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ABSTRACT

Projections concerning the nature of schooling in the 21st century are replete with images of schooling at home via electronic media. Educational goals suggested by theorists include (1) using language and other symbol systems to think and communicate effectively with diverse peoples; (2) developing skills of lifelong learning; (3) acquiring a broad, interdisciplinary general education; (4) developing the ability to solve complex problems by analyzing and synthesizing information, thinking critically, making decisions, implementing plans, and accepting consequences; (5) developing the ability to cope with change; (6) learning to understand and use technology; (7) developing a futures perspective and a value system that includes concern for planetary survival; (8) developing skills in group processes and concern for social problems through constructive participation in decision-making; (9) developing the ability to respond and express oneself aesthetically; and (10) developing skills and interests for use of leisure time. A close examination of these goals reveals their similarity to the statements on the essentials of education. Excellence in the English language arts programs for the year 2000 can be achieved by combining and blending these goals and essentials in a classroom where the students are actively and personally involved in learning. (HOD)

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Activity, Essentials, and Excellence: Language Arts 2000

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It was Friday the 13th. The theme was "Colombus 1984: Charting New Worlds." The participants were teachers of the English Language Arts. They had come together to consider the journey to the future. All were mindful of the significance of the year, the impending arrival of the year 2000, and the technological explosion surrounding them. A somber, yet expectant mood pervaded when teachers realized that a child born during this year will be just 16 at the turn of the century. A male born this year is projected to live until 2058, a female until 2070 (Hilts, 1983). What will their world be like and what kind of educational programs are needed now to prepare young people for life in the year 2000 and beyond? What type of English Language Arts program can help to assure that those are even

pertinent questions?

These are the problems that stimulated this paper. It grew out of a seminar during the spring of 1983 in which, with a group of doctoral students, I examined the type of English Language Arts program appropriate for the 21st century. The research was guided by the recent NCTE conference theme, "Let the Best of the Past Inform the Future." As a teacher educator I am convinced that many of our problems result from lack of awareness of our own history and our failure to apply that history to current and future needs. I agree with Alan Robinson's satirical statement that "research in English education was not born in the 1960s nor was ERIC its father" (Robinson, 1984, p. 42; see also Robinson, 1983).

Within this context seminar participants set out to do three things:

1. To examine futurist literature to infer what life in the 21st century may be like.

2. To examine futurists' views of education and educational needs in the 21st century.

3. To examine the English Language Arts curriculum through seminal research and documents from various periods in its history and to assess their implications for Language Arts, 2000.

As you might imagine much of what we read and discussed

was heady, sobering, and conflictory. And it was within that context that the National Commission on Excellence in Education Report (1983) was received. It was one of the recent studies of schooling considerd by the seminar. The title for my paper, "Activity, Essentials, and Excellence: Language Arts, 2000," foreshadows the insights which I will share with you.

Life in the Year 2000

Life in the year 2000, what will it be like? A quick look at projections will provide the necessary backdrop to consider educational demands and the type of language arts program most likely to meet the needs of learners.

One of the most significant projections, and one about which there is great consensus, is that the United States and other industrialized nations will complete the transition to information societies. This will have implications for all segments of society, just as the shift from the agrarian to industrial era did.

Governance will be one highly affected area. At the national level futurists forecast a rapid shifting of power from the executive branch toward the legislative branch and toward decentralized, grass roots, citizen controlled government. This will create a need for new qualities of leadership. The legislator-as-learner and the "adhocracy-role" are necessary to anticipatory government.

In the information society the national town hall meeting will be a reality. This will require new roles and skills for both elected and lay decision makers, coupled with new decision-making processes. Some mix of representative government and direct citizen participation via technologic media may result (Gingerich and Gingerich, 1981; McClaughry, 1981; Olson, 1981; Toffler, 1980).

Similar projections abound for international governance. Current nation-state governance poses impediments for the type of global governance necessary to meet problems of the future. Governments presently must give highest priority to national interests while recognizing their growing dependence on the fate of others; must deal with relatively short-term problems, even when such policies conflict with long-term objectives. There is a need for growth in the global capacity to govern and for new forms of transnational governance. Some form of open network for global policy planning to interface with high quality national and international policy-makers is seen as a necessity (Dator, 1981; Dror, 1982; Freeman and Jahoda, 1978; Toffler, 1980).

A number of other projections make attention to issues of governance both internally and internationally imperative. World population will continue to grow, but at uneven rates in the more advanced and lesser developed nations. The conflict between the haves and have-nots will

divide not only nations, but groups of peoples in both the lesser and the more developed nations. Shortages of resources, including water, will result in conflicts among regions and in new technologies. Increased life expectancy and a shift to an older populace will continue, both in the United States and worldwide; however, again at uneven rates (Davis, 1979; U. S. Council on Enviornmental Quality, 1980; U. S. Bureau of Census, 1981).

In the U. S. the shift in population to the Sunbelt is expected to continue, as is urbanization. The increase in racial and ethnic minorities will continue, concentrated in the South and West. The trend toward both unconventional living patterns and atypical family structures (as judged by 20th century standards) will continue (Fletcher and Wooddell, 1981; Senter and Houston, 1981; U. S. Bureau of Census, 1981).

The rate of change will continue to accelerate, affecting all aspects of daily life. Technologic advances will make it possible for the home to be the center of business or employment, commerce and banking, information retrival and use, civic activity, education, and entertainment. Or to use Toffler's (1980) terms, we can become a home-centered society in our electronic cottages.

Education in and for the 21st Century

A consideration of education in and for the 21st century

must be approached dually. One must separate forecasts concerning the structure of schooling from the discussion of educational needs and the type of educational programs and experiences most likely to produce those learning outcomes, whether they occur in or out of the traditional school setting.

Projections concerning the nature of schooling are replete with images of schooling at home via electronic media. The role of both parents and community in "action learning" is expected to increase. Lifelong learning, reeducation as career opportunities appear and disappear, and education for leisure are all cited (Feistritzer, 1982; Shane, 1977, 1982; Theobald, 1981; Toffler, 1981). The years of compulsory schooling are expected to shorten as education is interspersed and interwoven with working in a fabric of lifelong learning (Toffler, 1980). Greater diversity in the educational opportunities available, greater choice among educational experiences, and greater decentralization of education through local initiative are anticipated (Ogilvy, 1981). Educators will use media to improve the general educational level of the world populace (Shane, 1982). Universal early childhood education and adult education that goes beyond mere literacy should be available (Shane, 1977).

But what of educational goals for the future? A host of

recommendations can be found. Time does not permit more than a sampling of these positions. An interesting approach to the problem was undertaken by Shane in an NEA study entitled Curriculum Change Toward the 21st Century, published in 1977. An international panel and a group of youth reacted to the Cardinal Principles of the Committee of Ten (Cardinal Principles of Seconday Education, 1918) as goals for the 21st century. They were considered to be valid guidelines when recast for the future. To provide a picture of some of projected educational needs, I have synthesized views from several theorists, including Shane, using the original seven objectives as headings.

Health

1. The goal is to develop total mental, physical, and emotional health for the total person; as linked to enviornmental problems; as related to conditions in other countries on an interdependent planet; and as a responsibility to be assumed by all educational agencies, among which the school remained extremely important (Shane, 1977).

2. There is a need to motivate students through action learning by making them feel they are productive members of society and attempting to solve some of their social problems such as loneliness, transcience, and lack of commitment (Toffler, 1981).

3. There is a need for mystical development in addition to psychomotor, cognitive, and affective development. The curriculum should include new literacies such as: people loyalities, desire to solve problems personally, concern for planetary citizenship, the capacity to be centered, long-term perspectives, openness to new revelation, peacefulness, and love and service (Bundy, 1982).

Command of Fundamental Processes

1. It is essential to develop proficiency in the three R's plus communication skills and new fundamental processes, including (a) skill in humanistic processes, (b) academic skills including knowledge of sources, the understanding and use of computer languages, and improved ability to cope with increasing specialization through a command of cross-disciplinary understandings, and (c) anticipatory skills represented by (1) the ability to see relationships and to make correlations, (2) the skills of sorting, weighing and then acting on data, (3) evaluating choices and making decisions wisely, and (4) understanding how power functions at various levels from neighborhoods to international capitals (Shane, 1977).

2. Educational experiences should develop abilities to synthesize, make connections, and classify and manipulate data using multiple models to analyze the same information (Toffler, 1981).

3. Concern for learning to learn and for basic skills should be balanced (Ogilvy,1981).

4. Learning how to learn quickly and efficiently must become a matter of highest priority, along with skill in critical viewing, reading, and listening and ability to deal with the unknown (Pulliman, 1981).

5. Interdisciplinary learning should be stressed and the art of anticipating relationships, seeking hidden connections, and synthesizing fostered (Lewis, 1981; Shane, 1977; Toffler, 1981).

6. To survive we must have both high quality specialization and profound growth in the quantity and depth of general education (Pulliman, 1981).

7. Learners must be self-directed (take responsibility for their own learning) and have skills of reading, writing, and computation and ability to interact with a computer which are prerequisites. Education should develop a learning society composed of self-directed learners capable of solving complex, critical, interdisciplinary problems utilizing value judgements (Lewis, 1981).

8. Education should stress the art of communicating ideas clearly and how to analyze and enjoy what is seen, heard, and read (Shane, 1977).

9. Every subject should be taught with an historical dimension so that students understand that knowledge is not

a fixed entity, but constantly in development. All schools should teach courses in the philosophy of science, of history, of language, and of religion and provide a strong emphasis on classical forms of artistic expression (Postman, 1983).

10. Futures education must develop scientific thinking, creative thinking, skill in planning and anticipating, decision-making, complex systems thinking, and ethical-values thinking (Seif, 1981).

11. In addition to reading and writing we must broaden our definition of the basics to include social, political, aesthetic, and technological literacy (Apple, 1983).

12. Students need to develop skills of handling information, decision-making, problem-solving, and communication; recognize the interrelatedness of events and ideas; and develop a futures perspective (Fletcher and Woodell, 1981).

Worthy Home Membership

1. The concern should be with "worthy family membership," recognizing that there are many affinity groups of value which provide family-type experiences (Shane, 1977).

Vocation

1. The best vocational education is a general education which cultivates the habit of lifelong learning, competence in problem solving and reasoning, increased knowledge, and self-realization (Shane, 1977).

2. Most work of the future will necessitate a curriculum which fosters initiative, reasoning skills, judgment, independence, and self-discipline (Ravitch, 1983)

Civic Education

1. Civic education should develop world-mindedness, world citizenship, and loyalty to the planet as well as to the nation; give as much attention to national and international problems as to foreign language and present the difficulties and challenges of various types of societies; build respect and support for leadership of integrity; encourage active, constructive participation in politics and understanding of how to make positive use of power; and develop survival skills--the ability to work well with other humans (Shane, 1977).

2. There is a need to introduce a transcultural dimension and a futures perspective with at least a modicum of optimism (Toffler, 1981).

3. The school curriculum should relate to global problems and global survival and develop people who can cope with change (Glines, 1982).

4. Education must develop cope-ability, focus on the future rather than the present, and develop ability to handle transience over permanence in life (Toffler, 1970, 1981).

5. There is a need to develop a spirit of "global community" in an increasingly interpdendent world and to develop

survival skills and teach the concept of alternative futures, threat to the biosphere, and human geography and planetary cultures as they exist today as a basis for developing desirable futures (Shane, 1977).

6. Curriculum should begin to educate the world society concerning the need to stablilze world population; move from a throwaway to a preserving, conserving society using school, community, and national example rather than percept; power the planet with unexploited energy sources; redirect research and development toward global needs; and heighten awareness of the social fissures between the haves and the have-nots (Shane, 1982).

Worthy Use of Leisure

1. The goal is to open a broader range of ways to use potentially greater amounts of leisure time for re-creative purposes and as a means to self-fulfillment (Shane, 1977).

2. More leisure activity will give added importance to young people learning leisure-time skills (Pulliman, 1981; Ravitch, 1983).

Ethical Character

1. Developing ethical character is an educational imperative for the future. Students need moral and ethical models and involvement in process experiences to permit ethical character to grow from within as wholesome personhood is achieved (Shane, 1977).

2. A priority of futures education must be to encourage understanding and tolerance for diversity, foster understanding of human nature and provide support for individual growth, broaden socialization to include a wide range of alternatives, and contribute to the formation of values (Pulliman, 1981).

3. Schools should teach the values that TV ignores or mocks. (The TV curriculum is present-centered, attention-centered, image-centered, emotion-centered, and largely intoherent.) (Postman, 1983)

This compilation was intended to be a representative rather than an exhaustive listing of suggested goals. It would be possible to categorize many statements differently, since a number pertain to more than one goal area. However, with these restrictions in mind, even a cursory examination reveals the predominace of concern in the areas of fundamental processes and civic education. Central themes included:

1. Using language and other symbol systems to think and communicate effectivley with diverse peoples.
2. Developing skills of lifelong learning.
3. Acquiring a broad, interdisciplinary general education.
4. Developing ability to solve complex problems by analyzing and synthesizing information, thinking

critically, making decisions, implementing plans, and accepting consequences.

5. Developing ability to cope with change.

6. Understanding of and ability to use technology.

7. Developing a futures perspective and a values system that includes concern for planetary survival.

8. Developing skills in group processes and concern for societal problems through active, constructive participation in decison-making.

9. Developing ability to respond and express oneself aesthetically.

10. Developing skills and interests for use of leisure time.

That there seems to be some consensus concerning educational goals for the future is helpful to educational planners. In examining this literature the need for active participation by learners in group problem-solving was also a dominant theme, as was the centrality of language and communication. Yet, studies such as Goodlad's, A Place Called School (1983), indicate that these are not characteristics of schooling or language use by students at either the elementary or secondary levels.

If one accepts these as goals, the next step is to consider what type of English Language Arts program can facilitate their attainment. To address that question I

will return to the elements in my title: Activity, Essential, and Excellence.

Activity + Essentials = Excellence for Language Arts 2000

Let me begin with the concept of essentials. If you are familiar with the statements on essential of education, including the 1982 NCTE statement Essential of English, you may be as impressed as I was with the similarity in emphasis to the listing of goals above.

The Essentials of Education is a policy statement developed in 1978 and now endorsed by some 27 professional associations, each of which is then committed to develop an essentials statement for its own discipline. To date I am aware of statements for English, mathematics, and social studies. All show concerence with the original statement which affirmed the agreeement of educators "that the overarching goal of education is to develop informed, thinking citizens capable of participating in both domestic and world affairs."

The central concept of the essentials statement is the interdependence of all disciplines since skills and abilites do not grow in isolation from content. In all subjects students develop the essentials of education which include: the ability to use language and other symbol systems, to think and communicate effectively, to reason logically and make value judgments, to use mathematical and scientific

knowledge and methods to solve problems, to make use of technology and understand its limitations, to express oneself and respond aesthetically, to understand other languages and cultures, to develop capacities to cope with change, and to prepare for lifelong learning (The Essentials of Education, 1978).

Consistent with its precursor, Essential of English (1982) emphasized the importance of knowledge of language, development of its use as a means of basic communication through speaking, listening, observing, writing, reading, and use of tehcnologic media, and appreciation of its artistry through literature and the verbal arts. The statement also emphasized the close link between language and creative, logical, and critical thinking skills. Thus, the English Language Art curriculum is instrumental in developing competencies through which individuals "can acquire self-sufficiency and work independently in all disciplines."

In these statements, too, the need for students to be active learners is found. If one then moves to the concept of activity in learning, particulary in the language arts, two periods in our curricular history stand out, namely the Progressive Education movement and the post-Dartmouth years. In fact, the former period was referred to as the Activity Movement, or in English, the Experience Curriculum. An

early examination of the activity movement revealed these theoretical assumptions:

> (1) that the learner is properly an active being who pursues ends, (2) that each activity means interaction with the enviornment of people, things, and ideas with which he comes in contact, (3) that the product of this interaction is not only a change in the enviornment but also a change in the individual, and (4) that this change in the individual, as the inherent effect of the experience, is the resultant learning. (Ayer, English, Hosic, and Mossman, 1934, p. 66)

Similarly, An Expereince Curriculum in English (Hatfield, 1935) began with the premise that experience is the best of all schools.

One can certainly argue that activity as as end in itself is not an adequate basis for curriculum. But it is hard to deny the importance of student involvement in learning and in problem identification and resolution, particulary when one contemplates the significance of the problems which confront us as we move to the 21st century.

What conclusions should one then draw concerning excellence in a Language Arts progam for the year 2000 and beyond? Surely, a synthesis is the answer. We must find a way to blend the concern for social relevance, problem-solving, and functional mastery of cognitive

processes, including language, which was characteristic of the Progressive Era with the active, personal involvement of learners in the workshop classrooms of the late 1960's. However, societal and futuristic perspectives must predominate over purely individualistic concerns.

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