



SEYMOUR B. SARASON

**THE
CASE
FOR
CHANGE**



**RETHINKING
THE PREPARATION
OF EDUCATORS**

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of Educators**



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Preface

Schools of education have always had their critics. Some of these critics have taken delight in exposing the foibles, fallacies, fads, and fashions of schools of education—all for the purpose of demonstrating that these schools attract students who, having been symbolically “injured” at birth with a low IQ, then unknowingly suffer the insult of being subjected to an indoctrination by a faculty incapable of logical thinking, of feeling at home with a complex idea, or of running against the tides of convention. Although I understand the frustration of these critics, I cannot agree with what I have concluded is the basic point, the action point, of their diverse criticisms: throw one set of rascals out, put in the “right” kind of people, and all good things will follow. It is neither that simple nor historically defensible. The most damning critics have come from other parts of the university (for example, arts and sciences) that now or in the past would have absolutely nothing to do with the field of education. So when these critics vent their spleen at these schools of education, especially their preparatory programs, it does not necessarily mean that their criticisms are invalid, but it does mean that the critics and their fields have been and still are part of the problem and not the solution. At the very least, they are amazingly, unforgivably, and scandalously ahistorical.

I have been a psychologist for over fifty years—when you say more than half a century it seems longer. Except for four of those years, I have been in and around universities, prestigious or otherwise. My experience may be atypical, my perceptiveness may be limited, my sympathy for the underdog too

intrusive and distorting. With those caveats, I have to say that when I compare the personnel of schools of education with those in other parts of the university, I see little difference between them in the way wisdom, denseness, imaginativeness, arrogance, and intellectual flexibility, curiosity, or rigidity are distributed. If there is a difference, it is not one that makes a difference. That conclusion flies in the face of conventional academic wisdom. But if I restrict that conclusion to how these other fields have understood the substance and context of education problems and processes, the critics betray a degree of ignorance and bias no less than that of those they criticize. I do not say this from any stance of superiority. It took me years, in and around schools, to appreciate how complex the problems are and how they still bear the imprint of a long national and institutional history. One thing I have learned: the problems we deal with were not “willed,” nor was the response to those problems solely or even primarily a kind of conspiracy of educators intent on foisting on an unsuspecting public strange, wrong, or subversive ideas. Educators have played their parts, but there have been many other actors on the societal stage. If you like to play the game of blame assignment, few fields will keep you as occupied as education.

I am no less critical of preparatory programs for educators than the most splenetic critics. But mine is not an *ad hominem* critique, and it is not one that in any way suggests that improvement in these programs can be achieved by add-ons, new courses, or any other form of remedial cosmetics. Unlike almost all critics, save John Goodlad, what I advocate is a complete *conceptual* redesigning of preparatory programs. We have had a surfeit of recommendations from task forces and commissions about the crisis in education, and in each of these reports there is a sentence or so (rarely more than that) that says we need “better-trained” teachers. Nothing is said about administrators, even though one of the obvious features of the school culture is the adversarial relationship between teachers and administrators.

And what is obvious? Let me mention but four such points here. The first is that preparatory programs very inadequately

prepare educators (teachers *and* administrators) for what life is like in classrooms, schools, and school systems—a point long apparent to educators. The second is that as long as efforts at educational change focus on the repair of existing problems and for all practical purposes ignore primary prevention, the need for repair will *increase*. The third is that preparatory programs, far from being based on a primary prevention orientation, unwittingly contribute to the manufacture of problems. And the fourth is that we have been both unable and unwilling to confront and accept the fact that primary prevention courses of action require a long-term perspective, that is, they have none of the politically sexy attractiveness of quick fixes. There is really a fifth obvious point, obvious to educators but not publicly expressed: however morally and politically justifiable, the repair effort is doomed to disappoint us. That, I hasten to add, is no justification for giving up on repair—you don't turn your back on pressing problems about which you must do something—but it is justification to look to whatever you can do to prevent the incidence of problems. That is why this book looks at preparatory programs for educators. You start where you can, where your experience has led you, even though you know you are dealing with part of a horribly complicated drama. I can assure the reader that I know that what I deal with is only part of the problem. At the very least, I hope this book puts some conceptual flesh on the bones of the cliché that we need better-trained educators.

What I have to say in this book rests on two related assumptions. The first is that we should prevent in students the intellectual viruses of low motivation, a lack of intellectual curiosity, a devaluing of the life of the mind, boredom with subject matter, and the attitude that there are two distinctly different worlds: that which is inside of schools and that which is the “real” one outside of schools. That is putting it negatively. Put positively, it is our obligation to nurture and support in students their ever present curiosity and desire to understand themselves and the world they live in. You can count on that curiosity and desire. Our task is to recognize, harness, and exploit those characteristics. The second and related assumption is that unless the

conditions exist wherein the educators of these students can experience a sense of learning, growth, and personal and intellectual change for themselves, they cannot create and sustain those conditions for their students. Those conditions do not now exist for educators. What we now have are conditions inimical to both assumptions or goals. Musicians say that the Beethoven violin concerto is not for but against the violin. Schools today are against, not for, productive learning on the part of students *and* educators. Students begin their schooling, and educators enter their profession, eager to learn, to absorb, to "grow up," to make a difference, to feel worthy and respected, not passively to await a future but to reach for it. Rarely does it work out for them as they hoped. And if we do not face up to those disappointments, I am forced to this prediction: the maxim that says the more things change, the more they remain the same will be invalidated. Things will get worse.

Acknowledgments

I take personal pleasure in acknowledging the aid, encouragement, and friendship of Ed Meyer in the writing of this book. He has had several careers, one of which was as a high school teacher of science. He has been dubbed the Minister for Responsible Disturbance, an apt title for someone unable to suffer fools gladly, never in awe of those who in proclaiming educational policy betray their ignorance of what life is like in our schools and who indulge the tendency to blame the victims: students *and* educational personnel. And, of course, I shall always be grateful to Lisa Pagliaro for her graciousness, efficiency, and strange ability to read my handwriting. I thank God for big favors.

*New Haven, Connecticut
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The Author

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Sarason is the author of numerous books and articles. His more recent books include *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform: Can We Change Course Before It's Too Late?* (1990), *The Challenge of Art to Psychology* (1990), *The Making of an American Psychologist: An Autobiography* (1988), and *Caring and Compassion in Clinical Practice: Issues in the Selection, Training, and Behavior of Helping Professionals* (1985). He has made contributions in such fields as mental retardation, culture and personality, projective techniques, teacher training, the school culture, and anxiety in children.

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Chapter One

A Litany of Inadequacies

Years ago some obviously wise person said that the most important decision you have to make when you decide to write a book is what you are *not* going to write about. If I had any doubts about that advice, they were dispelled when I started to think about this book. Decisive in that agonizing awareness was a casual suggestion my friend Bruce Thomas made that I “might” want to look at *The Story of the Eight-Year Study with Conclusions and Recommendations* (Aikin, 1942), which was written under the aegis of the Commission on the Relation of School and College, a creation of the Progressive Education Association in 1930. The commission’s focus was on secondary education. And what were the inadequacies of high schools as seen earlier in the twentieth century?

1. Secondary education in the United States did not have clear-cut, definite, central purposes.
2. Schools failed to give students a sincere appreciation of their heritage as American citizens.
3. Our schools did not adequately prepare students for the responsibilities of community life.
4. The high school seldom challenged the student of first-rate ability to work up to the level of his or her intellectual powers.
5. Schools neither knew their students well nor guided them wisely.
6. Schools failed to create conditions necessary for effective learning.

7. The creative energies of students were seldom released and developed.
8. The conventional high school curriculum was far removed from the real concerns of youth.
9. The traditional subjects of the curriculum had lost much of their vitality and significance. "The purposes they should serve were seldom realized even in the lives of students of distinguished native ability" (Aikin, 1942, p. 7).
10. Most high school graduates were not competent in the use of the English language.
11. There was little evidence of unity in the work of the typical high school.
12. The absence of unity in the work of the secondary school was almost matched by the lack of continuity.
13. Complacency characterized high schools generally.
14. Only here and there did one find principals who conceived of their work in terms of democratic leadership for the community, teachers, and students.
15. Principals and teachers labored earnestly, often sacrificially, but usually without any comprehensive evaluation of the results of their work.
16. The high school diploma meant only that the student had done whatever was necessary to accumulate the required number of units.
17. The relationship between school and college was unsatisfactory to both institutions.

Apparently, the arena of education does not look very different to the critics of today. If the commission had done no more than give us a litany of inadequacies, its report deserved the amnesia that was its fate, but it went far beyond such a litany. It outlined, developed, and implemented the most ambitious, well-described, honest, carefully researched study of *institutional change* ever done in education. I know that is quite a statement. I entreat the reader to scrutinize the study's methods, findings, and conclusions. I doubt that anyone who reads the report will fail to ask: why has that study gone unrecognized, unutilized, and undiscussed?

So what do I do? Summarize that report? I was tempted to do that but it would not be directly relevant to my major purpose: to rethink the preparation of educators.¹ So I shall not fully elaborate on it. It is not surprising that I latched on to the following two statements from the report:

Teachers were not well equipped for their responsibilities. They lacked full knowledge of the nature of youth—of physical, intellectual, and emotional drives and growth. They understood little of the conditions essential to effective learning. Relation of the school to the society it should serve was only dimly perceived. Democracy was taken for granted, but teachers seldom had any clear conception of democracy as a way of living which should characterize the whole life of the school. Very few were capable of leading youth into an understanding of democracy and its problems, for they themselves did not understand [Aikin, 1942, p. 9].

It was in no spirit of sweeping condemnation that the members of the Commission viewed the work of the secondary school in the United States. Their criticism was not so much of others as of themselves. They realized that many shortcomings were due to the amazing growth of our schools, *to the necessity of employing inadequately prepared teachers*, and to lack of time

¹I have been unable to determine why the *Story of the Eight-Year Study* did not have an impact and has gone unrecognized. Almost all of the individuals who oversaw that study have long since died. The most likely explanation is that the study was published not long after we entered World War II, a time when the attention of everyone was far from the arena of public education. Having lived through those war years I should remind the reader that for the first two years of the war it was not at all clear that we could defeat the German, Italian, and Japanese military machines. Indeed, the manpower needs of our military appeared to be of such a large scale that it seemed as if many colleges might have to close their doors. It was not a time conducive to debate about school reform.

to adjust the work of the school to new responsibilities. But understanding of the conditions which produced weaknesses in our schools did not lessen the Commission's conviction that earnest attempts to remove them should be made at once. The co-operation of more than 300 colleges and universities was sought and secured in 1932 [pp. 11-12, *italics mine*].

Those statements contain, explicitly and implicitly, my justification for writing this book. As these extracts clearly show, the commission understood well that the process of *repairing* our secondary schools would have been far easier if the preparation of educators (teachers *and* administrators) had been more adequate to the realities of schools and their problems. That is to say, more realistic preparatory programs for educators could serve the goal of *preventing* problems.

I have five major goals in this book. The first is to persuade the reader that the repair of existing problems, however necessary and morally justified, can no longer be at the expense of efforts at primary prevention, that is, a reduction in the incidence of new cases with a particular problem in a particular cohort. The repair effort deals with problems that already exist and the prevalence of which has been more or less determined. The preventive effort seeks to lower the incidence of new cases having those problems, thus reducing the need for repair. If the repair effort needs no justification, the fact remains that such an effort is not only horribly complicated but very problematic in outcome. The track record of the repair of our schools is not encouraging. In fact, it is on the dismal side, which is why *The Story of the Eight-Year Study* is so refreshing and important. This is not to say that the preventive effort is anything resembling a simple, nonproblematic affair. When the Salk vaccine to prevent polio became available, no one had to convince the general public to have their children inoculated. In regard to the prevention of many educational problems, we cannot count on such willing compliance and support. The daily problems educators must deal with leave them too overwhelmed to give serious thought to prevention. And there has been little educational

leadership to inform the general public about the whys and wherefores of prevention. At the same time that no one denies the need for prevention—to do so would be like favoring sin over virtue—the reality is that almost all of our thinking, actions, and funding have gone into repair.

The second of my goals is to convince the reader that one way, and it is only one way, to take prevention seriously is to confront the inadequacies of preparatory programs for educators. If, as John Goodlad has said, we need completely to redesign preparatory programs, it is because such redesigning would better prepare educators to prevent as well as to repair *some* of our most thorny problems. Such redesigning is no panacea; it is not the universal solvent for all of our problems. It is one way to take action, a way most educators in their heart of hearts have acknowledged privately to be very important. We do not lack for problems that should be prevented. Nothing in the pages that follow should be interpreted as suggesting that if we redesign these programs the gray, threatening clouds will disappear, the sun will shine, and all will be well. I do not expect readers to agree with some of my specific suggestions. I can assure them that I in no way harbor the thought that I have cornered the market on wisdom or truth. If I am realistically modest on that score, I am nevertheless certain that as long as preparatory programs remain as they are, cosmetically adding this or that course or this or that requirement, or continuing to confuse ends and means, change with innovation, our schools will always require an increase in efforts at repair.

The third goal is to help the reader understand that in redesigning preparatory programs we seek to prevent problems in students *and* teachers. As long as teachers are viewing themselves as powerless as well as intellectually and personally alone and lonely, lacking the feelings associated with productive learning and growth, plagued with feelings of guilt because they do not know how to be helpful to many of their students, angered by the knowledge that they count for little or nothing in decision-making and policy matters, aware that they are settling into a routine that is the enemy of change, content to survive, and fearful of new ideas—if the incidence and strength of these and

other feelings and attitudes remain as they are, there is no basis whatsoever to expect that student outcomes will generally improve. What happens to teachers—emotionally, intellectually, and socially—very much affects how children experience classrooms and learning. And if what happens to teachers when they become independent professionals is untoward in its consequences, it is to a large extent a result of preparatory programs unconnected to the real world of classrooms, schools, and school systems. The adversarial relationship between teachers and administrators is not unrelated to the nonexistence of overlap between preparatory programs of these two groups. Why should they understand and appreciate each other? Why should they be able to work together to their mutual advantages? If, as I have, the reader scrutinizes the plethora of reports—from presidential commissions, state commissions, foundation task forces—he or she will not quarrel with two conclusions: little or nothing is said about how administrators need to change, and whatever is said about preparatory programs is superficial in the extreme, and superficial is a charitable adjective to describe these reports. But that is what happens when we look at the problems almost exclusively in the framework of repair. Where and how were these professionals prepared? You do not have to be especially wise to conclude that some of the problems that plague our schools have to reflect some of the limitations of preparatory programs.

The fourth major goal of the book is to help the reader understand that efforts at primary prevention will not bear fruit except over a long period of time.² That has been, and may continue to be, the kiss of death to the preventive orientation. Today we use the phrase *quick fix* as a pejorative, that is, a short-

²I ask the reader to keep in mind that when I use the word prevention, I mean more than the prevention of pathology. A colleague of mine, Elizabeth Lorentz, to whom this book is dedicated, put it well: "We have to unimprison ourselves from the medical way of thinking about prevention: the prevention of a particular pathology. Let us not forget that no less important, and ultimately more important, is prevention as the *promotion* of health. And let us remember that when we talk about deficits we refer not only to an inadequacy in performance of some kind but, more frequently, to a *lack* of information, opportunity, or motivation" (personal communication).