

New elitism in American public education

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expecting too much of the schools. He now seeks to "affirm the importance of the classroom as a special place, aloof from the biases of the media—a place in which the uses of the intellect are given prominence in a setting of elevated language, civilized manners, and respect for social symbols."

But what may be most significant in Postman's book is what it does not deal with: how the classroom he envisions is to serve the many children who arrive open-eyed but with language, manners and symbols that do not match those of the teachers who agree with Postman.

In big city schools, the vast proportion of teachers are mainstream white -- increasingly so after staff cut-backs according to seniority eliminated minority teachers hired in the 60s -- while children tend to be of other races.

Postman submits that schools cannot deal with social, motivational or emotional problems and that some children simply have not had the necessary training at home to be able to fit into a regular classroom without disrupting. He does not suggest that the classroom be modified to help them fit.

This new posture fits with the new drift in policy, for it permits the quest for excellence for some while dismissing the rest.

Last year, Kenneth B. Clark, a New York State University regent, said he thought the plight of the schools was about to get some attention because middle class children's educational achievements had declined.

"In the past, the public believed that if children were failing it was because they were dumb or their parents were failing. Now they are beginning to see that middle class children are also short-changed--witness the lowering aptitude scores. The problem now becomes one of general concern."

The concern has manifested itself, however, not in overall reforms but in allowing middle-class children to be shifted into select schools and classrooms within the public school system.

In New York, Chancellor Macchiarola is changing the school transfer policy so that parents will have a greater choice in schools. He is also seeking to place more children in classes for the "gifted."

In the 1977-78 school year, the Harlem district had two gifted

classes, starting with fourth grade and one for junior high students. The Flatlands-Sheepshead Bay district in Brooklyn, meanwhile, had 50 classes for gifted grade-school children and 51 for junior high students.

"Gifted programs are extra programs in most school districts and they tend to go to the affluent communities," said Halperin.

"The ones who are served now are primarily upper middle class," said Harold Lyon, director of education for the gifted and talented at the Department of Education. He said only 12 per cent of gifted children nationwide are included in such programs.

What of those who are not defined as gifted?

For children not inclined toward academic pursuits, vocational education has traditionally been viewed as an option. However, a recent federally-sponsored study suggests that this option may be illusory.

Instead of preparing them for jobs in fields in which they are being trained, such programs may merely be a way to stave off unemployment for many young people by keeping them in school a bit longer.

"Evidence regarding the overall effectiveness of vocational education as a system and the relative success of specific programs mandated by the Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its amendments is at best ambiguous and at worse nonexistent," concluded John Walsh, vice president of the Research Information Center in San Francisco, after surveying the programs.

The needs of the economy have always been a strong force behind the American educational system. In the early days of the nation, land grant colleges were established because of the need for the people competent to develop the vast territories opened to homesteading. The colleges admitted all who came, without regard to previous experience, and set about teaching them what the country needed them to know.

Now, in the emerging post-industrial economy, when data processing machines and other technology is increasingly eliminating middle-level employees, the educational establishment is shedding its excess, honing in on the adept.

Yet, Lyon says, some 30 per cent of all dropouts are gifted.

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DR. ERNEST HARTZOG

Hartzog attains presidency

by Kathryn H. Bogle

Dr. Ernest E. Hartzog of the Portland Public Schools is the new head of the National Alliance of Black School Educators, a professional organization of over 2,000 members.

Dr. Hartzog, installed in the presidency of this fast-growing organization at its seventh annual conference recently in Detroit, was among the charter members who formed and shaped its beginning programs.

In 1970, approximately 21 Black school superintendents met at the O'Hare Marriott Hotel near Chicago. These progressive and future-oriented superintendents organized themselves formally, that year. In 1973, at Detroit, the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) was formed. Membership in NABSE now includes educators from all levels: teachers, superintendents, professors, from institutions of higher education and others from state and federal agencies. Affiliate organizations exist in practically all the states.

NABSE is "committed to make collaborative efforts to effect the elimination of racism in education and to correcting the effects of racism in education", according to Dr. Hartzog.

NABSE is emphasizing the need for Black educators to strengthen their ties with parents and students in the home and in the community in setting priorities and objectives which result in greater student

achievement and greater patron satisfaction with the education product.

Regional forums are held across the nation directed toward developing genuine coalition efforts on behalf of American Black children and all children.

NABSE is also interested in increased funding for education, the creation of a separate Office of Education, affirmative action in employment and in college admissions. NABSE also encourages Black institutions to increase efforts in research, writing, and publication activities.

Dr. Hartzog, serving for seven years as Assistant Superintendent for Community Relations and Staff Development for Portland Public Schools, has played a major role in Portland's multi-ethnic curriculum and staff development and training programs. His department has the overall supervisory responsibility for districtwide programs and administrative services for desegregation or integration programs. Indian Education and Community Relations are also the responsibility of Dr. Hartzog's department. The annual budget to operate this department runs to approximately two million dollars.

Dr. Hartzog is married to the former Jeanne L. Shorty of Denver, Colorado. They have two children: a daughter, Sharon, a sophomore at San Diego State University; and a son, Daniel, a junior at California Polytechnic at San Luis Obispo, California.

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