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On The Politics of Change

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Reforming Teacher Education
Albert Shanker

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Many people working in public education did not exactly welcome the wave of school reform that began three years ago. They had grown accustomed to periodic attacks in newspapers, magazines, and on television alleging all sorts of shortcomings in their performance and in the institutions that they worked for. When the reports appeared, their first impulse was to start fighting back, by pointing to the inaccuracies and exaggerations that many contained. That was my first inclination as well. There was a great deal in the reports that one could honestly take issue with, although there was also much that was right on the mark.

Fortunately, a number of us resisted our first impulse and didn't immediately engage in a vitriolic debate. Instead, we began a serious assessment of the state of our schools. Public education in this country was in pretty serious trouble. For most of our history, the public schools were held in high regard. They were viewed as a means of providing opportunity for wave after wave of immigrants. Public education had been an inspiring success story. But now we had reached a point in our society where our teachers were not much more educated than the large mass of citizens.

Polls showed that throughout the 1970s more and more people were giving the schools lower and lower grades. The schools had less and less of a political constituency because, aside from the people who work in the schools, it's the direct "customers," the mothers and fathers of the students, who are most involved. Although every citizen should be concerned, what actually happens is that people who have children are more directly interested. Regardless of the social consequences, it's all too easy to become apathetic about other people's children. We went, in a short period of time, from a society that had up to 55% or 60% of the voting population in some communities with children in the schools (a powerful constituency for any politician) down to the current level of about 22%.

In addition, in the late '70s and early '80s, our society moved to other agendas--reindustrialization, rebuilding our infrastructure and defense capabilities at a time when we had a stagnant economy. Therefore, it was pretty clear that our schools were going to be squeezed out with this other set of priorities. At this time, tuition tax credits and vouchers gained great popularity, not exclusively among those groups who wanted tuition for the children they were sending to private schools. Recent polls over the last six years show that about 50% of the American population have in effect given up on the public schools as the major delivery system. "The schools are too rigid; they're too bureaucratic," they say. "They're not successful enough. Why not create competition in a market system? Why not give parents the right to pull their children out of public school?"

With all their criticism, the reform reports are in essential agreement on giving our public schools the opportunity to "re-tool." Each of the 30 reports prepared by commissions made up of top business and political leaders in this country rejected either implicitly or explicitly the option that private schools are an alternative to public education. They all talked about strengthening public education, even the commission appointed by the Reagan administration, which is committed to vouchers and tax credits. All this was a plus.

Another plus was that for the first time members of the business community in this country, at least those involved in preparing the reports, have come to realize that an investment in people is just as important as rebuilding industry or rebuilding the infrastructure. These committees, who have generally fought to keep taxes down, still want them kept down. But they have come to recognize that an investment in education pays off on the bottom line.

This conviction has been translated into action. In California, the Business Round Table came up with a reform plan with a two-year price tag of \$2.6 billion and sent it to the newly elected governor, Deukmajian; and they used their muscle to get it through.

H. Ross Perot, hardly a flaming liberal, chaired a special education committee for Governor Mark White in Texas and managed to get \$2.8 billion of his proposed \$5 billion increase into the state education budget. Before the recent downturn in the Texas economy, Perot once said to me, "Do you know how I got into this? I realized why this state is in such good shape. Oil! But we don't have that much compared to other places in the world. It's going to run out one day, and we don't know if the price is going to stay high. If we just keep living off this oil and don't do something smart, as soon as that oil gives out we'll be back to picking cotton. And we're going to be one of the poorest states in America. There's only one way we can invest money in this state and have some reasonable assurance that we'll have a decent economy, and that's to invest in people, invest in talent that will attract business and industry."

This conviction has gained strength across the country. There has been some additional investment and some additional support for public education by the business community. But the changes brought about, minimum standards for teachers, testing for students and a more defined curriculum, are mainly efforts to get rid of some of the excesses of the 1960s. And, I'm somewhat amused by the kinds of laws passed in state after state, some running to 150 pages, telling teachers how many minutes to teach a particular subject or mandating what text or test to use. Such laws, if passed for business, would be called over-regulation, but in education they're called reform.

Teacher Supply

Since many local education agencies did not do the job themselves, unfortunately, they did have to be reformed. Now there's a growing awareness that the whole education reform movement is about to be threatened by what is about to happen with the supply of teachers. In the next seven years, American will lose one half of the public school teachers in the country--1.1 million out of 2.2 million will leave. We do not have the usual sources of supply the schools of this country were staffed with in the past. They once had the benefit of many outstanding people who went into teaching because of the great depression of the 1930s. At the time, because of high levels of unemployment, our schools could pick almost anybody that they wanted. Most of those people are now retired. Later, the schools could choose from among many capable men who chose to serve in our urban schools, for a draft exemption, rather than in Korea or Vietnam. But the draft is gone, and we no longer get those men. Then, of course, the schools were once staffed with large numbers of women and other minorities who had other doors closed to them. But with the expansion of other opportunities--in finance, medicine, law, for example--the number of women entering teaching in recent years has plummeted.

This is wonderful for women, a great example of the rich opportunity of American society, but it's a disaster for education, denying our schools a once deep reservoir of talent. The figures graphically illustrate how teaching has declined as a profession of choice. In 1973, 24% of college undergraduates said that they wanted to be teachers. In 1983, the figure had declined to 4.5%. Last year, even with all the reform initiative, the figure went up to only 6% and all too many of those are heavily clustered in the bottom quartile of their classes, on SAT results, and on all other indicators.

You can see vivid evidence of the decline in quality in California and Florida where from 30% to 45% of the candidates couldn't get a passing grade on a 6th grade arithmetic entry level exam for teachers. And not long ago the City of Baltimore gave its new teachers a basic competency test in literacy and numerical skills. About 35% failed, but when the opening of school came around, those applicants who failed received telegrams asking them to report for duty immediately because there was a shortage of teachers. And these newly appointed teachers, who instruct young people during the day, are required to go to school at night to learn to read and write. The education authorities in Texas must see the handwriting on the wall, because they have already issued a directive explaining how it's

possible to retain a teacher who fails the state-wide examination, if no replacement is available.

What we've had so far in the school reform movement is a substantially increased investment in education on the part of the states (but not by the federal government whose contribution has declined). We've had a substantial increase in investment and in interest by the business community around the country. But, along with these positive developments, we are probably about to embark on the disastrous course of spending a great deal more money for teachers far poorer than those who now staff our schools. What this will certainly mean is that schools will resort to systems of management that will have the effect of undermining the morale of the more able people and drive them out of the profession. Inevitably, hiring people with marginal competence demands more and more supervision. You have to keep an eye on those whose ability is suspect. But in our public schools you can't just watch those you think are incompetent. That would be discriminatory, particularly where you have a good union. Management has to look at everyone very carefully, and when you do that, you start driving out those better people who feel they can exercise judgment and don't have to be watched.

This, in turn, will set the stage for a violent backlash against the reform movement. A sharp decline in teacher effectiveness will send a clear message to taxpayers about the futility of all the states' initiatives--salary increases, career ladders, new rules and regulations. This backlash will most likely lead to greater support for vouchers and tuition tax credits for private education.

Teacher Recruitment

Some simple arithmetic shows the magnitude of the recruiting problem that our schools face. Simply to replace the teachers who will be leaving, our schools will need to hire 24% of all the college graduates in the country in the next 10 years. Let's assume that, since we want quality personnel, we're not going to draw from the bottom quartile, but will only consider candidates from the top half of each class. Now this is not a lofty standard when you mix quality of college graduates and the singular importance of the teaching profession. But is it reasonable for a society like ours to say that one-half of the talent in the top half of our colleges will be devoted to one industry? Don't we also need people in other professions and occupations? Do we really think that that share of the talent in our country will go into the public elementary and secondary schools?

Whenever there's talk about the problems of teacher recruitment, you're bound to hear some old, familiar slogans. But what might have made sense back then can seem rather foolish in the light of current realities. Some of these time-honored battle cries are very simple and certainly have kernels of truth in them.

To some observers, the solution to a teacher shortage is simple. You have to have salaries that are substantially greater than they are now and that are competitive with other professions. It's a cut and dry problem of the marketplace. You set your standards and pay what you have to to get the talent you want. But when you think about what this will cost in a mass industry of 2.2 million people, you will begin to get an idea of just how difficult it will be to implement. The average salary of teachers around the country now is around \$24,000. A \$1,000 salary increase for each teacher would cost \$2.2 billion, not counting social security and other fringe benefits. Obviously \$1,000, while it would probably be welcomed by everybody, wouldn't do much to change the market. Probably you would have to offer a 50% increase, to about \$35,000, to get the talent that now goes into other fields. Then other employers will raise salaries to keep the people they have. So, if you want to get any shift in the schools' share of talent, you will have to do something dramatic. The tab for that will be about \$30 billion, without fringe costs. It's not very likely to happen. And even if you did all that, you still wouldn't get people in math and science, because they hardly exist, and the private industries who need the few

available will just meet the market price and up the salary ante in those areas, so even a vast expenditure will solve only some of our schools' recruitment problems.

Another difficulty has to do with the whole question of the intrinsic satisfaction a teacher receives. Most people didn't go into teaching because they thought they were going to get rich. They knew what it was like, and they went into teaching because perhaps they had had some outstanding teacher and they wanted to do for children what someone had done for them. Good teachers know that education is not getting kids to do well on a multiple choice test. What they're trying to do is to get their students to be able to write, express themselves, weigh alternatives, exercise judgment, to persuade, to not just be able to choose A, B or C on examination.

How does one get children to develop these skills? TheodoreSizer puts it quite well in *Horace's Compromise*. Students need to do a lot of writing and have frequent practice in organizing their thoughts, but this means that the teacher has to spend time reading many essays and coaching each student, talking to Johnny about whether what he wrote is the best way to express his thoughts and whether his second point logically follows his first. By this constant coaching, a student does eventually get to develop these skills. But can you do this if you're a secondary school teacher with 30 students in a class, five classes a day--150 students? If it takes you 10 minutes to mark the paper and discuss it with the student, you have 25 hours for one set of papers. If you don't do it, you know you're not doing your job and you get no satisfaction. If you do do it, you're driving yourself beyond any point that's realistic.

Another popular recruitment slogan is: "Let's improve working conditions! Reduce class size." If we cut registration by 20%, we won't have 30 students per class--we'll have 24--and, instead of taking 25 hours, grading one class set of compositions will take only 20 hours. Life will be wonderful for teachers! If you're going to reduce class size by 20%, you'll need more teachers. But there's a shortage of teachers, and if you have a shortage, you have to hire more teachers. Guess which teachers you're going to hire. You have to dig deeper and lower into the talent barrel. The more you hire, the lower you're going to go. Therefore, to improve working conditions even marginally, you're going to bring in more people who are not really qualified to be teachers.

I haven't even begun to discuss the money required for this rather modest reform, which offers little relief for teachers. So, reducing class size, though it's still a great slogan, really doesn't do much to alter the overall picture.

A third popular slogan addresses the problem of ending teacher isolation and promoting collegial relationships. Being locked up in a room with only children for almost all of your working life is not exactly the sort of thing that a sane adult would want to do. And the truth is that vast numbers don't. In every city I visit, I hear someone call to me, "Hi, Al." I turn around to see if I recognize the face. Usually the person says, "You don't know me, but I used to be a teacher." After a while, it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to quit as President of the American Federation of Teachers and start an organization that had the possibility of being ten times as large--The American Federation of Ex-Teachers.

The fact is that we don't have vast numbers of ex-doctors, or ex-lawyers, or ex-engineers, or ex-most-other-professions. So why are there so many former teachers? Substandard salaries and over-sized classes are part of the answer. But the narrowness of the teacher's world denies the possibility of satisfying exchanges with other adults and the sense that one is part of a thoughtful community of professionals. Again, the solution is simple. Decrease the teaching load, four periods a day instead of five, for example. But how many teachers would we have to hire to do this? We will need 1.1 million just to maintain current staff levels, and we're not likely to get those. So, if we attempt to reduce class size, we won't need 1.1 million, we'll need 1.4 million. And if we want to reduce the teaching periods, we won't need 1.4 million, we'll need 1.7 million. So, we'll get to the point where we won't need 24% of college graduates, we'll need 35%, 36%, or 37%.

These are not outlandish or unrepresentative figures. This is essentially the premise on which arguments of the Carnegie Report *A Nation Prepared*, are based. It all seems hopeless. Let's forget about it. We can lie to teachers, repeat the old slogans about salaries and working conditions and make them believe that things are going to get better and know they're not. Or we can wait for things to get worse and keep our fingers crossed.

The Structure of the Schools

What about the students' side of the story? This is a very important perspective and one that's often ignored in most discussions of education reform. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we put all of the recommendations of the last three years into effect. What would the schools look like? Schools would look like what they were in 1945. We would test teachers, get the kids to take required courses and deny them diplomas if they didn't measure up to rigorous standards. Back in 1945, 75% of the students dropped out of school, and it wasn't considered a disaster. A high school dropout could always work in an auto plant and make more than a teacher. But the job market has changed, and now a 25% dropout rate is a disaster.

If all the traditional reforms took hold, we would still face not only the problem of recruiting and retaining sufficient teachers, but also the problem of engaging large numbers of students we now lose. John Goodlad (1984) has described very well the fact that teachers spend about 85% of their time lecturing to kids and imparting information, a method that is simply ineffective for many students.

I don't think that any person in his right mind would organize an institution in which kids come at nine in the morning and sit still until three in the afternoon and listen to someone lecture; and no intelligent adult would want to be in the room with kids for that time. When you have so many students in a class, you're not really talking to the whole group. Some already know what you've said, they're bored; another third are lost and they're nowhere near you. It's a very inefficient system. Besides, we now have video cassettes, slides, films, audio cassettes and computers and all sorts of other educational tools. What makes us assume that a lecture by a teacher about how Indians or Eskimos live in Alaska is necessarily more effective than a series of other experiences that are now easily and cheaply available?

Example: a child comes to school when it opens in September. Like many other human beings, knowing that the "payoff" isn't until next June, when the report card comes, he delays getting down to serious work. After all, the day of judgment is a long way down the road, and he has plenty of catch-up time. A lot of kids do that and, by the time they get to mid-October, they find that they're hopelessly behind. So what is the rational thing to do if you're hopelessly behind in October or November? The rational thing to do is to drop out, one way or another. Why sit there if you don't know what's going on and when you know you can't catch up?

If you drop out, when is the next time that you can drop back in? Next September. But, by next September, all your friends have gone on ahead and you've been out in the world and have had a good time for a year, hanging out in the streets or watching daytime television; there's a strong temptation not to go back at all.

Given our present school structure, the chances of getting back on track are very poor. But what if you have a school that isn't organized on an annual basis? Suppose there were four week "semesters" instead? If a student fell behind and failed a four-week course, it would be easier to make up rather than a whole year's work. Besides, for some students, the prospect of a final grade after four weeks would offer a more immediate reward and be a more effective incentive than a distant reckoning four or more months down the road.

Schools with such flexibility do exist. Do they really retain students much better and have a different pace of instruction and intensity and commitment? They certainly do.

Why don't more schools do this? Well, administratively it's easier to do things the way they are now.

This sort of rigidity creates other problems. As things are now, all students are required to begin classes the day that schools open; otherwise, they'll miss a whole learning sequence or two. Though school districts have cut-off birthday dates for entrance eligibility, there are significant age differences among the students on each level. A few months, particularly in the lower grades, can mean great differences in maturity, readiness and physical size.

Research tells us a great deal about the effect of these age differences. Those who are a year older do much better in the same class than those who are a year younger. A year makes an awful lot of difference at the age of five or six. So, quite early, the older students get the message that they are a lot smarter, more powerful, and the younger ones get the message that they're weaker, a lot dumber. That message tends to persist throughout life; it's a very hard lesson to overcome. But if we had semesters start at a different time, and if we had a more flexible system, we could avoid or mitigate this sort of problem.

Essentially, what is unique in the Carnegie Report is that it set our sights beyond reform, beyond tinkering here and there to make modest adjustments in the prevailing system. It asked if there were ways in which the fundamental structure of schools and of the teaching profession could be changed so that they could function more effectively.

Proposals of the Carnegie Report

Specifically, the Carnegie Report says that we have to do for teaching what has been done at various times for other professions. For example, medicine wasn't always the kind of career that it is today. We have examples from the not-too-distant past of fathers' letters to their sons at Harvard threatening to cut them off without a cent if they went into medicine, because it was a field that was held in such poor esteem. Law and business administration were also not always the high prestige fields that they are today. We have within our own history and in living memory examples of careers that went from being fairly poorly paid, with low status and poor training, into professions that are now widely respected and richly rewarded.

Implementation of the Carnegie recommendation would mean that teaching would have the characteristics of all other professions. The teaching field would be based on a significant body of knowledge, and its practitioners would act on the basis of accepted procedure consistent with that knowledge.

Another aspect of professionalism is the question of empowerment. The problem with most existing education legislation and all too much of the new reform regulations is that they essentially tell teachers what to do. If something like this were done to any other profession, it would be called legislative malpractice. But when it comes to education, legislators think nothing of writing bills telling teachers what to do in complex situations in which a professional practitioner should have the freedom to analyze the facts and exercise his judgment. And if you have a legislative mandate, you are really preventing the professional from exercising judgment and, therefore, taking the proper steps.

There's an element to the whole issue of professionalization that is tied in with the approaches of Japanese management and modern management companies. By and large, American schools have employed teachers the authorities did not hold in very high esteem. As a result, the school was structured very much along the lines of an industrial/factory model. The modest credentials of most teachers once may have justified such an approach. For many years, teachers in our public schools were graduates of one-year training schools, and the principal was the only one on the school staff who was a college graduate. Therefore, the teachers were viewed as sort of "hired hands" who had to be closely supervised by the far-more-qualified "foreman." Between the principal and the teaching staff there was a palpable educational distance and an authority relationship. This relationship has remained, although teachers are much more educated than they once were.

But the financial structure of the schools still reflects this old hierarchical relationship. In operating budgets across the country today, only about 36 cents of every dollar go to teachers' salaries.

I'll give an example of New York City to make it very dramatic, but if you analyze your own community, you'll most likely come up with something similar. The operation budget includes \$5,000 for each child. Since the fiscal crisis, there are at least 30 children in each class. Sometimes more than 30. For a class of 30 children, New York is spending \$150,000 in your classroom. The teacher's salary, on the top, is \$40,000, and if you add your pension and other benefits, maybe the teacher is getting \$50,000. Now where is the other \$100,000?

In reality, most of the remaining money goes into "support staff" to help teachers, though, by and large, the average rank and file teachers would be hard-pressed to identify exactly what sort of help they're getting. In any other industry, if you had an institution that was thought not to be doing very well and if only about one-third of the money was up front in the productive process, and two thirds was somewhere back there with supervisors and administrators, coordinators, and all sorts of other people, you'd ask some hard questions.

Though the Carnegie report is a complex document that defies easy summary, I want to underline an important point that is missed in almost every journalistic account and may even be missed in a fast reading, because we tend to focus on some of the more daring proposals--the professional level salaries and the professional certification board, for example. These things are there, and they are the easiest to write about and argue about. So they appear on almost everyone's agenda. But what will not be on the agenda is something that can't be summarized in two or three sentences. That is that the report assumes that the structure of the schools of the future will differ radically both from the point of view of the professionals and the students. It assumes that we will get away from highly structured classrooms and group instruction, and, for want of a better analogy, we will move over to a model that is a lot closer to what the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts do; that is, each student will have a prescribed curriculum. Every student is to accomplish and master certain tasks. This mastery and learning is not accomplished through lectures. The job of the school will be to provide a series of experiences, whatever those experiences may be, to get the student to master whatever has to be mastered. Similarly, in the Boy Scouts, the Scoutmaster never gives a lecture on how to tie nine knots. Some kids are past knots; some are still involved in other things and are not ready for knots on a particular day. Whoever is ready is given a book and a piece of rope and is encouraged to try to do it on his own by copying. If that doesn't work, then they try to learn from samples of the actual knots. If that doesn't work, they try some peer tutoring with another scout who's a whiz at knot-tying.

The job of education is connecting the student to a series of illuminating experiences, and the job of the teacher is one of thinking out and planning strategies, games, evaluating materials, evaluating the videotapes, and training some of the people who can be used in tutorial functions.

In a school where students are actively engaged in learning by going through a series of prescribed tasks, not necessarily in order but all of them required, teachers will have the time for a fuller professional life; they will have time for collegial relations, to share their experiences and ideas with other teachers; they will have time to mark papers and coach students individually, because they will no longer be locked into four or five hours of daily lecturing. The old slogans about improving working conditions can be accomplished only if you free teachers from what they do most of the time and what most of the literature says shouldn't be done and what they don't do very well and what the kids are not getting very much out of in the first place.

The Carnegie report deals with that issue, with how we can liberate teachers from the rigidity of our present classroom structure, so they can think about what experiences and technology will best serve their students. The report suggests that other people can be

used in the school, whether they're volunteers or retirees; it suggests new approaches to the training of new teachers, so that a large number of interns and residents can be used as part of the instructional process, both to enhance their own experience as future teachers and as part of a way of running a school.

The Carnegie report advocates not only a restructured teaching profession, but a completely redesigned school system. This will be extremely controversial and will mean a much leaner administration than we now have. Understandably, the principals are already up in arms. There weren't any principals or school board members on the task force that produced the report and, to many, it will look like some radical plot by teachers to overthrow the "upper classes." Of course, it isn't. It is really very much like what management people are talking about doing in private industry.

The Politics of Reform

The greatest problem, however, may well be how teachers themselves will react. Most of them are dissatisfied with what society thinks of them, how they're being rewarded, what they're able to do and not able to do in schools. Many of them have great dreams of what teaching could be like. However, major change is not something that most of us take to very well, even if we are fairly miserable in our present condition. What the Carnegie Report advocated will never be imposed on teachers. You will never force teachers to take responsibility for making educational decisions for training other adults and for running the schools as senior partners do in a law firm or as faculty members in a college. Nobody can force a group of people to do that, if they choose not to. If huge numbers of teachers in the country say, "This is not what I want. Making decisions is the principal's job. Leave me alone. Just give me my money and, if you can, reduce my class size," then the offer that is "on the table" in the Carnegie Report will be removed and we are unlikely to see another that is equally promising in a long time. A negative teacher response will be disastrous.

The issues are very complex. They require not minor patching up or minor changes with the way we educate our children; they require the ability to envision an entirely new system.

Let's think about the current system for a minute. We have school board people. They're very nice people and they want to do something for education. They get elected; most of them serve without remuneration. But what happens? They want to be re-elected. They're usually elected not through any political parties. The only way they can be re-elected is that their names have to be known. The more they find out what's wrong in the schools and the more they publicize it, the more their names get known. The poor school superintendent is the only chief executive officer in the country who has to meet with his board of directors in a public meeting every two weeks or every week, where the major game of the board of directors is to bring up every embarrassing item that has occurred in the institution over the last couple of weeks. Now the superintendent is also a very nice person, usually someone who rose from the ranks on the basis of talent. But when faced with the constant carping of the local school board, the message goes out to middle management that, though creativity is appreciated and all that sort of thing, what is really most important is, "no more grief from board members."

So, the top priority of the schools is not to do something positive but to prevent anything negative from happening. Institutions that are devoted to that generally aren't very good. The price of preventing anything negative from happening is also the price of preventing anything good from happening.

The principals then turn to the teachers and say the kids are out in the hall too much or making too much noise or too much disturbance, and that's a sign of lack of control, and it could mean that someone gets injured. That's all that the board has to hear! So, teachers know that they're really judged on routines and rituals, not on the performance of students and certainly not on any great innovation. Get your planbook and reports in on time; make

sure all the kids are sitting in the classroom. The great commandment is: Thou shalt not make waves. The public school is an institution that stresses control. The superintendent develops a big, fat book of rules. If anything goes wrong, he can prove in black and white that it wasn't his fault. Some incompetent just violated rule #167. That's how you protect yourself against criticism. You show that you thought about all contingencies before, but some stupid underling just hadn't read the whole manual recently.

The questions is: Is it possible to turn this around and to make the school an organization in which everyone buys in? Right now, every teacher locked in a room with a bunch of kids has to be a multi-talented, triple-threat superstar. He or she has to be an excellent lecturer, a disciplinarian, and a diagnostician of multitudinous student problems. Above all, he or she has to have a personality that meshes with all sorts of students. There aren't many people built that way, and certainly not many people with all those qualities will stay in an institution like this. If you open the system up and the children can move around to different adults, and adults can move around to other adults, you can essentially exercise the strengths that all these adults have. If someone happens to be a brilliant lecturer, let that person give a lecture several times a week. There's nothing wrong with a lecture. The cruel thing is to get two million people who can't do it very well and tell them that's the only way they can teach. Or to tell the students who don't learn very well that way, but who might learn very well other ways, that that's the only way they're entitled to learn; otherwise they're going to be considered disruptive or stupid. That is where the system is now.

Conclusion

What are the consequences if we don't do something? The stakes are big. There is no way we can continue with the current system. Unless we get a different scenario about the talent or the lack of it that's about to come in on the basis of the current reward system and the current structure and the demographic economic facts of life, then indeed the current system will get worse. There's really only one place that this leads; there will be more and more people who are now committed to public education who will give up. Though they will probably continue to believe in the public schools in the abstract, they will be unwilling to sacrifice their children to a failed ideal.

The consequences for the country are very great. One of the dramatic and frightening figures is one that Harold Hodgkinson came up with a few years ago. When the first person retired on social security, there were 17 people in the work force to support that first person. Ten years from now when I retire on social security, there are going to be only three people to support me. One of those will be Black or Hispanic, and some are going to be whites who didn't make it in school. We may be getting very close to a society where instead of 17 supporting one person, we are going to have two people working, one of them supporting someone on social security and the other supporting someone who can't work because he didn't get the educational background that would equip him for a job. What does that do to our standard of living? If the standard of living dips so dramatically, what does that do to the faith of citizens in a democratic society? Clearly, many will start looking for other alternatives. If we lose faith in public education, what types of schools will we have, if we seek alternatives? There's no question: we'll have Catholic schools, Protestant schools, Jewish schools, fundamentalist schools, Lyndon Larouche and Farrakhan academies, Left-wing learning centers, and many foreign language and ethnic schools.

This is the problem that is unique to our country. In Japan, everybody is Japanese. If you come from somewhere else, no one will ever attempt to turn you into Japanese. In Germany, they've had a large influx of Turks as "guest" workers who have been living there for such a long time that many no longer speak Turkish. But, even though some were born in Germany and speak German, they will never be Germans. As a matter of fact, Germany is offering them money to go back to Turkey because they don't want to

have a problem with ethnic friction. Nowhere in Germany is there the ideal that people who come there and live there for generations will be Germans. The same is true in France.

This country is different. We all came from different ethnic backgrounds, and somebody 200 years ago would not have given us great odds that we would survive, because the history of most other societies where people come from different places, with different religions and different races shows that people have a nasty tendency to try to kill each other. That's the experience the world has had. Perhaps the only great exception to this is the United States. I like to think that some of this is due to the fact that we don't send little children off to separate schools to develop the identities that they get at home anyway. We believe that people do become Americans and are "Americanized" most effectively in our schools.

I think that the stakes are not whether or not we will have an education system in the future. We'll always have kids in public schools, because there will always be students the private schools won't want. But they'll be like the charity wards in the hospitals, with patients nobody else will take.

The choices that we now make in education will have very great consequences for our society. I hope that all concerned citizens will study the Carnegie Task Force report. It is a package, and not a shopping list that one can choose from. It might be wise to develop several other models and visions of overall changes that would be alternatives to the ones that the Task Force presents. The alternatives should not however, be little nitpickings at this report, nor will the successful alternative emerge out of attempts to make minor changes in the current system. Other major revolutionary visions and transformations may be better than this one, or equally good, or valid as points of discussion. But I do think that the Carnegie report does something necessary at this point in history. It looks at the basic structure of the school from the point of view of both students and adults. It does it in terms of economics and in terms of demography. It does it in terms of the technological developments that most schools have ignored. It's an exciting report, I recommend it to you and I hope it becomes the basis for discussion everywhere.

All of us can play an important role in the next few years. I have indicated that one group of people can kill the Carnegie report. I wouldn't mind it if they killed it after sober and informed reflection. I am worried that AFT members will get the AFT version of it, and NEA members will get the NEA version of it, and people will march to the tune of whatever their leaders say. I think that will be a terrible thing on either side. I hope that those in other communities, whether school administrators or university professors, will create an opportunity for educators throughout our entire public school system to go into these recommendations in great detail, so that whatever conclusions are arrived at are arrived at on the basis of informed judgment and not on the basis of red flags or slogans used by leaders on one side or the other. The stakes are far too important for us to be done in by factionalism.

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Albert Shanker's Reaction to School Board report
November 1986

School boards and their critics alike owe a debt of gratitude to IEL for unpacking the problems of local school governance. The good news in this report is that the American commitment to local control of schools is alive and well. The bad news is that instead of exercising leadership to make this commitment work, school boards are adrift in a sea of administrivia and petty politics. Whether and how these problems will be overcome are vitally important to all of us.