according to geographical, climatic, and topographical conditions. Along with these diverse patterns, variations also followed in the life style of the different colonial regions. New England in its Puritan conformity, the Middle Atlantic colonies in their pluralism, and the South in its plantations, all reflected the tendency to develop unique characteristics, as the common English experience was altered by the American environment. The variations in educational processes and institutions which began to mark these regions of settlement likewise reflected the imprint of the new environment.

Colonial education was influenced greatly by the cultural heritage that the colonists brought with them from Europe. To understand their ideas about education, it is necessary to examine some of the precedents that existed in Europe. The Renaissance humanism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries stressed the classical forms and tradition and the Greek and Latin languages as marks of the educated man. Linked with this classical humanism was a strong concern with religion, which was part of the