In this short essay are discussed the problems of urban education and the ways in which they can be solved. In particular, it is noted that the present system makes it difficult to assign responsibility to individuals. Involvement, problem-solving activity, accountability, and continual growth are key concepts that must be stressed. These ideas and what they mean are discussed. In addition, the function of effective teachers' educational reform is focused upon. (JW)
ORGANIZING URBAN SCHOOLS FOR RESPONSIBLE EDUCATION

BY WILLIAM W. WAYSON

The shortcomings of the American school system--kindergarten through graduate school--are inherent in the network of interactions and the styles of thinking that are fostered throughout the system. Perhaps the point will be clarified by these examples:

A. Teacher training programs generally tell about the ill-effects of marking (A, B, C, D or other variations) but screen out prospective teachers on the basis of marks.

B. Teachers in a building cry for freedom from autocratic supervision, but accept that they should get permission to wear the clothes they want to wear. The same teachers tell student teachers what to wear.

C. A school district publicizes its non-graded program, but all official reports state the grades taught by teachers and the grades to which children are assigned.

D. People generally admit that poor children do not learn to read and that the school atmosphere is boring if not repressive, but at every level educators point the finger at someone else who should solve the problem.

The process of education dictates that we cannot achieve our stated purposes. The circle of finger-pointers never ends; the complexity of every problem is staggering. It seems that everyone wants a hand...
in criticizing every solution; few seriously try to implement any sustained, broadbased solutions.

The typical school employee may be likened to a passenger on the Titanic, after it has struck the iceberg, demanding that the lifeboats go out for a test run before he will get aboard.

Silberman has described the situation very well. Indeed my own research\(^1\) indicates that he is understating the case, presumably to lead educators to face-up-to the situation rather than retreating into guilty defensiveness. One does not waken a sleeping watchman into watchfulness by whispering.

In 1965-1966 intensive interviews in five large American city school systems and observations in several more convinced me of these premises upon which we must focus our reforms for schools:

First, bureaucratization has proceeded so far that there is no point at which one may fix responsibility for any failures. If responsibility means to face the consequences of one's decisions, no one in the whole system is responsible, for example, if a child does not learn to read or if black children get poor education. The system has officially approved excuses which put the fault on some abstract and untouchable source other than the persons making decisions about children's learning. Efforts to impose responsibility without building internal personal commitments have nearly destroyed true commitment.
Second, the entire system is so engrossed in the means which things are done that there are truly no ends that anyone can state clearly even to himself. There is no reason for what goes on other than tradition or that something has to be going on. With no one knowing where we are going, we try to enjoy going nowhere together. Finally, most or all of the people are working to achieve goals that have little to do with—and may actually work against—what the organization is supposed to do.

Third, the district is too big and has power to do little more than inhibit instruction. The individual classroom is too insular, lacks sufficient resources, is too easily smothered by the school, and makes too small an impact on the total problem. The place to reform education is in the individual school building. While the irreducible minimum may be debated, the unexpandable maximum certainly is the school building. As seductive as it might be to be efficient on larger fronts, we must recognize that one does not overcome the weaknesses of a ship’s drunken crew by commanding the entire squadron to turn to starboard.

This is not to blame the present state of the educational enterprise upon teachers and principals nor to relieve central offices, school boards, universities or state education departments from doing anything—but to state where their efforts must be directed. For example, teachers’ colleges could educate teachers to function in the total context of the school, and central offices could conduct themselves in a manner that would cause decisions to be made in school buildings.
These three premises are not the only ones that might be listed, but they are three vital ones. Correcting them must get attention from educational reformers. Overcoming them in all their nuances is challenge enough for anyone because the whole system rewards their perpetuation and feels that their demise threatens the whole of the Western World if not the galaxy. Professionals have been chained in Plato’s cave so long that they themselves have merged with the shadows.

Can a School Become Educative?

The Martin Luther King School in Syracuse, New York, was founded in 1967 to correct these three premises. Between the years 1967-1970 it demonstrated the value and practicality of changing them in a large inner-city public school. The basic concepts and practices that guided the school may be applied in any school in any school district to the benefit of staff, students and community.

Those concepts emerge logically from the premises that seem to cause miseducation and non-education. If one assumes that the system is not responsible, the problem is "How can we develop a climate that assures responsible action?" Key developmental concepts become clearer: Involvement, Problem-Solving, Accountability, and Continual Growth. If one assumes that the organization lacks goals and that preoccupation with means is undermining education, the problem is "How can we orient to ends and escape myopic means-orientation?" We then see need for clearly stated goals that are...
commonly understood. Means deserve attention only in terms of whether they are or are not moving us toward the goals. The need to conceptualize Education, Teaching, and Learning is imperative. Finally, if one assumes that the building unit is an ideal unit within which to build an educational program, the problem is to mobilize all resources available to the building and to protect the building faculty from forces which unnecessarily impede its achieving educational purposes. Several concepts arise: Productivity, Power, and Social Responsibility. All of the concepts italicized above are related to one another, and they may be pursued in such a way as to resolve a large number of problems at one time. It is doubtful whether any significant or lasting advancement can be made in public schools without attending to these fundamental dynamic qualities of organizations. The following discussion shows how they were applied in the Dr. King School.

Involvement. Involvement in an organizational enterprise requires a sense of common purpose, a feeling of belongingness, and participation. Experience indicates that these qualities are lacking in many schools. While it is true that people enter organizations to satisfy a variety of motivations many of which are not related to the goals of the organization, education suffers excessive loss because there are no clear purposes for our schools (particularly those serving poor children) other than maintaining a semblance of order and saving the organization from criticism. Involvement depends upon having school staffs share a sense of common purpose.
which lifts them above daily crises and interpersonal squabblings. They also must have a feeling of belongingness which is gained by feeling important to the enterprise—a feeling that inadvertently but continually is beaten down in large city schools. Teachers and principals are treated as machine parts who are incapable of making effective decisions about the educational process; consequently, through the exercise of hundreds of subtle cues (mostly unintended) staff members are reminded that the enterprise and its efforts are out of their ken and touch. They begin to behave as expected and psychologically withdraw their efforts to produce, though for survival they will defend the school if they feel personally attacked.

Lack of purpose and being denied involvement in "really important" decisions combine to prevent full participation in the school. "My room is my responsibility—all else can go hang" is the teacher's definition of his role. Everyone else—the principal, secretaries, custodians, parents and children respond the same way. The school becomes a conglomeration of strangers drawn into one place at best to stay out of one another's way. More characteristically they lock in an undeclared war against one another's inferred purposes.

The effective school must build common purpose, belongingness and participation. At Dr. King School the common purpose was introduced in these general terms:

This school is failing every child in it. That is your responsibility. The usual excuses—bad kids, poor parents,
lousy administrator, bad curriculum—will not be acceptable. The only people in the world who can solve the problem are you—the staff. You have all the knowledge and skills to find ways to meet the problem, but it will require that we learn them together. If the principal is bad, get rid of him; if the curriculum is bad, throw it out the window and develop something that you think will work. The job of the administrator is to create conditions in which you can solve your problems and to protect you from pressures to do the same old things. The basic themes were constantly stated and enforced. The staff worked together to identify problems and to find ways to make the school more effective by reducing the causes of ineffectiveness. Belongingness was reinforced by pointing out the teachers’ (and the custodians’ and the secretaries’) key roles in teaching the children, by reinforcing the cruciality of their decisions, and by having them choose methods and materials, group children, schedule and organize time and space, and answer questions about what was happening in the school. Participation was forced (though at varying degrees) by the organization of the school, which will be discussed later, and by removing all possible organizational crutches.

Problem-solving. People get excited about solving problems in their world. In Dr. King School the staff accepted that, unlike other situations, they should not try to hide problems but should try to solve those that came to the fore from a variety of sources. Anytime a person says that the solution of a problem absolutely depends upon forces beyond his control, he is cop ing out. Most school problems may be defined so that there is a way over, under, around, or through any obstacle. Most of the staff in the school
accepted the challenge and responsibility to surmount obstacles.

It was pleasing to find that about 80 per cent of the staff were eager to get on with the new functions. A second surprise was that staff members lacked the elementary skills for problem-solving and solution. Almost all inservice programs were designed to teach skills for working effectively in groups to solve problems and make decisions.

The school was organized in a way that enhanced problem-solving. The staff worked in decision teams involving about six to eight teachers, an aide, perhaps one of the specialists (who were considered resources and not superiors), and any volunteers they could co-opt. Each team was assigned a group of children of about 2.5 times the number of regular classroom teachers in the team and a number of rooms equal to that same number of teachers. The team was charged with making all decisions about grouping children, choosing materials for instruction, and deciding upon the use of time, space, and personnel. Each team could operate differently from other teams consistent with the philosophy and general policies of the building.

School policies were made by the school cabinet, a legislative body made up of a representative elected from each team, the administrators, and three parents elected by the parent-teacher organization. This group could make any policy that it could enforce and it had full power to veto the principal. Its formation and operation have been elaborated by Blumberg and others.
Problem-solving proceeded at a hectic pace, with some teams proceeding more effectively than others but with all freed from waiting for all to move. The entire school took on a different character. Its parents and other community leaders gave it respect and love; other educators gave it respect but not love.

**Accountability.** Most organizations fear the consequences of bad decisions and prohibit all members from making any decisions. As a result vital decisions do not get made. Accountability and production are best promoted if basic decisions are made close to the problem and if the natural consequences of the decision are readily apparent to the person or persons who made the decision. Our schools support a highly restricted, dependent and non-responsible role for all personnel; thus, initiating a broader, professionally-independent and responsible role flies in the face of expectations that are deeply ingrained in the system. A teacher who wishes not to perform responsibly can get succor and solace from colleagues and superiors. The excuses are protected. But one does not have to be deterred from developing more effective schools because a few do not accept independence and responsibility. Effective practices tend to be contagious and they carry great satisfaction. A school building may move forward rapidly with fewer than a third of the staff committed to a change if the administrator rewards their doing so and if someone in the building can mobilize feedback that will not permit problems to be buried.
Accountability obviously depends upon having goals to which one is committed and which are understood widely enough that failure to achieve them will be apparent to everyone. The staff of Dr. King School recognized that they had no clear goals and that much of the frustration and failure in the school arose from the children not knowing what was expected of them and from teachers' not knowing what success was. Indeed, the lack of communicable goals teaches attitudes we do not want. The ordeal of sitting for hours and days and years in a classroom where we do not know what is expected leaves us totally dependent upon others for evidence of progress and success; such dependence leaves us no way of judging ourselves or our abilities. Since achievement is founded upon confidence in one's own ability to change the world (self-esteem, self-actualization, or a sense of control over one's environment), the staff of the school felt it imperative to build that confidence as a prerequisite to achievement in the school. They wrote a proposal and received funds under Title III, ESEA, to educate themselves to produce a curriculum designed to give children a sense of control over the environment. As part of the effort to build the students' confidence, the staff devoted three full weeks during a six-week institute to learn how to write clearly stated behavioral goals. The difficulty of writing such goals and the educator's unpreparedness for thinking about goals slowed progress, and it took three years before the staff prepared even the most rudimentary statement of academic goals for the classes. Neverthe-
less, progress was evident and it was clear that the statement of
goals alone was a highly effective teaching device, for even if the
teacher did not understand the goals and their implementation,
children and parents could proceed with learning the behaviors de-
scribed in the goals. It seems a safe bet that if we ever succeeded
in communicating our goals clearly to students and to ourselves
we would run out of things to do about 10:00 each morning because
we would have eliminated most of the uncertainty surrounding our
present procedures.

The school gained in other ways from learning to state goals
clearly. Staff members could question one another and communicate
suggestions much more effectively once vagueness and subjectively
evaluative overtones gave way to behavioral and objective observa-
tions. Even when teachers sat with the principal for end of the
year "evaluations", the teacher often asked, "Won't you be more
behavioral about that?" Clarifying goals and stating them to
others also strengthened requests to the central office or other
sources because others gained confidence from the staff's "knowing
what it was doing." Furthermore, if the person who was inclined
to say "no" could not state his opposition in objective terms, his
position was weakened.

Accountability also arises from having people who will ask
for an occasional accounting, especially if their interests are
not served. The school typically assigns evaluation and super-
vision to levels that have no vested interest in the actions that
they are assigned to assess. For example, a central office supervisor has no vested interest and feels no sense of personal loss if children in a classroom are mistreated or if they do not learn to read, and a principal feels no gut-level hostility if a teacher has mentally abused a child. Accountability cannot be a driving force in any setting unless two conditions prevail: first, the important decisions are made as close to the client as possible; second the client (or his representative) can go directly to the decision-maker to learn about the decision and to register praise, complaints, or suggestions. In a school the person closest to the client is the teacher, and the client is the child; his representative usually is a parent but it could be any figure who accepts responsibility for his welfare. An accountable system must open up every decision-maker at every level to direct feedback from the persons affected by the decision. The resultant feedback is the most productive and least expensive of all supervisory and inservice techniques that we can devise.

At Dr. King School the process employed was to open the system and to teach skills for upward communications from all possible levels. The only barriers to communication arose from the reluctance, obedience, dependence, and insecurity trained into pupils, parents, teachers, and administrators by previous experience and training. Children were taught how to deal with authority figures to obtain better instruction (a skill to be taught in any truly educational social studies program). They learned to speak with their teachers and the principal without either subservience or hostility. They learned a variety of techniques from conversing about their
concerns to writing, petitions, and picketing. They learned to state their purposes and analyze their own responsibilities. They operated in the school under a Bill of Rights,\textsuperscript{10} and although the procedures were never codified, they learned legitimate grievance procedures similar to those prepared in the Martin Luther King School in Sausalito, California.\textsuperscript{11} On one occasion some students used the grievance procedure to call the superintendent to ask his opinion about the enforcement of the goals-program. Teachers and the school earned much respect from these procedures as they developed confidence from being able to accept accountability for their actions.

Other "feedback loops" were built into the organization. Among them was a policy that any parent or visitor should go directly to the person whose procedures they wanted to discuss. There was none of the usual "get permission from the principal" which treats both teachers and parents as irresponsible children. Visitors had to "obey" one authority—the teacher who was the person responsible for the classroom. They came in large numbers and they generally left highly impressed with the "openness" of the teachers in the school. Parents or other volunteers often worked for hours in the room. Some teachers gained citywide respect for substituting "Come in, accept me for the human being I am, and give me suggestions that help me learn," for "I can't afford to let anyone see that I am human." Even the most fearful teachers on the staff found it difficult to accept the opposition to "outsiders" that they found in other schools.
Continual Growth. An organization that survives and functions effectively must be continually learning. It learns by adapting to its environment; it must be open to its environment. Problem-solving, utilizing the processes of the school as a curriculum for life, and meeting accountability in themselves help teachers to develop their skills and to advance their sense of worth in the performance of a useful life's work. The processes built into the school's operation constitute a "life curriculum for inservice," and these processes were the most effective inservice that could be provided.

However, high levels of teacher turnover are a part of life in most areas today. In Dr. King School, it seemed to be so much a part of life that the administrator gave very low priority to trying to stem turnover. Though turnover was about 25 per cent, very few of those who left could have stayed anyway (because of their husbands' leaving the area) and of those who could have stayed most needed to leave for their own benefit (to learn new skills and to see new situations) and a few should not have been deterred for the benefit of the school (they were unsuited for the situation). Consequently, the solution was to provide inservice development for new staff members so that they could more readily move into the new roles and functions required in the school. Inservice experiences (I prefer to call them "staff development") must be constantly provided for new members to bring them to the understandings and skills required within the school. Experienced members must be provided opportunities to add to their repertoire.
of techniques. The process of staff development never ends. The teacher who ceases learning is incapable of teaching children.

Thus, every school is a teacher training institution and must give explicit attention to making the training related to educational purposes. Most of the training should be consciously built into ongoing operations in the school; some of it should be provided in more formalized experiences designed by and for the staff as a part of its problem-solving, but great care must be exercised to prevent those experiences from becoming the useless waste of time and human resources that typify inservice programs. The problems of educating are so great that we must see the development of teachers as more important than having children in school, for until the school can be made educational, children and teachers alike are deprived of the chance to learn what schools are supposed to help them learn. One can easily guarantee that children will learn more if we send them home at noon every day and use the remainder of the teachers' day (say, until four or five o'clock) for personal and group inservice development, home visits, individual appointments with children and parents, resource gathering, materials development, and— that without which teachers try to operate now— reading. Such experiences must be developed in the school building. With so few exceptions that they probably merit no mention, inservice programs designed by larger units (such as the teachers' association or the curriculum department) can have small influence in what goes on in a school or classroom. The Dr.
King staff never had sufficient time for staff development, but
time was gained by closing the school 20 minutes early each day,
by closing an hour early every Thursday, by closing school for a
half-day every month and by using all faculty meetings as inservice
time. When the school board found out about these invasions upon
the child's day (a year later), the school staff had demonstrated
what production came from using school time differently. The
board permitted other schools to get time off by planning inservice programs. The King staff found that attacking and resolving
important problems lessened petty concerns about working hours
and the soul-destroying mediocrity of worrying about what everyone
else is doing. When one feels that he is doing something of greater
significance than the crowd, he does not seek to hide in the crowd.
When there are no higher purposes, people begin to seek a reason
for existence in what everyone else is doing; generally they find
little self-satisfaction there. Nevertheless, there is great need
to provide time in the teacher's day for the performance of functions
which may be clearly specified and judged, functions which cry for
inclusion in the everyday concept of what teaching is. The King
teachers' departure from usual practice rested solely upon respons-
sible use of the time and demonstrated willingness to give out-
of-school time to the effort.

The Functions of Effective Teachers

It will be said that "none of these things have anything to
do with teaching; they involve the teacher in a lot of things out-
side the classroom." That is correct. These things have little to do with teaching and the classroom as we know them. But we do know that teaching and classrooms as we know them have little to do with education; thus, it is that these new functions in reality have everything to do with what we want from teaching and the classroom. It may be seductive to surmise that we can isolate and protect the teacher from a more responsible and rewarding role but it is neither educationally productive nor personally satisfying to do so. We have abstracted teaching from learning and we have made the classroom a moratorium on life—the least educational place in our world. Learning, of course, takes place there (people are constantly learning or they are dead), but we can no longer ignore that what they learn often is the opposite of what we claim to be teaching. The conscious education that we want to provide requires at least these new functions which may be used to guide both preservice and inservice preparation:12

A. Above all, the teacher will be a fully functioning adult, working more with adults than with children. A childish teacher cannot help a child acquire the traits that contribute to an effective adulthood.

B. The teacher will make most of the decisions that effect instruction including most of those governing the use of time, space, material and personnel.

C. The teacher will be able to analyze the workings of groups and will be able to utilize group processes in the classroom and in
working with other adults.

D. The teacher will spend only about half the professional day in direct contact with children.

E. The teacher will be able to identify the causes for a child’s not learning and will be able to prescribe from a variety of methods those which promise improved learning for that particular child.

F. The teacher will know how organizations operate and will be able to make the school and the school system function on behalf of the child and the community.

G. The teacher will continually add to his repertoire of instructional techniques throughout his career.

H. The teacher will utilize the total environment to get resources for instruction and will be a powerful force in making the total community (what Silberman calls the paideia) more positively educational.

I. The teacher will participate in strong professional organizations that enforce responsibility to the client and the community.

Teachers such as these cannot develop, survive or grow in the present system. Experience in Dr. King School indicates that it is possible to step confidently toward a new system that may strive to produce such educators. The most potent opposition to such a system is within the present one; the procedures and attitudes presently employed throughout simply do not support the new
functions. Rather, they systematically weed them out. Unless leadership emerges within the system, it seems inevitable that outside pressures will have to bring about improved practices. Teachers educated for the new functions could provide much of the needed leadership either in or out of the public schools.

Notes on Educational Reformation

Most of what anyone learns is brought about by the processes in which he engages. Involving staff and students in processes that assure continual reconstruction within the school program is about the only way to assure that their learning is relevant to the milieu within which it is taking place. Thus, the continual reconstruction of the educational system is mandatory for effective education in our world. In this regard the "Hawthorne effect" becomes a powerful instructional tool and not merely a phrase used to criticize a research report. However, the educator is wellwarned of certain facts about learning which apply as well to organizations as to individuals.

Learning is not always neat and orderly and it cannot be made so. It is motivated best by a sense of constructive tension in the person or the group, and that tension derives from some feeling of discontent about the existing state of things. Learning involves the risk of meeting new ideas, new practices, unknown forces, unanticipated and unanticipatable consequences—all of which promise failure, uncertainty, ambiguity, and insecurity as well as success. Learning in social settings involves unavoidable conflicts
can you imagine learning to recognize and analyze one's prejudice without any emotional upsets?). Indeed the conflict through which one goes may be considered the best and possibly the only teacher that can produce the desired outcomes. Helping people learn new functions and processes necessarily requires conflicts, tensions and uncertainties. He who hopes to move forward without them not only must fail but will waste all his talents trying to eliminate the most essential parts of the process of growing and learning, much as if a cook spent his life trying to eliminate the flavors from a steak dinner.

No organization can ever get 100 per cent cooperation and support from all the people who contribute to it. One cannot expect that all pupils, teachers, parents, administrators, and others will move together or with equal fervor. If one wants to create a learning organization, he must work with fallible people (they are called human beings). One can never get everyone "with it", but one does not need more than a fraction of the total to make remarkable progress; focusing on those who won't move means that no one ever starts. Educators must develop the perspicacity to observe new practices to find those parts that are working or which may be made to work. Concurrently, we go into an observation determined to find that which is not working, and when we do we reject the entire idea.

Educational reforms are never "over." One cannot work to produce the perfect system and then spend his life exporting it--
canned with a guarantee of success. Each school building, each teacher and each child has a peculiar personality and all changes must be screened through that maze of individual differences. If education is life and life is the best educator, the school must be alive; it must be an institution in which the only thing that is institutionalized is the individual's responsible pursuit of new experience, new challenges, new responses. The processes of that pursuit are all that a formal educational enterprise can transfer to its students. They promote the only learning that has enough guarantee that the learner will learn for learning's sake.

Finally, all of these processes can be taught to students from kindergarten through graduate school. They should comprise the major part of the curriculum at all of those levels. Human relations, problem-solving, resource acquisition, and knowledge utilization--these are the essence of human existence; hence, they are the goals of education. It may be possible to foster them in graduate schools; it is imperative to do so in elementary schools.
FOOTNOTES


2. The ideas that led to this paper and the practice it describes "jelled" while I was investigating the politics of curriculum development as a part of a Large City Education Systems Study conducted under a grant from Carnegie Corporation by the Metropolitan Studies Department of the Maxwell School of Citizenship at Syracuse University.

3. In practice one other premise was applied in the school but is not discussed except by implication in the present article. The fourth premise is that institutions are not designed to serve the poor; thus, we who work in them must examine every procedure to see how it either perpetuates poverty or negates the possibility of truly educating poor children. For example, demands made upon teachers "to set an example for the children" often restrict communication so much that direct reaching cannot be effective and indirect teaching tends to teach the opposite of what the teacher wants.

4. The principal left in 1970, saying that it was time to see whether the philosophy and program had been institutionalized enough to perpetuate itself. At this time (February, 1970) the staff is continuing the program and has successfully surmounted efforts to kill it from the central office (thanks to high level support from within), normal strife within the staff brought on by unequal levels of commitment, unassuaged lack of skills for "humanizing" the school, and opposition from other educators in the city.


6. The organization, complete with roles and functions for the principal, teams, teachers, aides, and the cabinet, is presented in Organizing Schools for Responsible Urban Education, a handbook for teachers at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School prepared by teachers under the direction of Lynn Sullivan under a grant from Title III, ESEA, to promote self esteem among students, 1969-1970.


11. Mimeo handout from Sidney Walton, Principal, Sausalito, California.

