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ABSTRACT

Can educators be effective change agents, and if so, how? Let's consider our opportunities from three viewpoints: 1) the social setting of the school; 2) the school systems themselves; and, 3) the teacher. Within the social setting, one of the most important limitations to change is the resistance of many parents. The new curricula and approaches will be largely stillborn unless we can convince patrons of the efficacy of key elements. As to institutional blocks, we find, among others: standardized tests, nationally produced texts, accreditation rules; bureaucratic structure of schools; and lack of economic pressure to change. As to teachers: 1) teachers are relatively isolated from one another; 2) lack of any real assessment of efforts; and, 3) teachers tend to be fairly conventional and conservative. Some steps toward strengthening the teacher's impact are: 1) encourage policy of employing, and appropriately rewarding, change agents in the schools; 2) differentiated staffing and differentiated rewards; 3) freer communication and brainstorming; 4) democratization of the school systems and classrooms; and 5) strengthened cooperation with parents and other concerned laymen. Two books are recommended for social studies teachers: Beyond Freedom and Dignity, and Without Marx or Jesus. (Author/JLB)

THE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER: AGENT OF CHANGE

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Certainly, before a group of Social Studies Educators, I do not need to underscore the pervasiveness as well as the speed of change in our times. Yet we can become so enmeshed in rapid change that we overlook it. Ever increasing, it becomes just a part of our lives. Inventions progress geometrically, not arithmetically, and as a result the United States Patent Office has been swamped for years. It is estimated that in California in the past year about one-third of the profits earned by business came from products that were not even in existence 25 years ago. Looking back merely a short time ago, who would have imagined the finality of what has happened to railroading in the United States? Or have predicted the tremendous impact of TV on our culture? Or have guessed that we would now be planning for libraries without books? Some teachers may be happy with another change. For seven consecutive years the largest single number of individuals in the United States have been those reaching the 17-year bracket. Now for the foreseeable future, there will be a steady decrease annually in the numbers reaching that age which may mean that if we can hang on long enough, we will see the ending of the youth-centered cultural era in the United States -- for those millions of teen-agers will inexorably mature into young adults in the years immediately ahead. Meanwhile, however, we are also told

that we are in a period that will see the beginning of the end of the textbook and even of the school building as we have known them. All about us, obsolescence occurs so rapidly that even we teachers may soon be declared surplus. In such a period of flux and ferment, how can educators be effective change agents, or, better yet, is it possible at all?

EDUCATIONAL CHANGE IN HISTORY

Schools have naturally served as bulwarks of tradition. Even in progressive societies the maintenance functions are bound to emerge as predominant in public as well as private schools. This has a long history in our western tradition. Even Plato and Aristotle -- dedicated to producing rational thinkers and broadly educated citizens of character -- saw schools as the proper province of the state, largely for conservational reasons. Only under state direction could there be a guarantee that the essences would be taught. Plato wanted to establish a totalitarian dictatorship of philosophers to preserve what was good, and Aristotle, in establishing the categories of knowledge, subsumed education under politics since he believed the ultimate aim of the good man could only be attained via an agency regulated by the state. It is a truism that those in control of societies see the transmission role as the appropriate major function of the schools. Is it any wonder that innovations have come so slowly?

Paul Mort has indicated that it takes about fifty years for a good idea to find common acceptance in our schools. How wrong he has been! Those familiar with the history of education know that from the perceptive Quintilia in Imperial Rome to brilliant scholars, such as Juan Vives in

the Renaissance or Comenius in the Sixteenth Century, a host of most fruitful ideas and approaches have lain fallow for centuries. In 1581 Richard Mulcaster, a teacher and theorist in England who, among other innovations, advocated the highest pay for elementary school teachers since they are the most important, specialized teacher training institutes in the universities, and parent and teachers associations, wrote: "It may take 100 years for my words to gain their full authority." Sixty-five years ago, John Dewey is supposed to have started us toward inquiry as the central approach in education but it was the medieval educator Abelard who suggested "By doubting we learn to inquire; by inquiry we learn the truth," and Francis Bacon urged the use of the new inductive method, learning to observe, collect, and hypothesize.

Schools have usually been far behind the theory of the day and far too slow in adjusting to emerging demands. At the moment, challenged by immense change whirling about us, we face mounting criticism from within and without. We are justly charged by serious and objective scholars as Margaret Mead and Ken Keniston, and bitterly attacked by bandwagon-savants as Edgar Friedenberg and Ivan Illich who have fallen over the brink of reason. Or are they right? Is it too late? Can we still direct responsible change and save what works well and extend whqt is essential?

We will consider our opportunities to attain needed reform from three viewpoints: First we will look to the social setting of the school, then at school systems themselves, and finally at the teacher.

SOCIAL SETTING AND CHANGE IN THE SCHOOLS

We have already indicated several of the hindrances to change that exist in the very concept of a public school of a nation-state. Let us view other important societal limitations. In times of extreme pressure such as we suffer today, many parents are certain that the one thing that isn't needed is any further tinkering with schooling. Recently at a go-to-school night, I heard a distraught mother, reacting to the presentation of a new inquiry-oriented American history program, exclaim: "My God, you're teaching them to think for themselves!" Indeed, at the highest level of control in the state of California, when a new social studies Framework was proposed last year to the State Board of Education, one of the members objected to the forward-looking program, claiming he couldn't approve the proposed guide because it would promote undue questioning of teachers and parents by school children.

How fortunate we are when posted in the relatively rare climate that is truly conducive to educational innovation; but it is our professional responsibility to try and promote such an atmosphere. We need to understand the bent of community pressure groups, as well as the inclinations of many parents to resist new creations. They recognize that the children and youth -- and thus the future -- are to a large extent in our hands, Those most precious possessions dare not be misshaped by experimentation. Nor have we contributed to the alleviation of these fears by a too frequent tendency to grasp fads and panaceas which have backfired distressingly. Consider what has happened to ideas which may have been sound, at least in part, but which have so failed, such as foreign

language in the elementary school or in the mass institution of language labs. The situation is compounded by the mounting surrender of parental authority and the decline of the related paternalistic role of the school. People in the community tend to be increasingly irritated with the ever-more difficult regulation of the behavior of the young people via the school. On top of this, society has underwritten a major accommodation in legislating the legitimazation of the independence of young people, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 21, but certainly also among the younger set. Unfortunately, schools do not have a tradition or are not organized in a manner whereby they can readily acknowledge the rights of this new constituency. Thus, the system falls between the fire of the disgruntled adults and the dissatisfied youth.

In this setting we have come to the end of the first or developmental stage of the new social studies. Although not "new" in a number of elements, it is evident, for example, that some of the academic emphases of certain of the projects are already out of date and that many of the prime needs of our time are still not spoken to by the great bulk of these social studies projects. Thus, a new "new social studies" remains to be evolved. In any case, the new curricula and approaches will be largely stillborn unless we can better prove and convince our patrons of the efficacy of key elements such as problem-centered programs, objective value analysis, and related instructional techniques. In the latter case, let me mention role-playing and gaming-simulation. Both hold rich learning experiences and contribute to the development of prime social studies skills. Unfortunately, as now being practiced or malpracticed, especially gaming, in thousands of situations we have no assurance that basic aims are

being attained. Indeed, the gaming binge may well be establishing certain unfortunate attitudes and habits which are antithetical to our stated purposes. The inevitable results of such populism ought to be clear to every one of us social studiers. At least the older ones among us will remember the opposition that grew to the core program of a quarter-century ago when in many instances we embarked upon an organization for which almost no one was fully ready, and the unfortunate name of which an unprepared public could only equate with the unsightly residue following the consumption of an apple!

We have other contemporary evidence of parental antipathy to modern approaches which is particularly strong in a time of upheaval when the community feels that the custodial function of the school should be emphasized. A recent study in an eastern city found two-thirds of the pupils under teachers whose styles of instruction were not favored by the mothers; only about 30 per cent of the mothers approved the more permissive, discussion-style approaches favored by the schools. And 56 per cent of the parents actually differed with the educational goals and practices espoused by the schools, such as pass-fail grades or the use of national achievement tests for high school seniors.

Under all of the foregoing circumstances, with increasing and competing demands upon the tax dollar, it should not be surprising that bond issues fail and that essential monetary support for phasing in new programs and materials is not provided. In all of this it is no happenstance that in our beleaguered urban systems, most in need of massive infusions, we find little of the new social studies, just as these schools have been laggards in the adoption of new programs in other curricular areas. Here,

of course, the picture is complicated. The failure to provide adequate resources for change or to gain support for new approaches from the very individuals or groups who might be expected to support such effort, frequently screens other factors, such as goal conflicts between school and elements in the community or the vulnerability of the school to contesting local power blocs. What results is stagnation and a desire on the part of many to turn completely from the situation.

SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND CHANGE

Let us turn from the distressing forces in our social milieu which inhibit change and review some institutional blockages within the school system. Attempts by local systems to meet mythical national standards can promote change, but frequently such standardization can serve to delimit innovation. Blanket accreditation rules, college entrance requirements, nationally-produced texts, standardized tests, as well as the mobility of educators and pupils are all examples of pressures for uniformity.

Inhibition to change also stems from the complex bureaucratic structure of our school systems. All of us have suffered the red tape of gaining approval for something different. I remember, for example, the near defeat I met many years ago as a high school teacher when I decided I needed thirty red pencils so that I might innovate with pupil self-evaluation and have them mark their own papers. A year later I was stopped from instituting a lab. fee for senior social studies so that we might have a large number of current periodicals in the classroom for, the principal declared, "That's only possible in physics and chemistry. We don't have lab. fees in social studies." And, for that matter, what

has ever happened to the sound idea of a social studies laboratory classroom which has been around in theory for over fifty years? Recently one of my interns, having trouble gaining discussion among her students, responded to my suggestion that she shift the seating arrangements in her room so that they could have better face-to-face communication by informing me that she had already attempted such a move. She had, however, met the inflexible attitude of a master teacher who wouldn't have the room so disturbed and the even more behement protests of the janitor, because it would take him a few minutes longer to sweep the floors!

Let us, however, be honest; often our vaunted professionalism is but a veneer. In recent years teachers have earned unprecedented powers in policy-making. Certainly teachers organizations are to be complimented on this and in our large-scale and complex bureaucracy they are essential. Collective bargaining agreements now cover about sixty per cent of all teachers in school Districts employing 1,000 teachers or more, and our teacher organizations have an important say in curriculum, class size, and in hiring and firing procedures. Unfortunately a concomitant mentality has come to permeate some of these groups which seems to be primarily oriented toward non-venturesome security.

As a subsidized organization, the school is actually protected from having to change; its clients are assured, its survival is built into the warp and woof of the establishment, and its accountability has been minimal. No one can really evaluate its performance. We sit astride a virtual monopoly and no monopoly changes readily, even when threatened by unruly clients, disenchanted parents, and emerging alternative camps.

Additionally, school systems seem to thrive on denying the venture-

some. Ritualism stymies variation at the same time that ability to mobilize for change is frustrated by impervious resistance at all levels. Too many administrators have failed to really try and plan ahead adequately. They generally have not thought of themselves as spearheads of creativity, nor provided change personnel or supported the development of avenues for problem-solving into the structure of their systems. So again, from this viewpoint, inertia stands astride new directions.

THE TEACHER AND CHANGE.

Erasmus wisely stated, "The quality of the masters is the first condition of any educational reform." What can we say today of teachers as successful agents of reform? The past record is not too promising, As emphasized previously, until the present teachers have had little power to initiate change and linkages between systematic indolence and staff lassitude have unfortunately reinforced one another. Poor teaching practices are difficult to prove ineffective and instructors are not going shopping for new approaches when no one can prove to them that current practices are less than satisfactory. Here again we meet quasi-professionalism wherein so many of us refuse to examine ourselves or to accept counsel on ways we might improve. Change is also inhibited by the relative isolation of teachers from one another. We have a long tradition as kings and queens of our own classrooms. Too often we do not seem to know or care what is going on next door. Several school systems with which I am familiar provide teachers with a few days of paid visitation leave each year. They report that the majority of their staff does not take advantage of these worthwhile opportunities which is a sorry state.

for we have evidence that observing other teachers succeed with different approaches in somewhat similar settings is a most fruitful way of encouraging mentors to try something new.

Incentives to change are also lacking when in our isolation we are not observed by anyone but our pupils. Lack of any real assessment of our efforts is a major hindrance to innovation. The normal pressures of handling too many pupils under poor conditions, and the usual heavy demands of a school week further support the teacher's role as a mere bureaucratic functionary.

The weakness of the individual teacher as a strong force for change has now been documented by follow-up studies of Federally-funded summer institutes. These reveal disheartening results. Thousands of individual teachers of history and the social studies have experienced these programs, but the majority admit to little impact upon their fellow teachers and many have not even maintained new directions in their own efforts. This old approach is now being questioned and this accounts for the tendency to shape school and district teams, including administrators, who focus during the period of the workshop upon human relations and change agent skills, as well as upon new developments and approaches in the subject matter field.

In my opinion the nation-wide deterioration of team-teaching arrangements further underscores the ever-individualistic emphases that have compartmentalized us and which helped to turn a worthwhile venture into what I have characterized as "take-turn teaching."

Other studies of the characteristics and personalities of teachers reveal that teachers tend to be conventional and this quality is probably

reinforced by the caution and conservatism that often marks women, who have long consistuted a goodly majority of teachers.

This total picture, including the barrenness of the rewards which over the years has driven many risk-taking persons from teaching, explains why change has been so minimal. Significant incentives are just not provided by system or community and thus we have stagnated in a mire of inactivity which unfortunately to the present has not seemed to overly concern a large number of us.

In light of factors as those stated previously, are we completely boxed into a hopeless corner? Is there any possibility that we may now be able to attain a sufficient amount of managed change? The alternative to our active involvement on this problem is, however, even less promising. If we do little or nothing, we will abet change but it will be uncontrolled and dare not be tolerated. A number of suggestions are apparent in my foregoing remarks, and at this point I prefer to focus on the teacher. In spite of our minimal impact, I still believe that the mentor operates at the crucial juncture for most change -- in the school and classroom arenas -- where change becomes manifest for our pupils. Thus we must find ways to strengthen the teacher's impact as a facilitator of the future.

SOME STEPS TO FORWARD CHANGE

A first proposal is to encourage the policy of employing change agent types throughout the school system and of rewarding their efforts in a variety of prestige-full ways. This includes training teams as instructional and curricular change agents, employing specialized

personnel to promote experimentation and development , selecting department heads on the basis of their leadership and innovative qualities, and of tying sabbatical leaves to truly change-oriented experiences.

Using differentiated staffing and differentiated rewards -- financial and/or otherwise -- should deliver a blow to the rigidity and formalism of our situation. We should also go beyond merely considering merit rating arrangements, move away f automatic increments and lock-step promotions, and probably even modify tenure regulations so as to build stimulation and reward into provisions for continuing employment. In addition to financial bonuses, other compensation can include free periods for further dreaming or research, the provision of funds for teacher aides, secretarial help and materials, and the availability of school time for adequate group planning towards innovation. I would also like to see a Progress Awards Day where the teacher, pupil, staff member, custodian and parent who made the most significant contribution to new developments in the school or who hatched the most valuable idea toward improvement would be appropriately recognized.

What we seek is an institutionalized environment hospitable to creative change. Its attainment depends upon multiple facets within the system, from school boards who place a priority on reasoned risks and who budget generously for pilot projects, to provisions within schools that encourage independence, particularly on the part of new teachers whose freshness is so frequently smothered. I am actually proposing a true dedication to freedom on the part of the school. For such freedom to exist in reality, we must work toward optimum channels of communication; feedback, adequate opportunities for sharing , the encouragement of plain

listening, and review and evaluation processes need to be built into the planning structure. Old -fashioned information-imparting faculty meetings should become a thing of the past, and principals should promote brain-storming. On the other hand, teachers need to sensitize themselves toward responding openly to one another's intuitive suggestions, as well as to expressions of merit frequently forwarded by pupils. We also sometimes need to be more responsive in considering disturbing proposals which come to us from upper echelons in the system. We really have no freedom if those who must carry out decisions will not do so.

The liberty that must be guaranteed in school as well as in society is always and particularly the freedom for the individual who thinks differently. Within reasonable bounds we should extend them the right to test and to demonstrate, as well as to speak out and to try and convince the doubting majority. My fellow teachers, there is no more important job ahead of us than attaining an institutional climate which truly exemplifies the democratic way of life.

In such a re-definition of democracy in our schools, we need to remember that any organization only continues to exist by maintaining and extending its wise affirmations as it continually meets change. Thus, the schools in a free society have the responsibility to nurture those values which enable that society to function. Nevertheless, we have to attain as wide-open a situation as possible. A system that penalizes and stifles ideas that are candidates for progress just cannot be tolerated. And we must admit that one of the strong criticisms against our schools has been their authoritarianism masked

in the name of liberty. I speak of such anti-democratic conditions as the too familiar rubber stamp student council, the near-permanent branding of children by the manner in which we test, classify, and place them, and the so-called "individual choices" into which our captive charges are so frequently conned right in the social studies classroom -- the supposed workshop for democracy.

I believe we must start reform with ourselves and in our own school rooms. Here we should first of all reflect as models the qualities which we claim we aspire. Visiting a British secondary school not long ago, I was struck by the massive campaign against cigarette smoking signified by colorful posters throughout the building. My pleased response was, however, short-lived as I observed the smoke-filled Commons room with many of the faculty puffing away. I am certain that the full ashtrays, not the posters, were likely to be the most effective mentor in that situation. I have become increasingly confident that in building democratic values, our manners and the means by which we conduct a class are far more important in reaching those goals than the subject matter we are attempting to teach. As individuals and as institutions, teachers and the schools are prime trustees of the culture. So, the great challenge is to exemplify the principles which we are to represent.

In promoting the principle of freedom, we have a difficult responsibility in attempting to maintain that essential balance between self and society, between individualism and the common good, and between ethical values and contrary expedient action. Somewhere between the extremes of anarchy and authority, the school should provide a middle ground where personal freedom is joined to the common good.

In achieving this libertarian end, as well as in promoting controlled change, it is fundamental that youth be fellow-participants in most of what qe are about in school. Isn't it a tragedy that there are so few schools that can be identified in actuality as living examples of a free society? In my quarter-century of extensive contacts in education here and abroad, I can number on my fingers such institutions with which I have had personal experience. In these citizenship-oriented schools it is a thrill to observe pupils involved in a principal's cabinet, resolving fundamental policy matters, making decisions in classrooms about the important things that affect them, young people debating with faculty but sharing equally in the decisions of the school's senate -- and in these cases to find not only positive change but the even more important commitment to the democratic process.

Can we be brave enough, honest enough, fair enough, and free enough and lead in opening up such developments? I believe the system will only survive if we so move and that such goals can be attained if we have the will to so strive. Just imagine what it really means if we will work to shape our schools, bridging theimportant period from dependent childhood to adulthood, as institutions wherein youth have the freedom to be human. The hope of our free society is in such tuition.

Certainly beyond changing ourselves and democratizing the school, we should establish bridges across the moat of isolation to the parents and laymen and the environment which encompasses us. Another basic challenge to the educator today is to meet the incessant demands towards participation and shared responsibility for schooling on the part of adults and groups in the locality. I suggest no abdication of our

leadership or reduction of our particular, pertinent professional contributions to such mutual endeavors. But let's end the mistaken parallel with medicine and the old excuse for failing to work with or even to seek the counsel of such persons by claiming "Who would allow a layman to diagnose or to write a prescription?" These individuals have not only a vested interest in the school which we frequently overlook, but they are rich sources of both ideas and support for change, I believe we should now go out of our way to search for possible cooperative ventures. A great variety of possibilities exist, from jointly sponsored child care centers to adult participation in our citizenship education efforts.

A dual challenge faces many of us here for our communities are shattered. In working with these people and their children, we have the opportunity to literally help create a community where one largely no longer exists. The educational programs evolved and carried forth on a continuing basis with the participation of concerned citizens-parents, representatives of business, home owners associations, and minority group organizations -- promise not only some hope of attaining improvements in schooling, but also essential help in re-establishing a sense of community among those for whom the school serves as a nucleus.

In moving towards this goal of cooperative participation of those concerned in making decisions and resolving problems affecting all of them, the schools should employ a process-oriented emphasis. Professionals and citizens alike will have to command a number of skills that up to now have been only infrequently a part of our own education. As social studies teachers, you understand the need for particular attention to the skills that fall under the general heading of human relations. In surroundings

often charged by antipathy toward much for which the school stands, it is far easier to ignore or to dictate than to struggle towards mutual agreement. We have to shake the popular attitude about our ivory tower dictatorial approach to others. Too many pupils and parents reflect Cowper's view: "Pedantry is all that schools impart; but taverns teach the knowledge of the heart."

We have to start where these people around us are; but in the dehumanized situations which occur so frequently, we are beset by the alienated and the sometimes irrational who would turn their backs fully on society and its institutions. This is a direct slap at us, for after the family the schools are the most important force in the socialization process. Teachers help extend social health and the maintenance of essential shared beliefs at the same time that we work to allow new beliefs to be tested and possibly to even replace others. Unfortunately, at this moment in history the realities of existence dwarf social ideals and it is easy to despair for any success on the part of the school in preserving the precarious accommodation between society and the individual, while it promotes the progress of both.

TWO PROPOSALS TOWARD CHANGE

Among the doomsday books now flooding the market, I should like to recommend two for all social studies teachers to consider. Both are in a sense hopeful but very different in their approach to changing society in necessary directions. I speak of BEYOND FREEDOM AND DIGNITY by B. F. Skinner, and WITHOUT MARX OR JESUS, by Jean-Francois Revel. Both volumes address themselves to the problem which concerns us. The noted behavioral

psychologist, B. F. Skinner, proposes that we do away with our vaunted concepts of freedom and individual dignity. He urges swift action to control both our surroundings and our actions in groups but especially as individuals before our society destroys itself. He sees the option of a bright future if we finally acknowledge that persons acting freely and independently have brought us to the brink of disaster. Thus, in his estimation, we must move bdyond freedom and dignity and the randomly arrived-at mess in which we are caught. We can accomplish this by creating a deterministic environment and technologies which will direct men completely. Skinner believes mankind can be saved under these circumstances because we have given up the view of autonomous man and our related economic, political and social shibboleths.

I summit that what I have been suggesting and what I trust most of you are involved in in schooling does not parallel Skinner's 1984 Utopia when men and women will have lost their personalities as well as their humanness, all in the name of saving humanity! But unless we seriously use our freedom in terms of dignity -- and both of these qualities have been lacking in our schools -- each day threatens to bring us closer to the possibility of such a Pavlovian Nirvana. We must ponder and study this narcotized approach to saving the world for nothing as its appeal grows menacingly in this era of stress.

In contrast, French journalist Revel believes deeply in intelligent and autonomous action, but he urges it on a revolutionary base for the changes that are imperative. In the relatively objective tradition of de Tocqueville, Bryce abd Myrdal, WITHOUT MARX OR JESUS brings an intriguing

"outside" assessment of America and its dilemmas. No one will accept all of Revel's conclusions and many would differ with his major thesis. This is that the real revolution of the 20th Century will occur in America; that it can only take place here, and that it is already under way. He further predicts that this revolution will likely develop world-wide. In his examination of the United States he has found the uni e combination of economic, technological, political, and cultural factors which provide the vision and strength, as well as the conducive setting for innovation and change, for a revolution that will save us from destruction.

Spearheading this revolutionary movement are a relatively large bloc of educated liberals, joined with the bulk of the nation's youth who are in common agreement upon a number of prime steps which may resolve the proble.s which beset us. Revel believes that radical change is most possible in the United States because of the legal framework and means which we enjoy and which provide a fundamental avenue by which the revolution will succeed in our land. He has faith that the new man of the 20th Century will take shape as we wipe out the inequities now plaguing us. Because of our traditions of liberty, there is considerable hope tgat profound adjustments and alternatives can occur in American society without wrecking our institutions and that we can reshape our civilization without annihilating it.

Under these conditions, the teacher's clear responsibility is to help instill in our students an understanding of and a belief in this egalitarian system, as well as the skills by which they may extend its fruition. Only then can they emerge as agents of controlled change and

and thus shape their own richer futures.

I have attempted to indicate how complicated and difficult are any of the roles we may try to play as creators of a better tomorrow. In these efforts our greatest opportunity sits right in front of us each day -- the children and youth who are to be brought up as intelligent and open-minded yet dedicated and principled free men and free women. Ultimately they must be able to shape change in the directions indicated by human values. With their teachers as prime partners, youth must maintain an unending American revolution wherein the destiny of people and nation rest upon the ability to both accept and direct change. There is no question, fellow social studies teachers, our major duty is to cooperate in the development of young citizens who are capable of continuing a revolution without sacrificing the democracy that it seeks to fulfil.