

## “Molds” and “Spirit” in the Eight-Year Study

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The molds into which education was poured, rather than its essence and spirit, became the goals of pupils and parents alike.

Wilford M. Aikin (1942a, 7)

During the 1930s the Progressive Education Association conducted a comprehensive study and field experiment with thirty U.S. secondary schools known as the Eight-Year Study. Detaching these schools' curricula from college and university admission requirements for the sake of curriculum experimentation, this remarkable undertaking remains today as perhaps the major school-based curriculum research project in the history of U.S. curriculum studies. Not incidentally, the Study provided a crucial career “break” (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 91) for Ralph W. Tyler, who drew on his experience as Research Director of the Committee on Evaluation and Recording to devise his “principles” of curriculum and instruction (1949).

*Stories of the Eight-Year Study* – by Craig Kridel and Robert V. Bullough, Jr. – merits serious scrutiny not only because it constitutes a landmark contribution to our understanding of the Eight-Year

Study through portraits of its primary participants<sup>1</sup>, but because it enacts a central curriculum practice, the “translation” (Edgerton 1996, pp. 54-55) or “recontextualization” - with this concept’s echoes of Rorty (Hall 1994, 5; Roberts 1995, 239-251), Bernstein (Muller 2000, 63), and Derrida, Wittgenstein and Peirce before them (Roberts 1995, 181, n. 3) - of primary (or simply antecedent) texts according to present purposes. Indeed, Kridel and Bullough (2007, 2) characterize their scholarship as an “*act of reclamation.*” In their reclaiming of this event, Kridel and Bullough risk reducing the Eight-Year Study to another (if powerful) instance of school “reform” by recasting it as “an opportunity to recall what can be accomplished when educators, students, and parents come together to explore values and to develop practices that represent and reflect the desire to realize our national democratic commitments” (2007, 2). It is not clear to what extent these constituencies “came together,” as there are allusions to tensions<sup>2</sup> at various points. But to the extent they did cannot be converted into a formula to be employed regardless of time, place, and circumstance, a reiteration of the instrumentalist-organizational (il)logic of present-day school deform (Pinar in press).

There are other theoretical issues at stake as well.

Understanding curriculum as primarily institutional invokes the

concept of curriculum *reorganization*, e.g. altering the institutional forms through which intellectual content is structured. Curriculum *reconstruction* requires reconfiguration of intellectual content in light of new knowledge as well as reshaping the communicative and institutional forms through which it is enacted. While in the reports of the Eight-Year Study (and, on occasion, in Dewey: see 1920, 134-5) the distinction between the two concepts – reorganization and reconstruction – is blurred (see, for example, Giles, McCutchen, and Zechiel 1942, 85; Thirty Schools 1943, 419), I emphasize the distinction in order to underscore the specificity of the experimentation to which our progressive predecessors devoted themselves. Asking “how can the high school improve its service to American youth?” (Aikin 1942a, 1) and relying on “fuller knowledge of the learning process (1942a, 2), the Eight-Year Study was dedicated to teaching that “way of life we call democracy” (1942a, 19).<sup>3</sup>

That dedication seems to have taken primarily institutional or organizational forms. By focusing on the organization of the curriculum one is, by definition, attending primarily to the “molds” into which education is poured. Aikin is referencing “traditional” education in the sentence quoted above, but his observation seems inadvertently self-referential as well. In the Eight-Year Study’s

emphasis upon reorganization, on evaluation, and student record-keeping, it reiterated the organizational emphasis Aikin associates with “traditional” education. Ralph W. Tyler played a crucial role in this institutional experimentation. For Tyler, central to the reorganization of curriculum was linking evaluation to the establishment of objectives, two of what Tyler (1949) later theorized as “basic principles” of curriculum and instruction. Structuring organizational experimentation through the establishment of objectives measured by evaluation institutionalized the instrumentalism of those engaged in the Eight-Year Study.<sup>4</sup>

Experimentation is integral to democratization, as Roberto Unger (2007, p. 160) insists: “The experimentalist impulse – at once piecemeal in its method and revolutionary in ambitions – must be diffused through all society and culture.” One domain of such experimentation is indeed organizational or institutional. In *Stories of the Eight-Year Study* we read accounts of reorganizing the curriculum, re-imagining the teacher’s role, rearranging class schedules, revising forms of student record-keeping, and expanding evaluation. These activities are explicitly associated with the school as an institution, and less with education as an intellectual experience of subjective and social reconstruction, although the two domains are hardly

unrelated.<sup>5</sup> Missing are accounts of curriculum development informed by teachers' advanced study in the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences.<sup>6</sup> Such study provides "new" knowledge, enabling teachers to experiment intellectually and not only by reorganizing what they know already. Combining intellectual with institutional experimentation is more likely to set the stage for the reconstruction (not merely the reorganization) of the curriculum, enabling "inner reform" as well as "external liberation" (Toews 2008, 76).

Foreshadowing contemporary school reform was the revolutionary scale of the Eight-Year Study's aspiration, nothing less than the democratization of culture, the realization of "our national democratic commitments" (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 2). With curriculum attentive to student needs at its conceptual center, the school was to become the laboratory of American democracy. "The lasting testimony of the Eight-Year Study," Kridel and Bullough (2007, 5-6) conclude,

demonstrates that educators can experiment with secondary school practices in ways that lead to greater curricular coherence, stronger democratic communities for teachers and students, and innovative programs that are responsive to the

needs of adolescents, regardless of their career and education choices.

The Eight-Year Study was, they emphasize, an “experiment in support of experimentation” (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 6). Why, then, the emphasis upon institutional reorganization rather than upon subjective and social reconstruction?

Several secondary-school teachers working in New Trier, Illinois appear to have appreciated the limits of reorganization, with its emphasis upon “molds.” These teachers reported that “quite frankly [we] worked within the traditional subject matter headings, feeling that it is not so important what you name a class period as what you do in it” (quoted in Kridel and Bullough 2007, 231). Also participating in the Study, the Tower Hill School (Wilmington, Delaware) faculty

assiduously avoided the label “progressive” on the basis that such a designation implies commitment to a fixed set of methods and principles rather than the open-minded, self-critical attitude upon which the school has prided itself (Thirty Schools 1943, 608).

I have long questioned a concept of curriculum design associated with objectives (see Pinar 1994, pp.123-127), even progressive

objectives. Design is more an intellectual (including aesthetic) than institutional form of “curriculum-as-plan” that (like a screenplay: see Pinar 2009, 156 n. 18) precipitates (but does specify) the “curriculum-as-lived” (Aoki 2005 [1986], 144).

The staff of the Aikin, Thayer, and Keliher Commissions respected the academic disciplines, Kridel and Bullough (2007, 143-144) report, because “when applied to genuine issues – personal and social – they knew such knowledge achieved its fullest expression and its greatest value.” Can the linking of academic knowledge to subjective and social concerns be achieved without ongoing and advanced study of academic knowledge in the arts, humanities, and sciences? To summarize such scholarship and research for teachers is, I have suggested (see Pinar 2006a, 1-14), one task of curriculum development. Such synoptic texts can offer, as Kridel and Bullough (2007, 103) point out in a different context, “many possibilities for teachers and students to connect academic curriculum to human emotions and personal and social values.” If we add “historical moment” to this list, this seems a succinct summary of curriculum development after the Reconceptualization (Pinar et al. 1995, chapter 4).

## Reorganization

Since established specialized courses would remain unchanged, the interests and needs of core initially appeared to represent less a curricular shift and more a change in scheduling and instruction.

Craig Kridel and Robert V. Bullough, Jr. (2007, 146)

In *Stories of the Eight-Year Study*, organizational processes (students were involved in curriculum planning: see Kridel and Bullough 2007, 152) seem to have been more important than the subjective and social reconstruction that teachers' advanced study of academic knowledge might have encouraged. Rather than taking advanced graduate courses in politics, culture, science and art, teachers engaged in ongoing conversation regarding the aim of education. We are told that participants in the Eight-Year Study came to appreciate that "determining educational aims" required "lengthy discussions" that dwelled on "*democracy as a way of life, a way of living most supportive of human growth and the development of personality*. No other *aim* would prove more important to the Eight-Year Study" (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 170, italics added). The italicized phrase asserts a reciprocal relation between democracy and personality that would be restated a decade later as a negative reciprocity between authoritarian personality and fascism (and prejudice; see Young-Bruehl 1996, 49ff.) Missing is the prominence of subject matter in



enabling teachers and students to articulate these concepts as lived experience. Moreover, does not this task – discussions of democracy as aim - cast the curriculum as a means to an end? One obvious casualty in such a protocol is the notion of education as “getting lost” (Block 1998, 328), wandering off the paths prescribed by others (including paths prescribed by the state), studying to find one’s own way through the labyrinth that is the present.

If the establishment of “objectives” leads to the selection of “content,” why not skip the first the step and focus on content at the outset, on *what knowledge is of most worth?* As in the case of the Tyler Rationale – the vignette of Tyler in *Stories of the Eight-Year Study* requires a separate section (see below) – objectives limit teaching and classroom conversation to their achievement. Evaluation – focused on objectives – seals the deal, as objectives can quickly become specific, even behavioral, trivializing teaching and study as they reduce “learning” to behavioral change and scores on standardized tests. Tyler’s Rationale, wherein objectives and evaluation are sequentially linked, set the stage for *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*, the Bush-Obama era of the test-driven curriculum.

We do not require the present to see the errors of the past. Even in the context of 1930s progressive curricular experimentation, the

focus on aims or objectives for an entire school seems strangely non-progressive. If individuality was important<sup>9</sup>, why would the intellectual independence and individuality of teachers disappear into a “social philosophy”? If democratic communities are dedicated to the cultivation of difference, the protection of dissent, and the encouragement of originality and creativity, then in what sense can “forging a school philosophy” be “essential to the formation of democratic communities” (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 180)? Does not a “school philosophy” risk becoming a totalizing discourse that obscures individual expressivity and dissent? Does not its formulation quickly become bureaucratic busywork distracting teachers from advanced study in the arts, sciences and humanities and the reconstruction such study encourages?

### Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

The idea of the changeless and standard-setting framework turns out to be yet another version of the attempt to see with the eyes of God, even if it is ourselves we see with these eyes.

Roberto Mangabeira Unger (2007, 5)

The strangest of Kridel and Bullough’s *Stories of the Eight-Year Study* is the one told of Tyler. From his 1934 speech at a conference on testing, Tyler is portrayed as a courageous defender of the

progressive faith, asserting the centrality of the teacher in assessment (see Kridel and Bullough 2007, 75). Just how central the teacher's role could be is not entirely clear, as Kridel and Bullough (see 2007, 75) also tell us that Tyler valorized testing experts. In the final report Tyler and his staff released on the evaluation of the Eight-Year Study, "one of their most basic convictions" was that teachers must be "intimately involved" in devising "assessment instruments" (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 75). In "democratic schools" one would think teachers themselves would devise whatever "assessment instruments" they deem appropriate to employ, consulting "testing experts" if and when desired. What strikes me in the final report is the staggering overuse of tests ("appraisal was to be continuous" [Smith, Tyler, & the Evaluation Staff 1942, 442; see also Aikin 1942b, xviii). Kridel and Bullough (2007, 82) acknowledge: "Assessment was quite expansive."

Tyler may have opposed one uniform evaluation for all thirty schools, but that amounts to a consolation prize, as Kridel and Bullough (2007, 76) also tell us Tyler recommended that evaluation "begin with school staffs formulating ... objectives." Specifying shared "objectives" threatens uniformity of practice among school staffs, not exactly an invitation to experimentation.<sup>10</sup> And for Tyler

the determination of objectives was the most basic of the “basic principles” of curriculum and instruction.<sup>9</sup> Tyler (we are told) appreciated that evaluation does not provide “indubitable proof of the success or failure of current educational endeavors” (quoted in Kridel and Bullough 2007, 76). As a testing expert (see Kridel and Bullough 2007, 73), did Tyler never suspect that the tail might someday wag the dog? In the 1930s, we are told that Tyler remained focused on the curriculum, not its evaluation. In assembling an evaluation team for the Eight-Year Study, Tyler’s hiring decisions represented the conviction that “content knowledge was more important than knowledge of tests” (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 78). “Content knowledge” may have been more important to Tyler in the mid-1930s, but by the publication of *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, it has been relegated to a means (e.g. “educational experiences”) to ends (e.g. the attainment of “educational purposes” (Tyler 1949, 3), the achievement of which would be ascertained by evaluative instruments.

Kridel and Bullough (2007, 94) report Tyler’s bemused response to Kliebard’s 1970 criticism of his rationale: the 1949 book was not, he offered, a curriculum theory<sup>11</sup> nor had he sought a “theoretical formulation of what a curriculum should be” (quoted in Kridel and

Bullough 2007, 94). Instead, in Kridel and Bullough's (2007, 94) words, Tyler had "merely wished to pose an outline of kinds of questions that should be asked." But by outlining the questions teachers and curriculum developers should ask, in effect Tyler composed a theory of curriculum that demoted knowledge to the status of a step (and not the first step) in a sequence. Despite Tyler's demurrals, the book amounted to a "theoretical formulation" that, by 1970, structured practically everyone's (except curriculum theorists' and historians') thinking about curriculum and instruction into four sequenced questions that he inflates into "basic principles."<sup>12</sup>

"An affable man with a mannered smile, a clever retort, and a penchant for helping others," Kridel and Bullough (2007, 96) assure us, Tyler persuaded educators to "reexamine basic, taken-for-granted educational practices and traditions." Given his emphasis upon objectives, that reexamination did not include questioning the pervasive instrumentalism associated with social engineering (see Pinar et al. 1995, 91). Rather than the progenitor of the present calamity in which the curriculum is the tail on the test-harassed dog, Kridel and Bullough offer an image of Tyler as a gentle progressive<sup>13</sup> kindly inviting colleagues to engage in reflection and reconsideration. In fact, Kridel and Bullough (2007, p. 96) tell us:

When he urged the use of objectives, he was offering teachers the opportunity to reconsider their educational lives in classrooms, a setting deeply entrenched in nineteenth century educational practices. And when he advised educators to attach behaviors to outcomes, he was placing the responsibility of evaluation in the hands of teachers and encouraging them to look critically at the consequences of their actions. In many respects, his work continues to justify those activities for educators in the twenty-first century.

If in emphasizing objectives Tyler was “offering teachers the opportunity to reconsider their educational lives in classrooms,” why do so by employing a concept – objectives – associated with industrial management? Why not use the sonorous language into which Kridel and Bullough translate Tyler’s crude concept?

Kridel and Bullough (2007, 96) characterize Tyler as a “facilitator,” enabling others to determine educational practice. To facilitate means to “make easier” or to “help bring about,” but the installation of objectives as the first and primary step in curriculum planning has only made professional life onerous for teachers. At best, stating objectives is bureaucratic busywork; at worst, it restricts the educational imagination to what policy-makers or teachers

themselves decide is important and achievable and, too often, behaviorally observable or measurable by standardized examinations. Moreover, establishing objectives disguises the political content of the curriculum by creating the illusion of a rational professional practice independent of ideological investment, especially as objectives are “strained” through those screens.

Could Tyler have been unaware of John B. Watson and the movement in American academic psychology known as behaviorism? If so, that ignorance would seem to constitute professional malpractice. If, on the other hand, he knew, as any informed social scientist of his day would have known, he had to appreciate the inevitable association with behaviorism of his assertion that “Education is a process of changing the behavior patterns of people” (Tyler 1949, 5-6). It makes matters only worse to claim to be using “behavior in the broad sense to include thinking and feeling as well as overt action” (1949, 6), a definition in which all human experience becomes reduced to “behavior.” There is, as well, the implied arrogance that educators have the right, let alone professional obligation, to change how people “think” and “feel.” What Tyler “facilitated” was behaviorism’s invasive incursion into

mainstream educational practices that, by the 1960s, had become omnipresent (see Kridel and Bullough 2007, 94).

The 1949 Tyler was evidently blind to the ways his emphasis upon objectives devalued academic knowledge by reducing it to a means (e.g. a “functioning instrument” [Tyler 1949, 1) to an external end, even a laudable one like “social sensitivity.” Such instrumentality effaces experimentation by determining the destination before the journey has begun. Like basic research in science, educational experimentation requires erudition and judicious judgment as well as the courage to create (or discover) what is not yet known. The specification of objectives – then linking evaluation to these – forecloses the unknown future as it recapitulates the present. If in the 1930s, as Kridel and Bullough (2007, 87) tell us, Tyler “fully recognized” the “complexity of teaching and learning,” he has forgotten it by the time he is formulating his *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*.

Ignoring that dreadful little book, Kridel and Bullough (see 2007, 87) state that Tyler remained devoted to “school experimentation throughout his career.” The experimentation in which Tyler professed faith would appear to have been institutional, not subjective or social, certainly not intellectual. His emphasis upon



objectives devalues academic knowledge – sidestepping the central curriculum question “what knowledge is of most worth?” – and in so doing shifts teachers’ attention from intellectual content to its institutional forms. Although I do not doubt that curriculum “reorganization” had intellectual consequences, it does not substitute for ongoing and advanced academic study, for the subjective and social reconstruction such study can engender. That Eight-Year Study participants were caught up in the larger ethos of social engineering is implied when, still praising Tyler (at one point he is actually described as “one of the most important educators of the twentieth century” [2007, 89]; at another, Tyler is likened to Dewey [2007, 96]), Kridel and Bullough (2007, 87) depict his faith in school experimentation as meaning that

thoughtful educators, when provided the requisite resources and possessing good data, could develop fruitful experiences for their students and, through ongoing assessment, engage successfully in a process of continuous educational improvement.

“Thoughtful educators” not only reorganize what they know already, they add to, indeed reconstruct, what they know through academic study. Study, not institutional reorganization, is the site of education.

It is study that structures teaching which is itself restructured in complicated conversation with students and others. The experimentation in which teachers are most fruitfully engaged is, then, subjective and social, always intellectual. To focus on institutional experimentation renders teachers bureaucrats, however “progressive.”

### “Thick and Fast”

[E]ven the idea of a free society, based on cooperation among individuals assured of equal opportunity and respect, has no unique and uncontroversial translation into a particular organization of human life.

Roberto Mangabeira Unger (2007, 71)

As a high-school teacher I wanted homeroom to be more than attendance taking. I wanted an opportunity for students – through solitary meditation and public conversation - to reflect on the day before and imagine the day ahead. From *Stories of the Eight-Year Study* we learn that homeroom was a “place and time to unify students’ interests and studies” (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 107; see Giles, McCutchen, and Zechiel 1942, 174-5). That seems an even more grand aspiration than I had entertained in 1969. To integrate students’ interests and studies would have required an assistant (or two) and

more (I should think) than an hour, let alone the 10 minutes I had, half of those taken by announcements made on the loudspeaker.

Ten minutes are exactly what teachers at the Ohio State University School were allocated (see Kridel and Bullough 2007, 107). “Soon,” Kridel and Bullough (2007, 107) report, “counseling became part of every teacher’s responsibility, and all shared in guidance.”<sup>14</sup> Surely “counseling” can begin to be meaningful only when “Sizer’s rule” (Pinar 2006a, 128) – no more than 80 students per teacher - is observed. Kridel and Bullough (2007, 108) acknowledge that these new roles were “seemingly overwhelming in terms of time and emotional responsibility,” but add that teachers found that the “school day became a manageable, more enjoyable occasion of moving from one student community to another.” Even within small schools or small classes within large schools, it must have been, even when “enjoyable,” indeed “overwhelming” for teachers to take on these expansive responsibilities (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 108; see *Thirty Schools* 1943, 161).

While I agree in principle that “all aspects of the school community” – including lunch - can be considered “potential venues for social development,” recall it was exactly this scale of the educational vision that scandalized the distinguished and influential

historian Richard Hofstadter (1962, 340). By overreaching what it could accomplish, did the Eight-Year Study itself create the internal conditions of its own demise? By 1950, Tyack and Cuban (1995, 101) report, the Eight-Year Study had “faded in part because the participating teachers had become ‘exhausted by the demands made on them, [since] challenges came too thick and fast for the faculty to digest them’” (quoted in Tyack & Cuban 1995, 101).

In 1950, Frederick L. Redefer and twenty-nine others involved in the Eight –Year Study – including representatives of fifteen of the private and public schools participating in the Study – pondered why the Eight-Year Study had faded so fast (see Tyack and Cuban 1995, 100). In addition to the exhaustion of participating teachers, Redefer and his colleagues pointed to a number of external reasons: World War II and the Cold War had produced a “concern for security [that] tended to strengthen conservatism and authoritarianism” in the school as well as in the society; in such times “everything connected with ‘progressive education’ was under fire” (quoted in Tyack and Cuban 1995, 100), including in Canada (see Tomkins 2008 [1986], 261ff.) Moreover, a number of colleges and universities either did not know about or disagreed with the finding that the Eight-Year Study programs enjoyed strong results. The experiment had been “too

intramural,” and had failed to anticipate resistance from parents and trustees (quoted in Tyack and Cuban 1995, 101).

If the pace and scale of the experiment had been exhausting for participating teachers, and if foreign threats to U.S. security had emboldened political conservatives so that progressive educational experimentation was rendered controversial, how can the Eight-Year Study provide inspiration for contemporary teachers? U.S. teachers have never been more exhausted or overwhelmed than they are now – they are fleeing the profession at unprecedented rates (Gabriel 2011, March 3, A18), although they left during the Eight-Year Study as well (see Tyack and Cuban 1995, 101) – and political conservatives exploit foreign threats (especially terrorism, but economic competitiveness as well) to mobilize a wide range of reactionary, anti-democratic, interventions<sup>14</sup>.

### The Significant Thing

The process of growth, of improvement and progress, rather than the static outcome and result, becomes the significant thing.

John Dewey (1920, 177)

Consonant with its echoes of post-Civil War America<sup>16</sup>, the concept of *reconstruction* emphasizes experimentation. To reconstruct,

the dictionary tells us, means to “establish or assemble again, to subject (an organ or part) to surgery to re-form its structure or correct a defect.” Dewey underlines this last idea in his assertion that thinking – the means of reconstruction (1920,, 134) – “takes its departure from specific conflicts in experience that occasion perplexity and trouble” (1920, 138). While Eight-Year Study’s participants also pointed to the resolution of “conflicts” as animating the “reconstruction of experience,” apparently they proceeded by applying “a consistent philosophy of life” considered “basic to democratic living” (Thirty Schools 1943, 722). Predetermining the consequences of reconstruction, as Dewey implies (in the epigraph), undermines its potential.

Even when reconstruction begins in correcting defects, it proceeds by thinking transformed by “continued progress in knowledge,” thinking that does not necessarily replace but protects “old knowledge from degeneration” (Dewey 1920, 34). Such “progress” requires, Dewey suggests, the “invasion of the unknown, rather than repetition in logical form of the already known” (1920, 34). It asserts the “superiority of discovery of new facts and truths to demonstration of the old” (1920, 31). The emphasis upon discovery of

new knowledge denotes reconstruction, while demonstration of what we know already is associated with reorganization.<sup>17</sup>

As the dictionary definition suggests, *reorganization* is devoted to recreating a “coherent unity or functioning whole,” as in “the school.” It means to “integrate”: “trying to organize her thought” is the example the dictionary offers. In addition to the emphasis upon the organizational unit – the school – in the Eight-Year Study, I would point to “core” and “fusion” (Thirty Schools 1943, 162, 257) as curricular instances of “organizing thought.” Finally, the dictionary includes the phrase “to set up an administrative structure for” in its definition of “to organize,” which, adding the prefix “re” would specify reconfiguring the administrative apparatus (e.g. Giles, McCutchen, and Zechiel 1942, 184-209). Despite its pedagogic intention, appraising student progress could not be free of administrative intent, nor was it limited to tests conducted by others. Appraisal was to be internalized: the Parker School, for instance, dedicated itself to “develop in students habits of self-analysis, self-evaluation, and discrimination” (Thirty Schools 1943, 298). With its Foucauldian echoes (see Baker 2001, 622), such alignment of internal with administrative surveillance threatens conformity, not individuality.

That the cultivation of individuality (individualization) and democratization were inextricably interrelated is acknowledged on several occasions. The Baldwin School's contrast between "individualization" and "individualism" (Thirty Schools 1943, 24) – the former taking curricular form through "work on long individual topics" (1943, 25) – underscores the social relationality, not isolationism, of individualization (see, also, 1943, 264, 361, 550, 720). In the George School report, the educational significance of knowledge is construed as "the inner compulsion to act" (1943, 362). Suspending for the moment the psychoanalytic complexity of the phrase, such assertion of self-critical curiosity becomes expressed in an "endless and persistent uncovering of facts and principles not known" (Dewey 1920, 34). Such reconstruction implies

the individual not as an exaggeratedly self-sufficient Ego which by some magic creates the world, but as the agent who is responsible through initiative, inventiveness and intellectually directed labor for re-creating the world, transforming it into an instrument and possession of intelligence. (Dewey 1920, 51)

The individual is also subjectively reconstructed by her or his agency in the world.



“Individuality in a social and moral sense,” Dewey (1920, 194) explains, “is something to be wrought out.” It is not a given. Indeed, the democratic project of individuality is threatened by an atomistic conception of individualism. For Dewey, then, individuality becomes an opportunity, a subjective aspiration and ethical obligation: “It means initiative, varied resourcefulness, assumption of responsibility in choice of belief and conduct” (1920, 194). The point of democracy is to encourage such individuality, such “all-around growth” (1920, 186).

While on occasion reducing reconstruction to problem-solving (see 1920, 162), Dewey seems clear that reconstruction requires not the reorganization of existing knowledge to achieve objectives, but the discovery of new knowledge to provide passages to futures that cannot be specified in advance. Like utilitarianism, however, reorganization becomes trapped by the instrumentalism it employs to surpass the past:

Utilitarian ethics thus afford a remarkable example of the need of philosophical reconstruction which these lectures have been presenting. Up to a certain point, it reflected the meaning of modern thought and aspirations. But it was still tied down by fundamental ideas of that very order which it thought it had

completely left behind: The idea of a fixed and single end lying beyond the diversity of human needs and acts rendered utilitarianism incapable of being an adequate representative of the modern spirit. It has to be reconstructed through emancipation from its inherited elements. (Dewey 1920, 183)

In the Eight-Year Study, that “fixed and single end” appears to have been “student needs,” in the name of which the curriculum was to be reorganized. Chair of the Committee on Adolescents, Caroline Zachry believed that such “needs” could be ascertained empirically, and that they would prove to be same for all adolescents (Kridel and Bullough 2007, 126). Such an “inventory of needs” (quoted in 2007, 126; Giles, McCutchen, and Zechiel 1942, 7-8) would provide the “template to design the curriculum” (2007, 126). As Kridel and Bullough (2007, 129) point out, the relation between democracy and adolescent needs was never worked out (see, also, Bullough and Kridel 2003, p. 160). The erasure of individuality by a de-individualized conception of “adolescent needs” comprises one “fixed and single end” Eight-Year Study participants failed to leave behind.

## Conclusion

Both beguiling and disconcerting, this grand experiment continues to capture our imagination.

Craig Kridel and Robert V. Bullough, Jr. (2007, 2)

Emphasizing organizational over intellectual experimentation, the Eight-Year Study is, indeed, “disconcerting,” as it privileged the institutional forms curriculum takes over its intellectual substance, in Aiken’s (1942a, 7) language its “molds” over its “essence” and “spirit.” The distinction between form and substance is hardly absolute, as the juxtaposition of even well-worn academic discourses with present social concerns and organized according to faculty and student interests can animate educational experience. But without the ongoing incorporation of new knowledge<sup>18</sup> into the school curriculum, even creative curriculum reorganization fails to address present circumstances. New academic knowledge, juxtaposed to developments in the public sphere (also in popular culture) and to those ideas students themselves articulate in class, can invigorate existing school curriculum as it provides opportunities for intellectual experimentation animated by the immediacy of the historical moment. Critical of avant-gardism and of naive conceptions of progress that position the “new” as always “better” than the old, an Eight-Year Study for our time would provide, first of all, opportunities for teachers to concentrate on advanced academic

study, and not only in education. Curriculum studies scholars can provide succinct summaries and provocative juxtapositions of new academic knowledge that teachers can find helpful in their ongoing curriculum development, after the Reconceptualization an intellectual rather than institutional undertaking, a subjective and social pursuit of understanding, not an always already doomed exercise in social engineering.

The Eight-Year Study was, in Kridel and Bullough's fine phrasing, "beguiling" as well as "disconcerting", seducing many of its participants and successive generations of scholars and schoolteachers into believing that the promise of American democracy can be actualized through the reorganization of the school curriculum. Educators know how crucial schooling can be in one's life; perhaps that autobiographical knowledge prepares us to be "beguiled" by the sheer scale of the progressive aspiration. I am not implying that the education is unrelated to democratization, but I am insisting that the school was never – is not now<sup>19</sup> - the primary means of social reconstruction. Nor is the school the sole lever for upward social-economic mobility, as present-day conservatives self-servingly allege, and reproduction theorists rule out (see chapter 1). Education

can be enlightening but its institutionalization is an ambivalent friend, ensuring as it threatens its survival.

If education contributes to democratization through experimentation it does so less by reorganizing its institutional “molds” – the rescheduling and renaming of courses - and more by the invigoration of the intellectual content of those courses offered by animated, erudite, imaginative teachers attentive to particular students in particular classes in particular schools. In concentrating on the reorganization of the curriculum (rather than its intellectual reconstruction), in overemphasizing the potential of teaching (by expanding the range of responsibilities), in its overconfidence in the claims of learning theory and knowledge of youth, in its identification of the school as the unit of success or failure, in its overuse of evaluation, the Eight-Year Study helped set the stage for the catastrophe – school deform - that has befallen us now. *That* is also the story of the Eight-Year Study.