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ABSTRACT

Anthropologist Margaret Mead focused much of her thinking, speaking, and writing on education and the impact of rapid change on educational theory and practice. The history of Mead's writings shows sensitivity to both tradition and change. A selection of 12 of Mead's publications provides insight into Mead's innovative and thought-provoking ideas. Even while engaged in field studies in the Pacific, Mead wrote regularly about anthropology and education. Her earliest professional writings show an awareness of technical change, of the educational adjustments required, and of the outmoded teaching system then in use. She observed the tremendous emotional and social significance of every action by the teacher within the context of the community. Mead raised the issue of education as a mechanism of social change. She also contrasted schools oriented toward the past and those that looked toward the future. Through her writings, Mead called for a more innovative, circular approach to education. Her recommendations included teaching patriotism for the world as a whole and setting aside old assumptions in favor of ideas consistent with a changing world. (LBG)

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"Margaret Mead: Anthropological
Perspective on Educational Change."

By

Suzanne S. Monroe



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"...The fact that I began my work with
children while I was very young, during a
period when the world underwent the most
rapid change in history, has been
particularly fortunate for it has made
possible these ongoing studies of change..."

--Margaret Mead (Gordon, p. 18).

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I. Introduction and Background

Dr. Margaret Mead, foremost woman anthropologist and prolific publisher, focused much of her thinking, speaking, and writing effort on education and the impact of rapid change on educational theory and practice. Her publication of monographs and an overwhelming array of essays and articles was continuous and consistent in theme.

From her earliest article about education, "The Need for Teaching Anthropology in Normal Schools and Teachers' Colleges" (1927) to her personal longitudinal overview "What I Think I Have Learned About Education" (1974), Mead was sensitive to both tradition and change--to the ideas of transmission and transformation. In her personal life as well as her professional writing, Mead carried the optimism of the Nineteenth Century into the chaos of the Twentieth Century.

According to biographer Jane Howard,

"Anthropology had attracted Mead in the first place because its borders were so flexible, but even it could not contain her. Nothing could!...She was not only one of the most accomplished and most energetically public women of her time, but one of the most enigmatic...She made her own rules, and lived many lives. She rushed across oceans and continents, time zones and networks and disciplines, knocking down barriers and redefining boundaries."

Howard notes:

"She focused more intensely than any anthropologist ever had before her on matters of gender and women and children."

Howard's discovery may account for Margaret Mead's prolific writings in the areas of education and feminism--both controversial subjects following World War II, when many elements in America preferred to settle back into peace and isolation. However, the end of the war really brought to the public attention a host of new issues, among them: education as an agent of change.

It was much earlier, however, in the early 1930's, that Margaret Mead was first identified as an educational reformer. Because of her personal and professional association with Lawrence K. Frank, she found herself part of the educational protocracy, the advance guard of the new movement in education. It was in fact her work with various committees and boards as well as her research and publication related to the Hanover Seminar on Human Relations (1934), that catapulted her into The Progressive Education Movement. During this period, Mead published Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples and served on several influential committees--the Progressive Education Association, Hanover Seminar and the Committee on the Function of the Social Sciences in Education.

According to biographer Robert Cassidy,

"For fifty years, Mead was the bellweather of Anthropology both in the United States and abroad...As a fellow anthropologist said of her, 'None of us knows what really lies ahead, not even Margaret Mead. But I assure you, if there is a committee in charge, she will be on it.'"

Cassidy observes:

"She was also involved in extensive research related to adolescence. Not only did this progressive movement contribute to the public's changing opinion toward adolescence, but it also created a network of leaders and reformers who believed in spreading the idea of changing the schools."⁴

He continues:

"Margaret Mead's contribution to education rests equally on her work as a teacher, lecturer and philosopher of education and on her seminal writings. Of the latter, two essays written during the 1950's--'The School in American Culture' and 'Why Is Education Obsolete?'--represent the most precise distillation of her thoughts on the subject. Yoked with several lesser-known but equally significant essays written during this period, they neatly summarize her educational philosophy."⁵

Drawing upon the suggestion of biographer Robert Cassidy, the researcher reviewed Mead's lucid and critical observations of American education in these two major publications: "The School in American Culture" (1950) and "Thinking Ahead: Why is Education Obsolete" (1958). The researcher then perused approximately 100 articles and monographs in an effort to broaden her perspective of Mead's contributions to education. The selected Bibliography includes those publications which were most relevant for this particular research. A more extensive overview of Mead's publications related to education is included in the Appendix. In the interests of brevity and continuity, the researcher selected one dozen publications which, in her opinion, provide the most innovative and thought-provoking ideas. These have been organized into chronological periods of "the early

years" (1927-1943), "the middle years" (1950-1960), and "the later years" (1971-1974).

II. "The Early Years"

Although much of Mead's time and energy were being devoted to her field studies in the Pacific, she did regularly write articles relating to anthropology and education. As early as 1927, in her publication of "The Need for Teaching Anthropology in Normal Schools and Teachers' Colleges" in School and Society, Mead was sensitive to the generational differences in the learning-teaching process. She observes:

"The primitive instructor had to teach the child entrusted to his care all that he himself had learned from his teachers and his own experience; his task was simply to pass on to the next generation the sum of this civilization, undistorted, unexpurgated, unadorned...But in the teaching method there was no assumption of changes to come...Seldom was the technical education conducted in such a way that the pupil was taught general principles, either principles of mechanics or properties of materials."⁴ "Each item of knowledge is imparted separately...In teaching about society, the child receives no such groundwork for abstract and constructive thinking...But the child is given no teaching as to the potentialities and limitations which man has shown through the ages...under the influence of different civilizations with vastly different patterns of behavior."²

She concludes:

"Anthropology is a special technique for enabling people to step outside their own civilizations and view them objectively. By the study and analysis of the diverse solutions which other members of the human race have applied to the problems which confront us today, it is possible to make a more reasoned, a more scientific judgment of the needs of our society."¹³

Although her thoughts are somewhat fragmented in this very brief piece, Mead was ahead of her time in her awareness of technical change and of the educational adjustments required. She was also beginning to think about the limitations of an outdated teaching system in a modern age--a theme which was to continue another 50 years!

In 1931, the anthropologist published "The Meaning of Freedom in Education" in Progressive Education. Here, Mead argues that education is primarily a process of transmission of the old, not a way of creating the new. She also notes that American culture is poor in opportunities for self-expression, and questions whether the indictment of the mainstream culture should fall upon the classroom. She contrasts various methods of education, and concludes that they produce one result: turning newborn children of any society into typical members of that society.

Mead analyzes the problem:

"But we have introduced a new ideal into education. Education is not to content itself with the task which it has never done properly since the beginning of civilization--the transmission of the particular cultural heritage into which the child is born. It is to go further than this; it is to produce something new. The schoolroom is to become a workshop, a mint, from which the routine human stuff of each new generation is to emerge new-coined and from a new and hitherto unknown die. And there is the rub."

She concludes:

"The inevitable fashion in which the children of each society become the adults of that society would discourage any tendency to utopian dreams of reforms sprung from the classroom..His task (educator) was not reform, but merely guiding young minds so that they might come healthy and unwarped to receive the die which their culture would place upon them...By training children in such a way that they can use this cultural inheritance, the educator can make a real contribution, a contribution which will almost inevitably escape those who follow instead the will-o'-the-wisp of the spontaneous creativeness of children."¹⁰

This article undoubtedly proved disquieting to the child development specialists and developmental psychologists of the time. However, Mead was rarely deterred from her responsibility to speak honestly. In both of these early articles on education, Mead is both critical and optimistic about the American educational system. She takes notice of current innovations as well as the complexities of tradition!!

Mead published "An Anthropologist Looks At The Teachers' Role" in Educational Method (1942). In this article, she has expanded her thinking from the earlier publications of the late 1920's and early 1930's. She reiterates her observation that "...throughout the primitive and ancient world, the teacher was conceived as the custodian of the precious past, its lore and its skills...As long as this condition prevailed, there was no thought of methods of teaching, but only of methods of learning, had the student the fee, the skill or the memory to learn that which he could persuade someone to teach him...A first great

shift in the role of the teacher came with the invention of the school and the implicit assumption that through the school the number of persons who shared any skill could be enormously extended."¹¹

Mead observes the tremendous emotional and social significance of every action by the teacher within the context of community. She suggests that any deviations on the part of the teacher arouse terrible anxiety in the parents.

"...The fact remains that the teacher is leading the children--their children--into a strange world where they can never follow, that the teacher is--in a sense--a Pied Piper of Hamelin."¹²

"In such a highly charged situation, there are two roads open to the teacher. The teacher can seek to increase her ties of solidarity with the parents, sharing in their community life, continually interpreting to them...or the teacher may press for more and more powerful and remote sanctions to be placed behind her teaching...But behind the whole issue of whether our school systems should be more and more run from the top, first by states and ultimately federalized, lurks this problem: how close or how distant are to be the ties between the teacher and the parents of those whom she teaches?"¹³

Mead notes that the public demands more originality and scientific thought at the same time challenging educators with an intensification of the problem of community relationships. She also notes that teachers cannot--even if they wanted--give up their role as the official instruments of change.

She concludes:

"Every great and sweeping upheaval in the world gives us a chance to recast our institutionalized roles, to divest them of cumbersome and worthless symbolism, to invest them with new meanings...If the schools will seize this opportunity to use symbols of past and future together, and, at the same time strengthen their horizontal ties with their local communities...to take such steps as these, two things are wanted: understanding of the strategic crossroads at which the schools stand, and a confident attitude towards the future."¹⁴

In her publication of "Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective" in 1943, Dr. Mead is concerned about cultural transmission as well as cultural transformation. In this article she observes,

"In its broadest sense, education is the cultural process, the way in which each new-born human infant, born with a potentiality for learning greater than that of any other mammal, is transformed into a full member of a specific Human Culture."¹⁵

In this article, Mead raises the issue of education as a mechanism of change, particularly social change. She focuses on the elements of cultural transmission as well as cultural transformation. She notes:

"There are several striking differences between our concept of education today and that of any contemporary primitive society; but perhaps the most important one is the shift from the need for an individual to learn something which everyone agrees he would wish to know, to the will of some individual to teach something which it is not agreed that anyone has any desire to know. Such a shift in emphasis could come only with the breakdown of self-contained and self-respecting cultural homogeneity."¹⁶

She continues:

"With social stratification the possibility of using education as a way of changing status is introduced, and another new component of the educational idea develops. Here the emphasis is still upon the need to learn--on the one hand, in order to alter status, and, on the other, to prevent the loss of status by failure to learn."¹⁷

A major portion of this paper is devoted to a discussion of the common factors in modern trends in education. One common strand is the acceptance of discontinuity between parents and children. She suggests that

...."Modern education includes a heavy emphasis upon the function of education to create discontinuities--to turn the child of the peasant into a clerk, of the farmer into a lawyer, of the Italian immigrant into an American, of the illiterate into the literate."¹⁸

Another expressed concern is the increasing emphasis on change rather than growth. Mead observes that changing peoples' habits, ideas, beliefs and language involves a deliberate violence to their developed personalities.

"Thus we see that the presence of one element within our culture--a spurious sense of superiority of one group of human beings over another, which gave the group in power the impetus to force their language, their beliefs, and their culture down the throats of the group which was numerically, or economically, or geographically handicapped--this corrupted and distorted the emphases of our free schools."¹⁹

And finally, Mead refers to the belief in the power of education to work miracles...to become an agent of transformation.

"As long as the transmission of culture is an orderly and continuous process, in a slowly changing society, the child speaks the language of his parents...It took the discontinuity of educational systems, purposive shifts of language and beliefs between parents and children, to catch our imagination and to fashion the great American faith in education as creative rather than transmission, conversion, suppression, assimilation or indoctrination."²⁰

It is in this article that Mead takes a strong position toward education as a transformative tool in culture change--a position which will be expanded throughout her next 30 years of writing and research--but a position from which she will not back down. She notes the emphasis has shifted from learning to teaching, from spontaneity to coercion and from freedom to power. With this, she contrasts the birth of a belief that education is an instrument for the creation of new human values. She summarizes:

"Instead of attempting to bind and limit the future and to compromise the inhabitants of the next century by a long process of indoctrination which will make them unable to follow any path but that which we have laid down, it suggests that we devise and practice a system of education which sets the future free. We must concentrate upon teaching our children to walk so steadily that we need not hew too straight and narrow paths for them but can trust them to make new paths through difficulties we never encountered to a future of which we have no inkling today."²¹

"...It is most uncertain whether the educational invention made by those who

emphasized teaching or the educational invention made by those who emphasized learning will survive. But the more rapidly we can erase from our society these discrepancies in position and privilege which tend to perpetuate and strengthen the power and manipulative aspects of education, the more hope we may have that that other invention--the use of education for unknown ends which shall exalt man above his present stature--may survive!"²²

This is a very powerful statement about the transformative nature of education, and clearly supports the idea that Margaret Mead was usually light years ahead of her time! Written in 1943, this article is probably one of the most dramatic of her "early years" publications and sets the stage for her forthcoming publications on the changing images and roles of education, characteristic of her professional focus in "the middle years."

III. "The Middle Years"

In her publication of The School In American Culture, actually the Inglis Lecture given at Harvard in 1950, Mead was adamant that the major problem in education was how to teach young people to cope with rapid change. The children of the post-war years were unique in that they were growing up in the atomic age, an experience in which technology and scientific change would make yesterday's knowledge useless. For the first time in recorded history, the younger generation would grow up with a premium on experience. This idea was more fully developed in Culture and Commitment (1970). Mead begins her discussion in The School in American Culture with this purpose:

"I would like to discuss the teacher within the school, the teacher within the school within a changing society, how her role has been defined and underwritten, what she must learn and unlearn again in the course of our teaching lifetime."²³

Mead notes that even though American ideas of "teacher" will be varied and compounded by both stereotype and actual experience, the current crop of teachers are of both sexes and from many different ages and backgrounds. In spite of these statistics, the traditional image remains--that of a white, middle class, middle-aged woman of Protestant background.

She then moves on to analyze a series of images about "school" and distills the range of variations into three basic images:

- * The Little Red Schoolhouse
- * The Academy

* The City School

"The Little Red Schoolhouse provides a symbol for a passing phase of history--of a stable, democratic, slowly changing real American world," and (the teacher)... "she teachers the children pretty much what their parents learned; new teaching is viewed with suspicion, and the schoolboard of the little red schoolhouse are traditionally regarded as the enemies of all change."²⁴

"Like so many symbols of the American dream, it stands both for a desirable state never attained and for a past golden age which has been lost--the school in a world which did not change..a world of rural images."²⁵

"In contrast to this image is the academy...at which the children of the privileged were initiated into the mysteries of our heritage from Europe--Latin, Greek, Music. The school to which the parents who could afford it sent their children, so that their children would remain part of the past to which they owed, or wished to owe, allegiance...the perspective of the academy stretched back to the culture of the grandparents and great-grandparents who had been judges and governors."²⁶

Regard the third image of the city school--an architectural non-entity filled with the children of immigrant families, Mead observes:

"...they must be taught, not the constancies of their parents' immediate past, as in the little red schoolhouse, or the precious values of a long ancestral past, as in the academy, but they must be taught to reject, and usually to despise their parents' values. They must learn things which, to the extent that they make them Americans, will alienate them forever from their parents, making them ancestorless, children of the future, cut off from the past."²⁷

Mead uses the analogy of these images to look at the history of American education and the on-going conflict between the school oriented toward the past and the school oriented toward the future. In examining primitive societies as models of slowly changing homogeneous societies, Mead contrasts the extreme conservatism of societies in which children are reared by grandparents to those cultures in which the child nurse (elder brother or sister) is still maturing.

"And so we have a second model, the society in which the resources of early childhood, whether in directness of bodily expression or richness of phantastic elaboration or denial of the adult structuring of the world, are preserved for children, and therefore for adults also, because the child learns not from someone who has traversed the whole round of life, but from someone still very close to its beginning."²²

The third model echoes the little red' schoolhouse image in that children are not reared by grandparents or older sibling nurses but rather by young parents...the present possessors and inheritors of the adult world.

This third model is exemplified by the typical middle-class, nuclear family of the 1950's with parents being far from childhood, at the height of their careers and facing old age with minimal awareness and expectation. Thus, the child faces toward a partial future and conceives of life as an unwritten chapter of a book.

Mead suggests that these three models are drawn from slowly changing homogenous societies. In contrast to these models, Mead describes the heterogeneity and rapid changes of American urban

society and a differing group of children every ten years.. She draws an analogy between the teacher in the overcrowded "city school" and the parent model--as both urge children away from the past and toward the future. "This teacher is closest to the model in which parents rear the child to a kind of behavior rather than to fit within tradition...she faces forward into a future that is only partially charted, and so she must furnish her children with a kind of behavior, a method of exploration rather than a parchment map."²²

In her assessment of images of teachers, schools, and parents, Mead has repeatedly been concerned with people and institutions as transmitters of the culture, and as mediators between the past and the future. Mead envisions an effective teacher as one who has reached a synthesis of the three models, and who would combine respect for tradition with a willingness to open new doors. She summarizes:

"We are facing a world which this adult generation is unable to grasp, to manage, to plan for...we need a new kind of teaching--a teaching of a readiness to use unknown ways to solve unknown problems...We need to teach our students how to think, when you don't know what method to use, about a problem, which is not yet formulated."²³

A second major essay written during this period began as an article for "Thinking Ahead" column in Harvard Business Review (1958) and was later adapted for NEA Journal (1959) under the title of "A Redefinition of Education." In both articles, Mead's emphases include the shift from vertical to lateral teaching--learning styles, innovation in definitions of elementary and

secondary education, and the multiple functions of education in a world of nuclear energy, high technology and rapid changes. Mead observes:

"Although the educational system remains basically unchanged, we are no longer dealing primarily with the vertical transmission of the tried and true by the old, mature and experienced teacher to the young, immature, and inexperienced pupil in the classroom...What is needed and what we are already moving toward is the inclusion of another whole dimension of learning: the lateral transmission, to every sentient member of society, of what has been discovered, invented, created, manufactured, and marketed."²¹

Mead is most vocal about changes and its effect on both children and adults. She observes,

"Is not the break between past and present--and so the whole problem of outdatedness in our educational system--related to a change in the rate of change? For change has become so rapid that adjustment cannot be left to the next generation. Adults must--not once, but continually--take in, adjust to, use and make innovations in a steady stream of discovery and new conditions."²²

Dr. Mead maintains as the most vivid truth of the new age: "no one will live all of his life in the world into which he was born, and no one will die in the world in which he worked in his maturity."²³

This point regarding the impact of rapid change on human beings for now into the future is a continuing concern expressed in her later article, "A Redefinition of Education" (1959). She suggests that the education system of the day combines various functions:

1. The protection of the child against exploitation and the protection of the society against precocity and inexperience.
2. The maintenance of learners in a state of moral and economic dependency.
3. Provision of a wider education for all children rather than only those of privileged classes.
4. The teaching of complex and specialized skills.
5. The transmission to young children knowledge and skills not known by their parents' generation.³⁴

Mead suggests that to these multiple functions of education we have added slowly and reluctantly a quite new function: education for rapid and self-conscious adaptation to a changing world. She maintains that one of the ways of addressing the problem of rapid change is by a redefinition of the terms primary and secondary education. She defines primary education as that stage of education in which all children are taught what they need to know in order to be fully human--including the basic skills of reading and writing as well as a basic knowledge of numbers, money, geography, transportation, communication, law, and nations of the world. And she defines secondary education as that based on primary, and which "can be obtained in any amount and at any period during the individuals' whole lifetime."³⁵

She summarizes her redefinition of education:

"In thinking about an effective educational system, we should recognize that the adolescent's need and right to work is as great as (perhaps greater than) his immediate need and right to study. And we must recognize that the adult's need and right to

study more is as great as (perhaps greater than) his need and right to hold the same job until he is 65."³⁶

In both of these essays, Mead suggests that the traditional linear system of teaching and learning must be modified and balanced by a more innovative, circular approach and process. She provides examples of how some educational agencies are recognizing the need for change through alternative models--the two major agencies being the armed services and industry, and their emphasis on in-service training programs and adult continuing education.

Mead concludes:

"We cannot accomplish the essential educational task merely by keeping children and young adults--whom we treat like children--in school longer. We can do it by creating an educational system in which all individuals will be assured of the secondary and higher education they want and can use any time throughout their entire lives."³⁷

A year later, Mead published "The High School of the Future" in The California Journal of Secondary Education. She begins her discussion by asking these fundamental questions:

1. Do we mean by high school simply a stage of education which is possible for any individual, child, or adult, who has an elementary education?
2. Do we mean by high school a stage of education which is the appropriate precursor of some other stage of education without which the later or further stage cannot be undertaken?

3. Do we mean by high school a kind of schooling which opens many doors, even though they lead to paths not taken at once, not taken for years, or not taken at all, or do we mean a kind of schooling which--like a hospital for incurable cancer patients or the senile--is supposed to be "terminal"?
4. Do we mean by high school not really a school at all in these three rather limited, specialized and archaic senses, but instead a setting for the life of our adolescents with the emphasis upon a phase of growth rather than upon a stage of schooling?³⁹

Mead suggests that we need some new concepts of the period when young are old enough to take part in society at differing rates of learning, maturation and responsibility. In their theoretical framework, she discusses four phases:³⁹

Phase I--those students who are so young or vulnerable or slow growing that continuous contact with a familiar place or person is needed if learning is to take place; the period when individual personal relationships are essential to the learnings basic to being human.

Phase II--those students who are ready to learn in groups those skills which are products of higher civilization and for which it has seemed more economical to be wasteful of a pupil's time rather than burden each adult with teaching of a few children.

Phase III--those students who are growing so unevenly that they require projection in some sectors of life if learning, growth and achievement are to be possible in other sectors of life. This unevenness is characteristic of most, but not all, adolescents.

Phase IV--those students who are mature, not just adult, whose need for special protection from the community is minimal, and who are most able to carry the major economic, political and ethical responsibilities of our society.

Mead concludes:

"So a first step in planning the high school of the future is either to broaden or narrow its focus. If broadened it should be a community center where all adolescents are given a focus and some sort of protection...The other solution, a meager one, is to narrow the school to what it once was--a little academic enclave for the children with the economic resources and the intellectual ability to go to a higher education...The opportunity to learn to be a full human being--which is education in its widest sense--is as indivisible as freedom itself."⁴⁰

IV. "The Later Years"

In 1971, Margaret Mead published "Early Childhood Experience and Later Education in Complex Cultures". Here, she draws upon her cross-cultural orientation and experience as well as her leanings toward a philosophy of child development.

"Education in a complex society may be seen as merely an extension of the educational process found in simpler societies, but taking longer, requiring more specialized institutions, and involving progressive absorption into wider or narrower segments of the total society."⁴¹

The author addresses the issues of literacy, early language learning and sex and temperament--all from a cross-cultural perspective. She emphasizes the importance of family literacy and the preschoolers' accessibility to books as well as the teachers' love of reading and the subsequent impact on children's motivation to read. In this article of the seventies, Mead supports current research of the eighties regarding literacy before schooling:

"The bright moment passes, never to be regained, But attitudes toward the importance of reading have been established for good or ill, long before the child goes to school."⁴²

In the subject of bilingualism, Mead notes:

"If the mother tongue is treated as an inferior version of the standard language, rather than as a dialect, movement becomes much more difficult between the phonemic, morphemic and cognitive structures of the two forms, the home language, and the school language..It will be particularly important to explore the later effects on the thinking ability of the co-existence of two languages:

an infant or child language that remains rudimentary and undeveloped, unused since childhood, and a standard language that is reinforced with literacy, literature, and disciplined thought."⁴³

Mead continues:

"Deeper than the marks of a different intellectual style, of a failure to grasp the meaning of literature as access to new experiences, and deeper than the learning that comes from the content of the home and from the cues given by sex and temperament, is the mark laid upon the small preschool child by his parents' expectations of his achievement."⁴⁴

"Instead of a single-track notion of education from which those with the 'wrong' cultural backgrounds were automatically excluded, and within which those with the 'right' social backgrounds were often severely punished, we need to construct a system in which all sorts of lateral movements are possible...To accomplish this, the school needs to be more explicitly geared to compensate and balance, to take advantage of and when appropriate undo, the enormous strength or preschool experience."⁴⁵

Also in 1971, Mead agreed to an interview with the Nation's Schools. In her response, "Are Any School Administrators Listening?," Mead focuses her attention on post-war youth and their education. In analyzing the contemporary educational system, Mead conceives of it as a linear and hierarchial system. She suggests that the system must change, to become more open to the changing nature of pupils.

"Essentially, the old system assumed that pupils would be the same one generation after another, and that developments should be toward better ways of teaching or new curriculum...We need to alter our perceptions and realize that each group of children who come into the schools has had new experiences

which were not there before. New information about the new children that are entering school is the most valuable information that a high school administrator or high school principal or supervisor of curriculum can have. Unless they have it, the schools become progressively obsolete, as they are now in this country."⁴⁶

Mead notes that administrators need to return to classroom for extended periods of teaching time. Unless the administrator works with current student, she/he cannot be of help to teachers in the system. She suggests that administrators might pattern their experiences after the Air Force, where the highest ranking officers continue to fly.

"The important thing is to think about students' energies and realize that they are not being adequately used. Most schools are too confining; their curriculum is obsolete...We need to find things that the students can do that are relevant to them, things that they feel matter now...Unless we let students out, it's pretty hopeless. For instance, the ecology problem provides appropriate activities for high school students."⁴⁷

In regard to peer learning, Mead notes Urie Brofenbrenner's work in the Soviet Union, where he observed paired classes in which older children look after younger ones. In this way, students who are being taught are also teaching, and this breaks the linearity of the system.

"I think one concept we might consider is that of educational clusters. In this system, you would have day-care centers, kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, and community colleges--all fairly close together--where different age groups can move back and forth. You can have the older students teach the young ones."⁴⁸

Mead concludes her interview by her observation that there is social unrest throughout the world, and largely because educational systems are obsolete. Her final piece of advice to school administrators is to listen to the younger teachers, those are members of the post-World War II generation!

An expansion of these ideas appears in "Margaret Mead: Education Needs an Open System," appearing in College and University Business, February, 1972. In addition to her philosophical statement regarding the need for adjusting the linear system, Mead favors a voucher system. She proposes that upon graduation from high school, each person be reassessed for health and skills. They would then be assigned to two years of domestic or international service. Upon completion of the service commitment, each person would be issued a voucher for continuing education.

"I'm very much in favor of a voucher system. Following World War II, the GI bill, which is essentially a voucher system, had a wondrous transforming effect on higher education...They would have earned it. They would be proud of it. They wouldn't be dependent on anyone. And what they needed to learn would shape what colleges were ready to teach."⁴⁹

The most comprehensive of her articles published in the Seventies is Mead's contribution to Education (April-May, 1974) in which she writes "What I Think I Have Learned About Education, 1923-1974". Her approach is longitudinal and personal in that she reviews what has happened to one human scientist--an anthropologist--who has been deeply involved with educational

theory throughout her professional life.

"So perhaps it may be useful to see how a particular (identified) person has changed as new knowledge became available and changing conditions in the world were reflected in new kinds of educational questions and new attempts to find viable answers to them."³⁰
 "So what I have decided to do is this: I have gone back over things I published beginning with 1926 and selected paragraphs which seem to sum up, as succinctly as possible, what I thought anthropology was able to say about the educational process."³¹

In her first piece of graduate research, Mead studied how language spoken at home affects children's performance at school. This was completed in 1923 as part of her M.A. in Psychology. From this study on, Mead related her anthropological work to the wider problems of education. She presents in this article her most significant attempts during the period 1926-1943, then skips thirty years and attempts to summarize the changes that have taken place.

"I am impressed by the similarity of many of today's problems and the problems that faced us during the early years of World War II...I am also struck by the educational problems which we already saw and which are still unsolved...But there were sharp differences also. The great Generation Gap was not yet upon us. I could speak of teachers and parents as viable models...We had not yet learned the lessons of the electronic age, we still thought in linear terms and did not allow for circular processes within total systems. We were barely beginning to understand the effect of the mass media. We were only beginning to think of the entire world at once..."³²

Mead observes that at the end of World War II, she was asked to edit Cultural Patterns and Technical Change (1953), and

realized that the old assumption that change had to be slow to be effective was no longer tenable. There was a growing recognition that the spread of communication around the world, the revolution of rising expectations globally, meant that it could no longer be assumed that change as implemented by education must take at least two generations.

"By 1969, it seemed clear that something very drastic had happened in the world. The old forms of education, in which the behavior of the old was a perfect model of what the young would someday be, I called a post-figurative culture; and the situations in the more rapidly changing societies where young people who had not learned a particular style of life learned from others who had, I called cofigurative culture...We now had a prefigurative culture, in which the elders had to learn how to incorporate what the young had learned but which they had not. This unique generation gap, certainly different from anything the world has ever known because it involves the whole world, had introduced a new element into education."⁵³

"Children are still there to be taught, and the things children need to know are more numerous and more exacting than ever before. But in the past, the adult could teach a child like the child that he or she had once been; now it is necessary first to learn what the contemporary world means to the children, before we can teach them anything that will be of use to them in it...It is no longer a case of passing on what we know, but of stopping to find out what they have experienced and we have not."⁵⁴

V. Researcher's Summary

Since the beginning of this project in June, 1987, the researcher has been amazed and overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of Margaret Mead's thinking and writing. The task has been to search for significant contributions to education, and then to synthesize the major ideas and present in an understandable format. All of this the researcher has attempted to do; and at the same time, present her own creative style.

The process of getting to know Margaret Mead as a person and professional has been a full-time immersion experience! The largest discovery for the researcher was not that Mead was such a prolific writer and publisher, but that so much of her material lent itself to educational inquiry, theory and practice.

Mead's writings about education were innovative and humanistic. She revered both the individual and the cultural group. She was international enough to address global issues of change, and patriotic enough to be sensitive to American traditions and innovations. She shared both her optimism and her criticism! Dr. Mead's work is a tribute to the limitlessness of human thought...of alternative approach...of the new or different idea--all within the cross-cultural perspective!

She was most free of the fear of change! A common thread throughout her writing, "change" appeared in her first essay on education in 1929 and would consistently reappear during the next five decades. In 1974, she wrote about her own personal and professional changes as a global anthropologist. Her continuing

contribution to education and humanity may best be summarized by Margaret Mead herself:

"Somehow we must bring our formal schooling in line with all the new things that are happening in the world, with the recognition that we are now part of a single planetary system in which the most remote people, the smallest child, the littlest piece of water is apart. For the old dependencies on home and village, tribe and nation state, and a school that articulated these loyalties and values, we have to recognize the effect of events shared round the world by television and mass travel. We have to enlarge old loyalties to the countries within which each of us dwell, into a concern for the shared air and oceans, recognizing that boundaries and barriers and sentinels have become helpless in defending any one group against the communications, and the ecological hazards introduced by other groups. We can only defend and save any part of this endangered planet by saving the whole. We can only muster the political will to save the whole by a fervent concern for each part." 33

"These are some of the things that I think I have learned by returning again and again to the peoples I have studied in other parts of the world and comparing what I learn there with what is happening in the United States, correcting for our lesser knowledge and lesser vision in the past. Many of our older assumptions, assumptions made in generosity and hope, from emotions of brotherhood and compassion, are still with us, and many of those who have given their lives to teaching past generations of young people find the present generation ungrateful. It is useful to remember that those who are rebelling are those whom we have taught as if they were the children we once were, instead of children of a new age into which we have come, often reluctantly and belatedly, as immigrants." 34

VI. Notes

¹Howard, Jane. Margaret Mead, A Life. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.

p. 12.

²Ibid.

³Cassidy, Robert. Margaret Mead: A Voice For the Century. New York: Universe Books, 1982; p. 21

⁴Ibid, p. 75.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Mead, Margaret, "The Need for Teaching Anthropology in Normal Schools and Teachers' Colleges." School and Society, vol. 26, No. 667; October 8, 1927; p. 466.

⁷Ibid., p. 467.

⁸Ibid, p. 467-68.

⁹Mead, Margaret. "The Meaning of Freedom in Education". Progressive Education, vol. 8, no. 2; February, 1931, p. 108.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 111.

¹¹Mead, Margaret. "An Anthropologist Looks at the Teacher's Role." Educational Method, vol. 21, 1942, p. 219.

¹²Ibid, p. 221.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid, p. 223.

¹⁵Mead, Margaret. "Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective." Education and Culture: Anthropological Approaches. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963, p. 309.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 311.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 313.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 316.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 319.

- ²⁰Ibid, p. 318.
- ²¹Ibid, p. 320.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Mead, Margaret. The School In American Culture. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964, p. 1.
- ²⁴Ibid, p. 8.
- ²⁵Ibid, p. 9.
- ²⁶Ibid, pp. 9-10.
- ²⁷Ibid, p. 11.
- ²⁸Ibid, p. 18.
- ²⁹Ibid, pp. 25-26.
- ³⁰Ibid, pp. 40-41.
- ³¹Mead, Margaret. "Why is Education Obsolete?" Harvard Business Review, vol. 36, no. 6, November-December, 1958, p. 23.
- ³²Ibid, p. 28.
- ³³Ibid, p. 30.
- ³⁴Mead, Margaret. "A Redefinition of Education". NEA Journal, October, 1959, p. 16.
- ³⁵Ibid, p. 17.
- ³⁶Ibid.
- ³⁷Ibid.
- ³⁸Mead, Margaret. "The High School of the Future". California Journal of Secondary Education, vol. 35, October, 1960, p. 361.
- ³⁹Ibid, pp. 362-364.
- ⁴⁰Ibid, pp. 368-369.
- ⁴¹Mead, Margaret. "Early Childhood Experience and Later Education in Complex Cultures." Anthropological Perspectives On Education. Murary Wax et al, Editors. New York: Basic Books, 1971, p. 219.

⁴²Ibid, p. 225.

⁴³Ibid, p. 233.

⁴⁴Ibid, 236.

⁴⁵Ibid, p. 237.

⁴⁶Mead, Margaret. "Are Any School Administrators Listening?" Nation's Schools, vol. 87, no. 6, June, 1971, p. 41-42.

⁴⁷Ibid, p. 42.

⁴⁸Ibid, p. 45.

⁴⁹Mead, Margaret. "Education Needs An Open System." College and University Business, vol. 52, no. 2, February, 1972, p. 30.

⁵⁰Mead, Margaret. "What I Think I Have Learned About Education, 1923-1974." Education, vol. 94, no. 4, April-May, 1974, p. 291.

⁵¹Ibid, p. 291.

⁵²Ibid, p. 294.

⁵³Ibid, p. 396.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 397.

⁵⁶Ibid.

VII. Selected Bibliography

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