

A STUDY OF "SCHOOLING IN AMERICAN SOCIETY"  
AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT ATTITUDES  
TOWARD EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

By

JANYS E. O'CONNOR

Bachelor of Arts

University of Oklahoma

Norman, Oklahoma

1981

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
May, 1989

THESIS  
1989.  
0183  
Cop. 2

A STUDY OF "SCHOOLING IN AMERICAN SOCIETY"  
AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT ATTITUDES  
TOWARD EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Thesis Approved:

*Daniel Siskovich*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Advisor

*Shon D. Johnston*  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Russell Olson*  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Norman N. Dusham*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of the Graduate College

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is appropriate at this point to express my appreciation to the many family members, teachers and friends who lent their support toward the completion of this study. Professors Russell Dobson and Tom Johnston served on my committee, and during the course of my graduate work at Oklahoma State University offered advice and encouragement when it was called for. I am especially grateful to my adviser and committee chair, Professor Daniel Selakovich. Over the past two years he has been a "teacher" in the finest sense of the word and his patience, wit and wisdom have kept my flagging spirits aloft during some trying times!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM . . . . .	1
Introduction . . . . .	1
Statement of the Problem . . . . .	1
Philosophical Orientation of the Course	2
Assumptions of the Study . . . . .	8
Limitations of the Study . . . . .	9
Endnotes . . . . .	10
II. REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE AND DEFINITION OF TERMS . . . . .	12
Introduction . . . . .	12
Conservative Perspective on Issues in Education . . . . .	13
Vision of Education . . . . .	13
Equality and Education . . . . .	15
Content and Methodology . . . . .	17
Liberal Perspective on Issues in Education . . . . .	20
Vision of Education . . . . .	20
Equality and Education . . . . .	22
Content and Methodology . . . . .	23
Summary . . . . .	25
Endnotes . . . . .	27
III. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY . . . . .	30
Selection of the Sample . . . . .	30
Data Collection Procedures . . . . .	30
Instrumentation . . . . .	31
Hypotheses . . . . .	32
Methodology . . . . .	34
Statistical Treatment . . . . .	34
Endnotes . . . . .	36
IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA . . . . .	37
Introduction . . . . .	37
Findings . . . . .	37
Summary . . . . .	47

Chapter	Page
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH . . . . .	48
Summary . . . . .	48
Conclusions . . . . .	48
Recommendations for Further Research . . . . .	54
Endnotes . . . . .	56
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	57
APPENDIXES. . . . .	60
APPENDIX A - COMPREHENSIVE EXAM FOR "SCHOOLING IN AMERICAN SOCIETY"	61
APPENDIX B - ATTITUDINAL TEST . . . . .	68
APPENDIX C - KEY TO SCORING ATTITUDINAL TEST	71

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Distribution of the Respondents on the Educational Continuum After Pre- and Posttests . . . . .	38
II. Distribution of Scores on the Comprehensive Exam During the First and Last Week of the Semester . . . . .	40

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Distribution of Scores on the Scale of Educational Liberalism from Pretest to Posttest . . . .	39
2. Correlation Between Performance on Exam and Position on Liberal/Conservative Educational Continuum . . . . .	41
3. Correlation Between Course Grade and Position on Liberal/Conservative Educational Continuum . .	43
4. Score of Discussion Group Leaders Compared to Mean Scores of Their Students on the Scale of Educational Liberalism . . . . .	45



## CHAPTER I

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### Introduction

The ideological underpinnings of America's educational system provide the focus of heated debate between conservative and liberal educators in this decade. "Schooling in American Society" is an undergraduate course in education at Oklahoma State University designed to encourage a more liberal position regarding the processes and practices of the teaching profession. The course is a prerequisite for teacher certification in the state, and seeks to educate students about the questions and concerns which challenge, and often confound teachers in our nation's public schools. The course attempts to attain its objective by addressing a wide range of issues, from poverty to prejudice, that affect the character and quality of the education that children receive in this country.

#### Statement of the Problem

The viability of attempting to influence student attitudes through a traditional lecture and discussion format has long been a focus of controversy among educators

at all levels. Twenty years ago, Arthur Combs examined the impact of the conventional course of study in this country's teacher education programs, on the principles and practices of their students. His conclusions were discouraging.

These courses (Schooling in America, Social Foundations of Education) have often failed to accomplish their objectives in anything like the degree we had hoped. The teacher who has not been exposed to classes designed to teach him about democracy in the course of his professional education would be rare indeed. Nevertheless, the failure of teachers to understand and apply the principles of democracy in the classroom is the despair of teacher educators everywhere. It is apparent that the mere exposure of people to ideas is by no means a guarantee that they will espouse them.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this research is to determine the effect of exposure to a liberal perspective on education, on students enrolled in the course "Schooling in American Society," and the degree to which the students internalize this perspective upon completion of the course.

#### Philosophical Orientation of the Course

At the close of the nineteenth century, Horace Mann authored his fifth report as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. The document reflected its author's unbridled confidence in the power of public schooling to right the injustices of American society.

Education . . . is the great equalizer of men - the balance wheel of the social machinery . . . It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich; it prevents being poor.<sup>2</sup>

Mann was not alone in his optimism. A century later, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued his own prescription for the social ills that continued to plague the country. "The answer for all our national problems comes down to a single word," the former school teacher promised. "Education!"<sup>3</sup> Johnson set out to prove his point, allocating millions of dollars to compensatory education and affirmative action programs and attempting to bring to parity the educational resources in low income areas. His "War on Poverty," however, was soon overshadowed by another far more costly war. In 1968, as a new Republican president assumed office and turned his attention to the conflict in southeast Asia, it became increasingly clear that neither Mann's nor Johnson's hopes had been realized.

Their concerns are among those addressed in "Schooling in American Society." the course places in socio-historic context, the social, economic and educational plight of minorities, and of children of the poor in America.

In his essay on Immigrants, Negroes and the Public Schools, author Colin Greer explores the widely held perception that education has historically served as a springboard into the middle class.<sup>4</sup> In reality, school achievement has been largely determined by economic status rather than serving as the determinant of that status. There are exceptions. Among ethnic groups whose cultures place an emphasis on individual achievement, schools have provided a window to success, but "for the Irish, the

Italians, the Poles, the Slavs, the groups which comprised the bulk of the immigration in the middle and late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - education was not an important means of mobility."<sup>5</sup> Few schools were sympathetic or responsive to the needs of immigrants or the native born poor. Their rules, customs and traditions were as alien to children of the lower class as the childrens' culture was incomprehensible to their teachers. The result, then as now, was the estrangement of the school from those who might have benefitted from it the most.

For African Americans, these problems were magnified, and the discriminatory conditions that characterized their lives in the South and in northern ghettos were mirrored in the public schools. In 1915, a survey of "Colored School Children in New York City"<sup>6</sup> unearthed an appalling truancy rate as well as a high rate of school retardation; facilities were inadequate and prejudice was institutionalized. Forty years later, Jonathan Kozol<sup>7</sup> and Herbert Kohl<sup>8</sup> found disturbingly similar conditions in predominantly black schools in New York and Boston. School buildings were old and dilapidated, classrooms were crowded and materials were outdated and in short supply. The problems were clear; the solutions were not.

Over the past two decades, the percentage of children in families who live in poverty has risen from 21 to 35 percent. In Oklahoma alone, 500,000 people live below the poverty line; 38 percent of these are children. Women and

minority groups are disproportionately represented among the poor.<sup>9</sup> Still, the myth persists that such conditions are somehow left at the schoolhouse door - that in the sanctity of the classroom, all children are equally afforded the opportunity to learn, to grow and to succeed. Americans have long viewed our system of public education as a panacea, but such faith is not grounded in fact. An increasing amount of evidence suggests that far from eradicating poverty and prejudice in this country, schools have played a significant role in their perpetuation.

Inequalities persist in our educational system. The national drop-out rate for black students is almost twice that of white students. The rate is much higher for Hispanic and Native American students. Sixty-three percent of black students attend predominantly minority schools. The income of a child's family is still the major determinant of the quality and quantity of education that child receives. Children from middle-class household average five more years of schooling than do children of lower socio-economic status.<sup>10</sup>

Such statistics are hardly supportive of the notion of education as "The Great Equalizer," yet in a decade when schools have once again become the focus of public concern and a renewed target for criticism, little mention is made of the poor or of minorities. In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education released, amidst a flurry of publicity, a comprehensive study of the failings

of America's educational system entitled A Nation at Risk.<sup>11</sup> The report did not once mention the system's failure to meet the needs of these groups, nor did it propose any solutions to the problem of educational inequality.

The conservative backed school reform movement of the 1980's has not focused on the inability of the educational system to serve the interests of students and society. Instead they have criticized the lack of discipline in elementary and secondary schools across the country, declining test scores and above all, the failure of students to learn "the basics." Right-wing rhetoric has remained curiously silent with respect to economic reform which might allow poor children to enter the educational system on equal footing with other groups.

There are . . . basic material needs that must be met before these children can match the achievement of middle-class children. Until they are satisfied, the difficulties in educating the culturally disadvantaged are compounded. Many of these basic needs are not satisfied because of economic impoverishment. It will be difficult to profit from the middle-class curriculum or to develop middle-class patterns of behavior until their economic base is substantially improved.<sup>12</sup>

Poor children, and those who are black or red or brown, are not the only ones whom our schools have neglected. Author and educator Charles Sliberman notes that the failure of schools to deal effectively with the problems of poor or minority children "is simply an exaggerated version of the failure of American schools as a

whole."<sup>13</sup> The deluge of books, articles, newspaper editorials and television documentaries devoted to the ineffectuality of our schools in educating even functionally literate young men and women, attests to the widespread dissatisfaction with the condition of education in the United States. Educational conservatives have defined the problem as "a crisis of authority."<sup>14</sup> The liberal diagnosis is not so simplistic, nor does it lend itself to an easy remedy.

For too many children, irrespective of race or socio-economic status, schools are unfriendly and unforgiving places. Most of all, they are confusing; democracy is preached but not practiced. Students are rarely consulted about what, or how they should learn. Competition and individual achievement take precedence over a commitment to "moral or aesthetic excellence or a commitment to nourish the imagination or idealism of our students."<sup>15</sup> Lip service is paid to the importance of helping students to become courageous, just and compassionate adults, but the formal and informal curriculum in our schools is as likely to damn such traits as it is to encourage them.

Decency in the American tradition . . . compromises fairness, generosity and tolerance. Everyone should get a fair shake. People who are in trouble or who, for whatever reason, are weak deserve a special hand; the big guys should not force their way on the little guys. It is difficult to imagine a citizen who would seriously quarrel with any school that tried to stand for these values and to persuade its students to make these values operative parts of their character. At the same time, it is difficult to find many schools today that both

formally articulate decency as an aim and precisely outline how the students can achieve it.<sup>16</sup>

It is perhaps unrealistic to charge the public schools of this nation with the task of creating a more just and egalitarian society; far more pervasive changes are called for in the economic, social and political structures of the United States. But schools can, and indeed must play a valuable role. It is toward this end that the course "Schooling in American Society" is designed.

#### Assumptions of the Study

This study is grounded in the belief that it is the responsibility of educators to create a learning environment where all people, not simply "a carefully selected and prepared minority"<sup>17</sup> can develop morally and intellectually to the limits of their potential. A major assumption of the thesis is that a narrow, conservative vision of schooling, with its emphasis on individual achievement and a curriculum tailored for the needs of industry, sacrifices a commitment to education as an agent for achieving positive social change, opting instead for education as a means for preserving the status quo.

The author approached this study hypothesizing that if students became more aware of the inequities inherent in America's educational system, then they could be able to move beyond the current conservative reform movement to



address the fundamental problems confronting our schools today.

#### Limitations of the Study

1. This study was limited to a survey of 248 students enrolled in the course "Schooling in American Society" during the Fall semester of 1988.
2. The study could not control for the variables outside the course which might have influenced student attitudes and beliefs over the course of the semester.
3. This study was limited by any inherent weaknesses of the instrument.

## Endnotes

1. Arthur W. Combs, The Professional Education of Teachers (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1965), p. 86.
2. Horace Mann, in Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis', Schooling in Capitalist America (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976) p. 28.
3. Julie Roy Jeffrey, Education for Children of the Poor (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 102.
4. Colin Greer, "Immigrants, Negroes and the Public Schools" (1974) in Colin Greer, cd., Divided Society (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1974) p. 90.
5. Ibid., p. 58.
6. Ibid, p. 91.
7. Jonathon Kozol, Death at an Early Age (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1967).
8. Herbert Kohn. 36 Children, (New York: New American Library, 1967).
9. Harold Howe, "Children Left Behind," Oklahoma Observer, 10 February, 1985, pp. 10-11.
10. Ibid., p. 10.
11. National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: USA Research, 1984).
12. Kenneth R. Johnson, Teaching the Culturally Disadvantaged, (New York: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1970), p. 7.
13. Charles Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).
14. David E. Purpel, The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education, (Granby, Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey, Inc., 1989) p. xiv.
15. Ibid., 18.

16. Theodore Sizer, Horace's Compromise, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), p. 121.
17. Joel Spring, The Sorting Machine, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1976), p. 72.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

#### Introduction

In order to formulate clear and accurate definitions of the terms "liberal" and "conservative" as used throughout the body of this thesis, the researcher conducted a review of selected literature on purpose and practice among educators at either end of the educational continuum. The author did not attempt to distinguish between radical and liberal theorists or between centrist conservatives and the New Right, though their beliefs differ significantly in many respects. Instead the concern of this chapter was to explain the liberal ideology regarding education, toward which the course, "Schooling in American Society" is directed, and the opposing ideology of the conservative reform movement of the 1980's. The ideological camps represented here are merely paradigms; they are not, nor are they intended to be comprehensive definitions of the liberal and conservative perspectives. Rather, they illustrate a few of the broad ideological differences between the two camps as defined by the current literature in education.

Conservative Perspective on  
Issues in Education

Vision of Education

The manner in which conservative theorists define the aims and objectives of education in the United States is dependent in part on their positions along the educational continuum. Advocates of the "New Right" including Republican Senator Jesse Helms, Reverend Jerry Falwell, and members of Washington's conservative backed think-tank, the Heritage Foundation; all fall far to the right of conservative Centrists such as Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch.<sup>1</sup> Further divisions occur along disciplinary lines; proponents of the humanities argue that "liberal education" has been effectively undermined by the increased emphasis on science and technology.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, however, philosophical differences among conservative critics of America's educational system are superficial rather than substantive. Publication of the study A Nation at Risk, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, represents a confluence of opinion at the conservative end of the spectrum regarding the functions of schooling in America. Their message is unmistakable:

America's position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally trained men and women. It is no longer. . . If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all

. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, conservatives have saddled our schools with the weighty responsibility of regaining American manufacturing supremacy in the face of stiff competition from Japan and West Germany. Authors Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux note that, according to this argument, the term "educator" has become synonymous with that of "manager."<sup>4</sup> In our highly competitive and stratified economic environment, the school must act as a "sorting machine"<sup>5</sup> for the efficient distribution of human resources for industry. The report emphasizes that in school, as in the work place, the worth of an individual will be measured by his ability to meet the needs of a capitalist economy.

The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of schooling as a training ground for industry is a dominant theme throughout A Nation at Risk, but the report enumerates other functions of education as well. Conservatives charge our educational system, not only with the task of maintaining U.S. ascendancy in the marketplace, but with the responsibility for preserving democratic institutions and the transmission of traditional American values. "A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the

fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom."<sup>7</sup>

Fred L. Pincus, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Maryland, notes that conservatives equate the term "common culture" with the basic values upon which American capitalism is founded.<sup>8</sup> The result is a vision of education as a legitimation of capitalism and of the existing social structure.

In order to reproduce the class and caste distinctions that are a necessary by-product of our economic system, schools must adopt some mechanism for the proper selection and channeling of students into the labor force. By limiting access to higher education at one end of the pyramid and refusing to address the conditions that put poor and minority students at a disadvantage, at the other end, conservatives effectively ensure the perpetuation of the status quo. This has become the educational agenda for the 1980's.

### Equality and Education

The move to tighten admission standards at colleges across the country, in league with the reduction in financial aid to students during the Reagan era marked a dramatic reversal of the "open access" policy initiated two decades earlier by Lyndon Johnson. The late-President's commitment to the eradication of economic and racial barriers to higher education resulted in unparalleled

growth in college attendance in the 1960's and early 1970's, and significantly narrowed the gap in educational attainment between whites and blacks.<sup>9</sup> In the conservative climate of the 1980's, many of these gains have been erased.

In proportion to the total budget, federal support for education has decreased every year since 1980. Poor children have been among those hardest hit by the cuts; for some schools in lower income areas, the result has been a 20% loss in funding.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the ultra-right, Heritage Foundation proposed the eventual elimination of all government support for education at the same time that conservative Centrists argued for more rigorous admissions requirements to four year colleges and universities in A Nation at Risk.<sup>11</sup> The affect of implementing this policy, would be to bar all but the most qualified students from America's universities, while decreasing the likelihood that students attending the lower-income schools would have the educational qualifications necessary for admission. Justification for their position is thinly veiled in a discourse of what constitutes "quality" education.

The sad fact is that for two decades now we have neglected educational quality in the name of equality. Trying to insure that every child would have access to as much as every other child, we have failed to attend to the content of that education . . .<sup>12</sup>

Neither Chester Finn, nor his conservative colleagues, deny that inequalities are rooted deep in our educational system



and in our society, but according to David Purpel, they are unwilling to address these issues, if the implications of change threaten the conventional power structure. Instead, they opt for educational "reforms" which serve the interests of the economic system and of the dominant culture.<sup>13</sup>

### Content and Methodology

Educational conservatives differ fundamentally from their liberal counterparts in the way that they perceive children. Firmly grounded in behavioristic psychology, conservative ideologists hold little regard for children's innate curiosity, or the ability of these children to make decisions that are in their own or the community's best interests. The "shoddy"<sup>14</sup> condition of American schools today, is attributed, in part, to the misguided attempt on the part of liberal educators in the 60's, to abandon a "teacher-supplied core curriculum" for a curriculum based on "students' uninformed notions of their own needs."<sup>15</sup> Children, by the conservative definition of the word, cannot know what is best for them. They must be motivated to learn "what is significant and contributory to their lives."<sup>16</sup>

To this end, the conservative-backed reform movement in this decade has de-emphasized the importance of education as an interactive learning process in favor of a far more limited role for education as the dissemination of

facts. This is the underlying rationale for the back to basics movement.

"Basics" as defined by conservative theorists from William Bennett to Diane Ravitch, are comprised of mathematics, science, social studies, English and the foreign languages.<sup>17</sup> Conservative educators in recent years have called for a return to the teaching of these subjects in our public schools, ignoring (or perhaps unaware of) John Goodlad's findings in A Place Called School which indicate that there had never been a departure from these subjects in the first place.<sup>18</sup> Proponents of the movement view the educational process as the acquisition of a predetermined body of knowledge and skills. E.D. Hirsch, Professor of English at the University of Virginia, has come the closest to defining this body, compiling a list of over 3000 items that he believes reflect the common culture of our nation. Hirsch admits that such a list is, by necessity, arbitrary.

We do not claim that the initial list is definitive. Such an assertion, even for a longer version, would be rash, because of human variations. Nonetheless, the consensus we found has made us confident that our list provides a fairly reliable index to the middle-level information that is shared by most literate people but remains largely unfamiliar to most illiterate people.<sup>19</sup>

Not all conservatives would concur on the items that Hirsch has selected for inclusion in his list. What is important here, is the conservative consensus that such a list is even possible. When followed to its logical

conclusion, this line of thinking suggests that a child's inability or unwillingness to master the prescribed material, is a reflection of that child's value to society. This idea forms the foundation of the conservative reform movement, and it is this idea that liberal educators implicitly reject.

The "Back to Basics" movement has addressed not only what children should learn, but how they should learn. Conservative methodology stresses more discipline, more homework, more requirements and more "time on task."<sup>20</sup> Drill, repetition and rote memorization of facts have been substituted for active inquiry. The role of the teacher, according to this model, is that of a manager, who has sole responsibility for defining the goals and the manner in which they should be achieved. The student, like any worker on an assembly line, simply carries out orders.<sup>21</sup>

A focal point of the conservative discourse on educational reform has been the necessity for adopting more stringent grading policies, and the implementation of a nationwide testing program. Conservatives defend both measures as means of identifying the need for remedial intervention and evaluating students' readiness for further study.<sup>22</sup> In reality, however, there is no reason to believe that either means of assessment will be used for any other purpose than that for which they have always been used: comparing, ranking and measuring children according to their performance. In The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in

Education, author David Purpel argues that the end justifies the means in a culture that "puts enormous stress on success, achievement, and individuality and [in] a system that requires social and economic inequality."<sup>23</sup> The conservative critique of education in the United States has circumvented this issue.

### Liberal Perspective on Issues in Education

#### Vision of Education

Nearly thirty years ago, Arthur Combs hit upon one of the over-arching truths in education in an article entitled, Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming, published in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Yearbook:

Whatever we do in teaching depends upon what we think people are like. The goals we seek, the things we do, the judgments we make, even the experiments we are willing to try, are determined by our beliefs about the nature of man and his capacities.<sup>24</sup>

Although any attempt to categorize a concept as elusive as the nature of humankind is difficult, liberal consensus with regard to the following assumptions provides the foundation for their vision of schooling in America - its purposes and its possibilities.

David Elkind, author of *The Hurried Child*, identifies two metaphors for childhood - "the child as a growing organism with its own emergent identity and the child as

malleable material awaiting society's imprinting."<sup>25</sup> Liberal educators have adopted the former view. Every child is perceived as a unique individual with a vastly different set of experiences and with singular needs, attitudes and abilities. All individuals have intrinsic value, regardless of what or how much they achieve in the course of their lives on this planet.<sup>26</sup>

the liberal vision of education is rooted in the conviction that humans are innately driven toward health and fulfillment; given the opportunity and the encouragement they will struggle to uncover their "possibilities and potentialities."<sup>27</sup> Abraham Maslow devoted his professional life to exploring the foundations of human development. His research on motivation and personality served to reinforce this traditional liberal view:

First of all and most important of all is the strong belief that man has an essential nature of his own, . . . that he has some needs, capacities and tendencies that are in part genetically based, some of which are characteristic of the whole human species, . . . and some of which are unique to the individual. These basic needs are good or neutral rather than evil. Second, there is involved the conception that full health and normal . . . development consists in actualizing this nature, . . . and in developing into maturity along the lines that this hidden, . . . essential nature dictates, growing within rather than being shaped from without.<sup>28</sup>

The common thread in the work of Combs, Elkind and Maslow is an ultimate and unshakable faith in humanity. Their research and writings illustrate the liberal

confidence that children, as individuals are unique beings with almost limitless potential, and that they are internally motivated toward the realization of that potential. Consistent with this perspective, liberal educators view the educational process as a means for self-actualization.<sup>29</sup> Effective schools present children with an opportunity to explore and make sense of the world about them, but in the end, it is children and not the schools, who must define their place in that world.

### Equality and Education

While committed in theory to an educational system that encourages the development of every child to his or her fullest potential, liberal theorists are nonetheless cognizant of the societal and educational inequalities that render this an impossibility.

Liberals have been at the forefront of the movement to eradicate the legal and "defacto" barriers to quality education for poor and minority children in this country. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Topeka* catalyzed determined efforts to integrate the nation's public schools and universities, in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, liberal educators worked determinedly to implement programs and policies to benefit economically disadvantaged students.

The establishment of the program, "Head Start," marked one of the lasting successes of the liberal reform effort,

as did passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>30</sup> In the new, conservative climate of the 1980s, however, liberals are engaged in a struggle to keep from losing the ground gained in the past three decades. From John Goodlad<sup>31</sup> to Henry Giroux,<sup>32</sup> they have argued futilely, that the combined practices of testing and tracking children in our public schools serve only to perpetuate inequality and prejudice. They have resisted conservative attempts to raise admission standards at universities in the United States and have fought for enforcement of existing civil rights laws.

In 1899, John Dewey wrote, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children."<sup>33</sup> A century later, Dewey's philosophy constitutes the foundation for liberal educational ideology. Maintaining the goal of empowerment for the poor and oppressed of our society, liberals seek ultimately, the creation of a humane and egalitarian educational system in America.

### Content and Methodology

The world in which we live today is imminently more complex, and in many ways more frightening than that of a generation ago. The threat of nuclear war is not an imagined one, nor is the mindless destruction of the earth's resources. Liberal educators argue that we can not

predict what knowledge our children will require to live successful and meaningful lives in the years ahead.

. . . With respect to education, the information available in the world is so great, change is so rapid, and the future needs of students are so diverse that it is no longer possible to be certain that any item of subject matter will be necessary to cope with life even in the very near future.<sup>34</sup>

The primary focus of schooling according to this view is not the information that is taught, but what children make of that information. Children are active participants in the learning process.

Liberal theorists emphasize that, in order for "information" to become "knowledge," it must have personal meaning for the student. In A Personal Approach to Learning, Arthur Combs noted that "people work very hard at learning when they have a need to know and when they believe they have a chance of success."<sup>35</sup> Children learn most effectively when they are addressing problems or questions that are of personal significance. Elliot Wigginton made this discovery in the winter of 1966, after a semester of trying, unsuccessfully to awaken a tenth grade class to the joys of English literature. The Foxfire Project was born out of desperation, but it was an immediate and overwhelming hit with a group of adolescents to whom it provided, perhaps for the first time, an opportunity to tackle real problems in which they had a personal stake.



A human being does not learn how to ride a bicycle, make love, solve a problem, conduct a laboratory experiment . . . or make friends through reading books or memorizing directions. One may learn the directions and be able to parrot them back, . . . but they have no meaning without personal experience. To present only prepackaged information and to assert that it is correct - is to deny the opportunity for the student to discover that there may be more than one way to solve any given task or approach any given problem, and thus to learn how to approach and solve those new and unfamiliar problems that will surely come.<sup>36</sup>

Wigginton learned the hard way that for learning to take place, children must have the chance to explore, to experiment, to make mistakes and to learn from them. Only then will our schools succeed in educating students whose passion for learning will follow them out the door of the classroom and in to the world beyond.<sup>37</sup>

### Summary

Widely divergent perceptions concerning the purposes and practices of schools in America distinguish liberals and conservatives on the educational continuum. For conservative educators, education is viewed primarily as a means of preparing students to fill the demands of the labor force. Liberal educators tend to take a more holistic view of schooling; their focus is on an educational environment that encourages social and moral development as well as intellectual growth, and where the needs of children as individuals take precedence over the demands of the marketplace.

Conservatives on the continuum, express the concern that the best and most able students in America's schools have been ignored in the drive to increase opportunities for poor and minority students in the educational system. Conversely, liberals argue that the needs of the latter groups have never been addressed effectively, in our schools and that improving educational opportunity for poor children and for children of color must rank among the highest of educational priorities.

Finally, conservative educators stress the importance of teaching "the basics" in our schools. The teacher in this sense is responsible for "imposing" the required curriculum on each of his or her students. Liberal curriculum theorists, on the other hand, emphasize an interactive learning process where the curriculum is dictated by individual student needs and interests. Knowledge is important only if it has meaning for the individual. "Schooling in American Society" posits the view of education presented under the "liberal position" defined in this chapter. The objective of this study is to examine the degree to which students adopt this view upon completion of the course.

## Endnotes

1. Fred L. Pincus, "From Equity to Excellence: the Rebirth of Educational Conservatism," Social Policy, Winter, 1984, pp. 153-154.
2. Chester E. Finn, Jr., Diane Ravitch and Robert T. Fancher, Ed., Against Mediocrity, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1984), p. iii-iv.
3. The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: USA Research, 1984), p. 7.
4. Standley Aronowitz and Henry a. Giroux, Education Under Seige, (South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers Inc., 1985), p. 1.
5. Joel Spring, The Sorting Machine, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1976).
7. Ibid., 7.
8. Pincus, p. 154.
9. Diane Ravitch, The Troubled Crusade, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), p. 161.
10. Harold Howe, "Children Left Behind," Oklahoma Observer, 10 February, 1985, p. 10.
11. The National Commission on Excellence in Education, p. 73.
12. Chester Finn as cited in Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux's, Education Under Seige, (South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers Inc., 1985), p. 4.
13. David E. Purpel, The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in education, (Granby, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, Inc., 1989), p. 15.
14. National Commission on Excellence in Education, p. 15.
15. Ravitch, p. 81.

16. Russell Dobson and Judith Dobson, The Language of Schooling, (Washington, D.C.: University Press, 1981), p. 16.
17. National Commission on Excellence in Education, pp. 70-72.
18. John Goodlad, A Place Called School, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), p. 34.
19. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Cultural Literacy, (Roton: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), p. 106.
20. National Commission on Excellence in Education, p. 75.
21. Arthur W. Combs, A Personal Approach to Teaching, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon Inc., 1965), p. 144.
22. National Commission on Excellence in Education, p. 75.
23. Purpel, p. 9.
24. Arthur Combs as cited in Russell L. Dobson, Judith E. Dobson and J. Randall Koetting, Looking At, Talking About, and Living with Children, (Lanham, Maryland: University Press, 1985), p. 69.
25. David Elkind, The Hurried Child, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1981), p. 24.
26. Purpel, p. 36.
27. Combs, p. 22.
28. Abraham Maslow, Motivation and Personality, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 269.
29. Combs, p. 21.
30. Julie Roy Jeffrey, Education for Children of the Poor, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), p. 47.
31. Goodlad, p. 207.
32. Aronowitz and Giroux, p.
33. John Dewey as cited in Charles Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 53.
34. Combs, p. 125.
35. Ibid, p. 60.

36. Elliot Wigginton, Sometimes A Shining Moment, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1986), p. 208.
37. Ibid, p. 202.

## CHAPTER III

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Selection of the Sample

The sample tested for purposes of this study was comprised of 248 students enrolled in the course "Schooling in American Society" during the Fall semester of 1988. The class was conducted at Oklahoma State University under the direction of a Professor of Social Foundations. The course was divided into a large group lecture that met once a week, and 10 discussion sections in which groups of approximately 30 students met twice a week to explore the problems and issues presented in lecture. Discussion sections were led by four graduate assistants from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

#### Data Collection Procedures

The data for the study was secured through the administration of an attitudinal survey at the beginning and end of the semester. A comprehensive exam over the subject matter of the course was also administered at these times. A total of 248 students responded to both the pretest and posttest, out of approximately 275 students.

The total response represents 90 percent of the sample population.

### Instrumentation

Two instruments were designed in relation to this study. The first consisted of a multiple choice, comprehensive exam over the lecture portion of the course "Schooling in American Society." The objective exam (see Appendix A) was prepared by the professor who presented the weekly lecture, and reflected the material that he presented in class throughout the semester. The second instrument was a Scale of Educational Liberalism (Appendix B) designed by the author of this study to test student attitudes on a liberal/conservative continuum, toward the issues that provided the focal point of the course. The scale consisted of 24 dichotomous statements classified as "liberal" or "conservative" based on the author's review of the text for the course, Schooling in America,<sup>1</sup> and by a review of the current literature, described in Chapter II. The statements in the survey, and the liberal/conservative classifications were reviewed and approved by the designer of the course prior to administration of the pretest. Statements one through four were eliminated after the posttest, as a result of questions concerning their reliability in measuring the respondent's the position on the educational continuum. Statements 1 and 2 actually addressed two questions, and consequently it was impossible

to identify which part of the statement elicited the students' response. Statements 3 and 4 were intended to be dichotomous, but the number of students who strongly agreed or disagreed with both, made it clear, that in their eyes at least, the statements were virtually synonymous.

The instrument had a Leikert-type scale for each question, from "A" to "E." An "A" indicated that the respondent strongly agreed with the statement while an "E" meant that the respondent strongly disagreed with the statement. In scoring the survey, the most liberal response to a statement received a point value of 1; a point value of 5 indicated the most conservative response (see Appendix C). The lowest, cumulative score possible on the survey, and the most liberal, was 20. The highest, and most conservative score possible was 100. Scores from 55 to 65 were interpreted as "moderate" by the researcher. Respondents who scored under 55 were defined as "liberal" with regard to educational issues, while those who scored from 66 to 100 were identified as "conservative." A copy of the Scale of Educational Liberalism is found in Appendix B.

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were investigated:

1. Null Hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between an individual's completion of the course "Schooling in American Society" and



his or her position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum.

2. Null Hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between completion of the course "Schooling in American Society" and knowledge of educational issues as measured by the comprehensive exam in the course.
3. Null Hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between knowledge of educational issues as measured by the comprehensive exam in the course "Schooling in American Society," and position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum.
4. Null Hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between a student's performance in the course "Schooling in American Society," as measured by his or her semester grade, and that student's position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum.
5. Null Hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between the discussion group leader's position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum and the position of his or her students on that same continuum.

## Methodology

A single group, pretest/posttest pre-experimental design was chosen for this study, in part, because of the difficulty of obtaining a control group representative of the population enrolled in "Schooling in American Society." This design is often discouraged because of the researcher's inability to account for the impact of historical events or the passage of time on the sample being tested. However, L. R. Gay, author of Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application, states that this design is sometimes justified when the behavior to be measured is not likely to change by itself.<sup>2</sup> There was little reason to believe that the attitudes toward educational issues of the population in question, (primarily second year students majoring in education), would change either as a result of the process of maturation or as a result of outside events, in the course of only four months. Consequently, the researcher believed that the design methodology was appropriate for this experiment.

## Statistical Treatment

Results of the pretests and posttests and scores from the first and second administrations of the comprehensive exam were coded and entered on to the computer using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). Additional variables

included in the qualitative analysis were the respondent's discussion group leader and the respondent's grade for the course. A t-test was used as a parametric measurement of the mean scores of students on both the pretest and posttest, and on the comprehensive exam at the beginning and end of the course. L. R. Gay defines the t-test as "a parametric test of significance used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of two matched, or non-independent, samples at a selected probability level."<sup>3</sup> Pearson r was then used to obtain the sample correlation coefficient between variables, i.e. the correlation between performance on the comprehensive exam and position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum.

## Endnotes

1. Daniel Selakovich, Schooling in America, (New York: Longman, Inc., 1984).
2. L. R. Gay, Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application, (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1981), p. 226.
3. Ibid, 437.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the author will describe the results of the statistical analysis and the relationship of the data to each of the five hypotheses examined. An observable level of significance of 0.05 or above is required in order to reject the null hypotheses.

#### Findings

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between an individual's completion of the course "Schooling in American Society" and his or her position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum.

Table I illustrates the distribution of students on the liberal/conservative continuum at the beginning and end of the course. The mean score on the attitudinal pretest for students enrolled in "Schooling in American Society" was 58.6120. The score reflected a moderate viewpoint on the educational continuum for the class as a whole. The mean score on the attitudinal posttest was 54.9840, marking

a 3.6280 difference in the point value and a shift to the liberal side of the continuum. The t-test yielded a value of 6.3166 with an observable level of significance of 0.0001, well beyond that required to reject the null hypothesis. As a result, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between completion of the course "Schooling in American Society" and a student's position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum. Figure 1 represents the distribution of scores on the scale of educational liberalism from the pretest to the posttest.

TABLE I  
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON  
THE EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM  
AFTER PRE AND POSTTESTS

Scale of Educational Liberalism	Number of Respondents		
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Pretest	51 (21%)	167 (67%)	30 (12%)
Posttest	109 (44%)	133 (54%)	6 (2%)

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between completion of the course, "Schooling in American

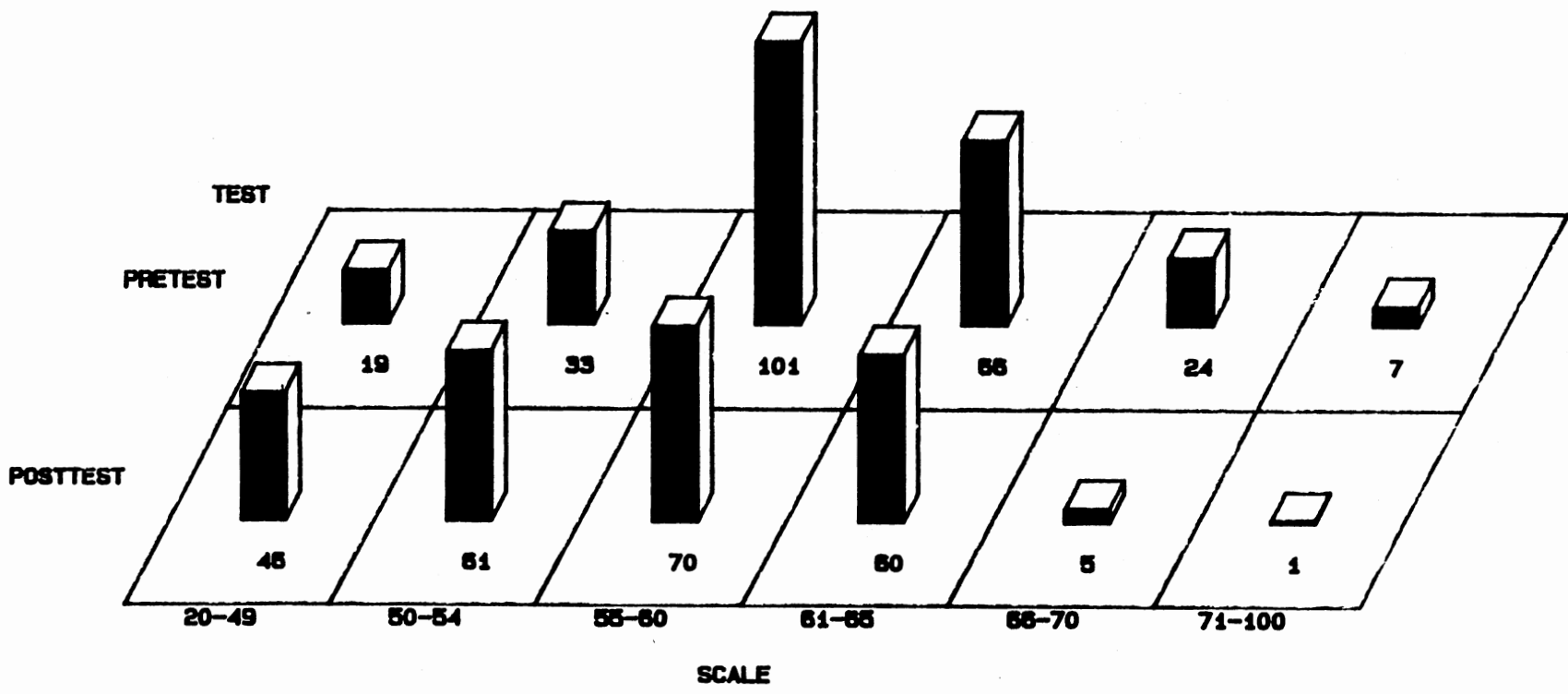


Figure 1. Distribution of Scores on the Scale of Educational Liberalism from Pretest to Posttest

Society," and knowledge of educational issues as measured by the comprehensive exam in the course.

TABLE II  
DISTRIBUTION OF SCORES ON THE COMPREHENSIVE  
EXAM DURING THE FIRST AND LAST  
WEEK OF THE SEMESTER

Examination Period	Score on Comprehensive Exam				
	29 or less	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-50
First Week of Semester	145	3	0	0	0
Final Week of Semester	24	38	81	75	30

The mean score on the comprehensive exam as administered during the first week of the course was 20.404. This score indicated little if any prior knowledge of the material presented in "Schooling in American Society" on the part of the students taking the course. The exam was administered a second time, as a comprehensive final at the end of the semester. The mean score at that time was 37.9146, a difference of 17.5106 points. The t-test yielded a value of 8.222 with a 0.0001 observable level of significance; clearly enough to reject the hypothesis. Not surprisingly, research indicated that



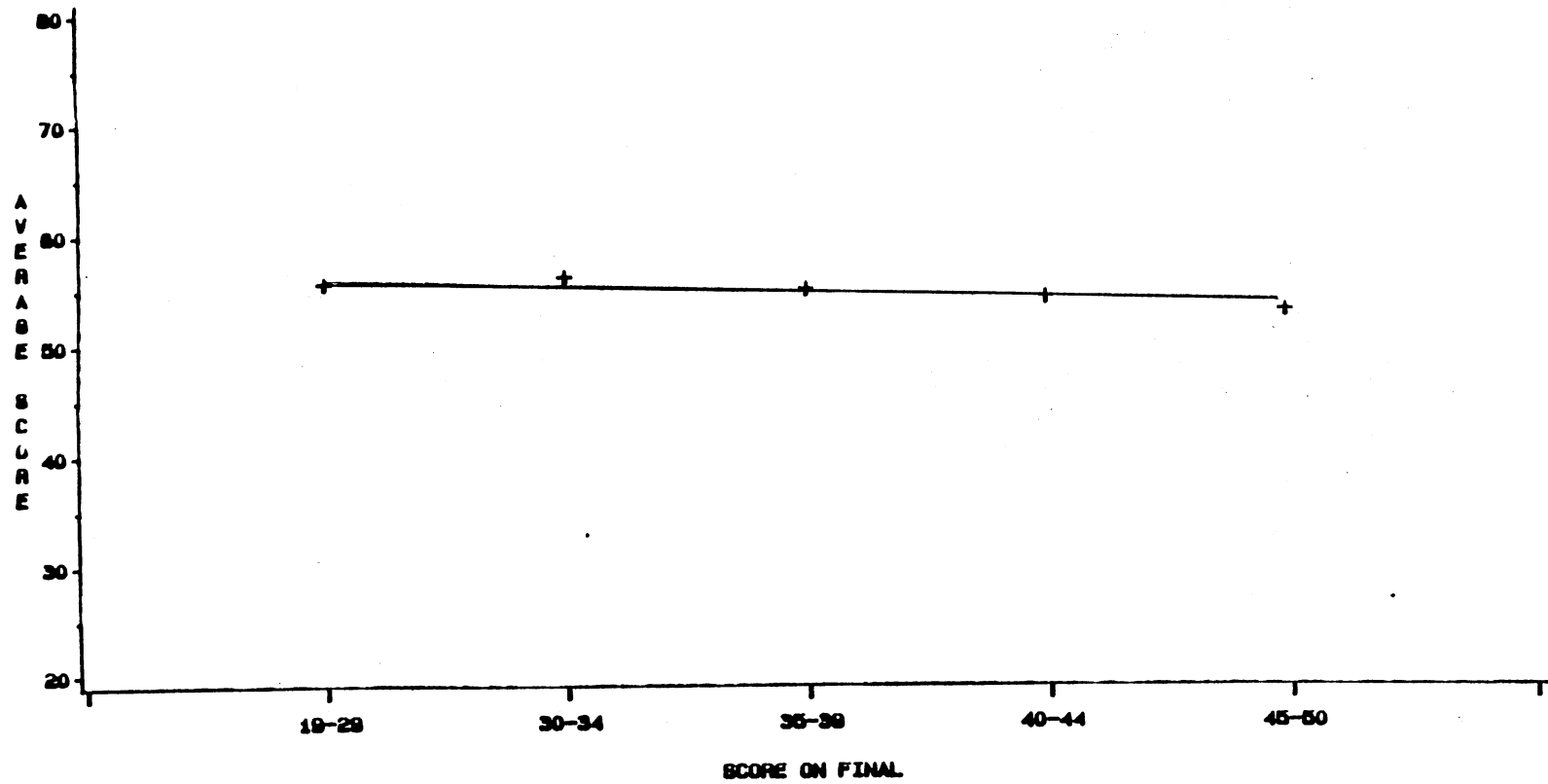


Figure 2. Correlation Between Performance on Exam and Position on Liberal/Conservative Educational Continuum

there is a very strong relationship between completion of the course "Schooling in American Society" and knowledge of the educational issues presented in that course and measured by performance on the exam.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between knowledge of educational issues as measured by the comprehensive exam in the course "Schooling in American Society," and position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum.

The Pearson sample correlation coefficient, representing the relationship between performance on the comprehensive exam and placement on the liberal/conservative educational continuum was a  $-0.10944$ . The observable level of significance was  $0.0867$ , insufficient to reject the hypothesis. Figure 2 appears to reflect a very slight correlation between high grades on the comprehensive exam and a liberal attitude toward educational issues. Statistical analysis indicates, however, that the correlation is far too weak to support a case that a significant relationship between the two variables exists.

H<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant relationship between a student's performance in the course "Schooling in American Society" as measured by his or her semester grade, and that student's position on the

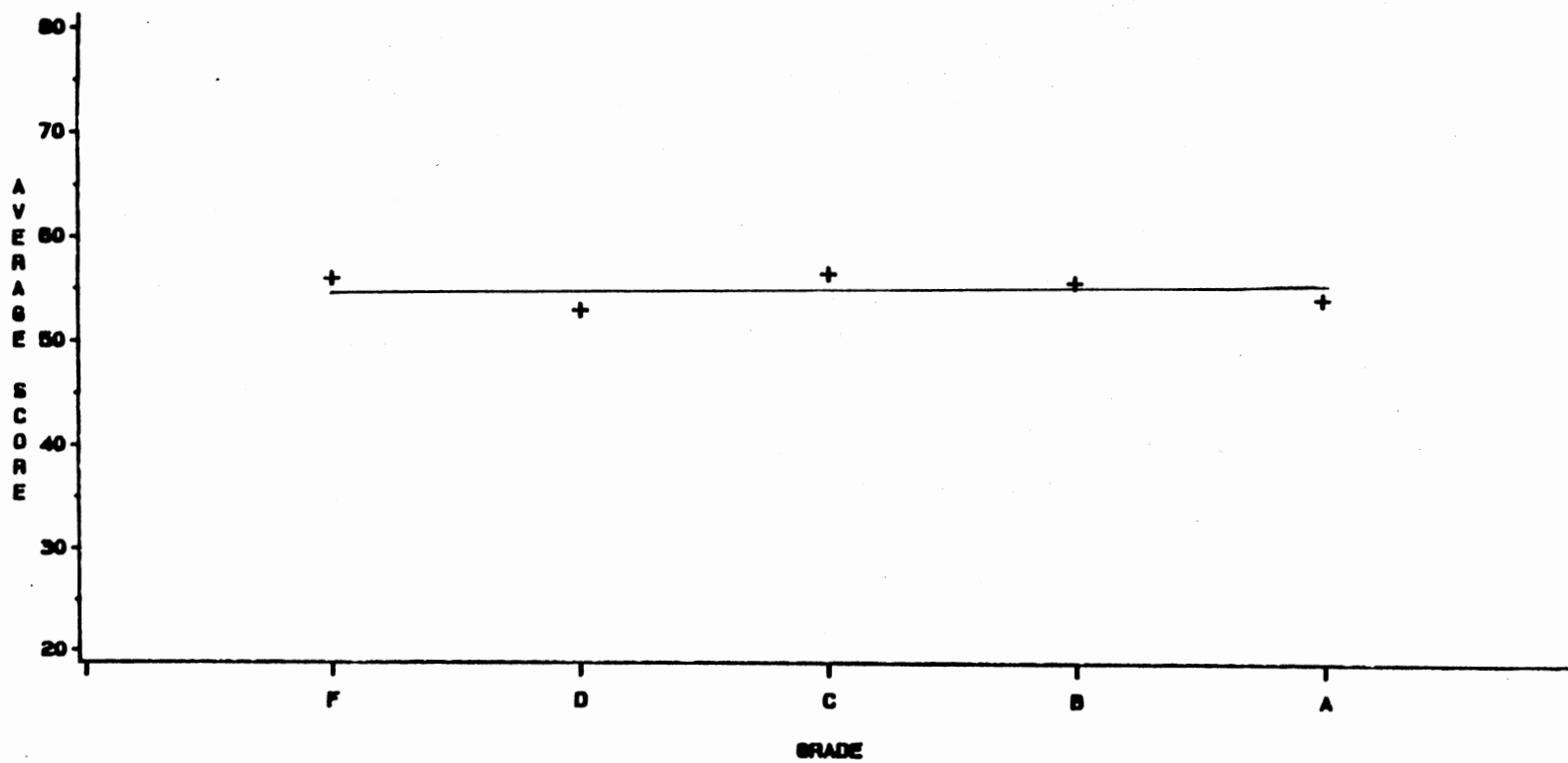


Figure 3. Correlation Between Course Grade and Position on Liberal/Conservative Educational Continuum

liberal/conservative educational continuum.

The Pearson sample correlation coefficient, representing the relationship between the grade received in the course and position on the educational continuum was 0.09302, with an observable level of significance of 0.1425. This was not sufficient to reject the hypothesis. Therefore, the researcher concluded that the correlation between the two variables was weak or nonexistent. Figure 3 illustrates the results of the statistical analysis.

H<sub>5</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the discussion group leader's position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum and the position of his or her students on that same continuum.

In analyzing the relationship between the discussion group leader's position on the educational continuum and the position of his or her students, the author measured the shift in mean scores on the pretest and posttest of the Scale of Educational Liberalism for the students enrolled under each discussion group leader. The students under Instructor No. 1 averaged a 58.00 on the pretest, and a 51.8205 on the posttest, yielding a t-score value of 3.9174. The observable level of significance was 0.0002. Instructor No. 1 scored a 24 on the Scale of Educational Liberalism.

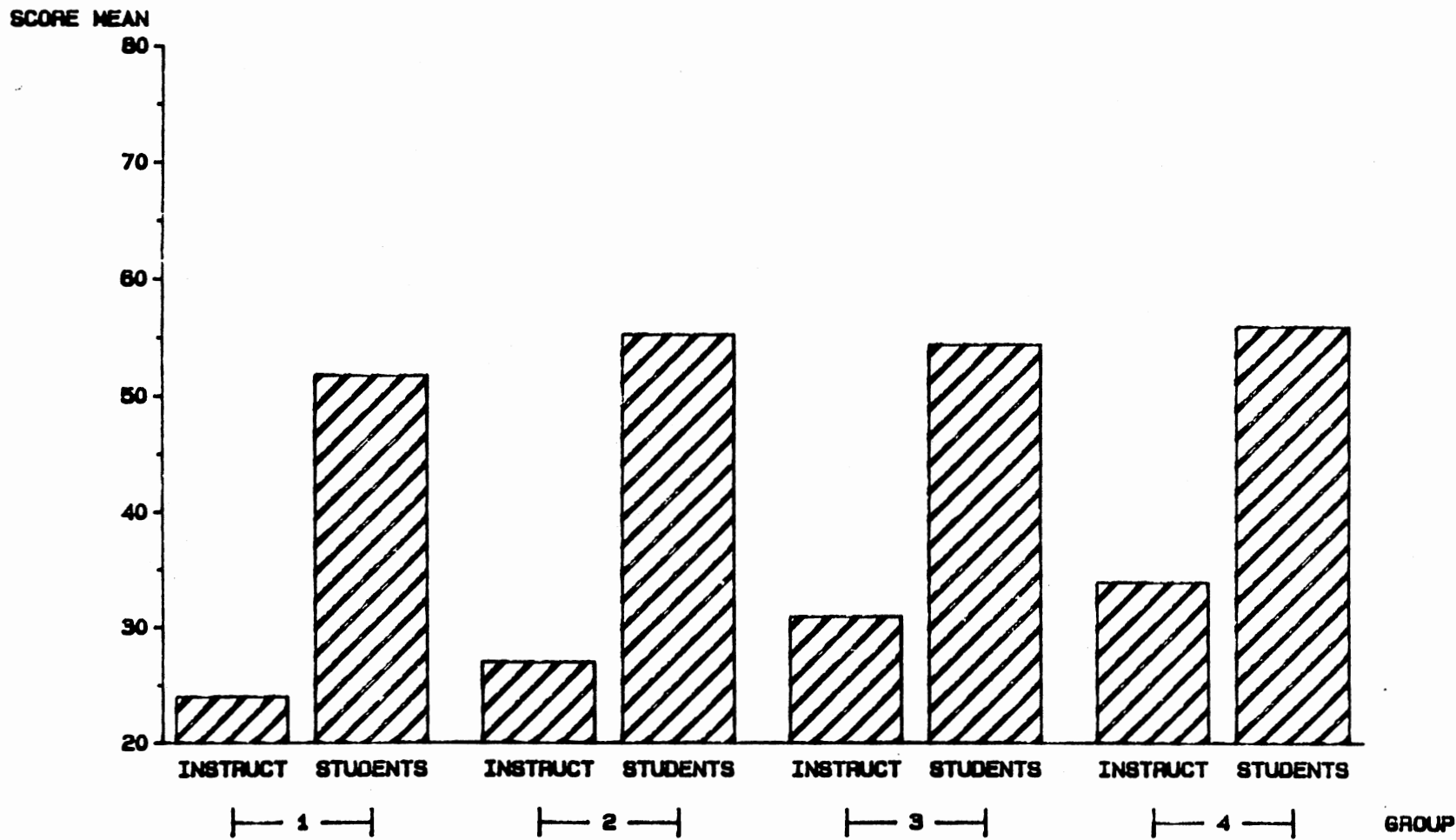


Figure 4. Score of Discussion Group Leaders Compared to Mean Scores of Their Students on the Scale of Educational Liberalism

Under Instructor No. 2, the mean score on the pretest was 58.9629. The posttest mean score was 55.4444. The t-test yielded a value of 3.2543 with an 0.0014 observable level of significance. Instructor No. 2's score on the Scale of Educational Liberalism was 27.

Students under Instructor No. 3 averaged 58.9200 on the pretest and 54.6600 on the posttest. The t-score was 3.9272 with an observable level of significance of 0.0002. The score on the Scale of Educational Liberalism for Instructor No. 3 was 31.

Under Instructor No. 4, students had a mean score of 58.3625 on the pretest and a score of 58.3625 on the posttest. The t-test yielded a value of 2.1899 with an observable level of significance of 0.0300. Instructor No. 4 scored 34 on the Scale of Educational Liberalism.

Though the degree to which students moved to the left of the liberal/conservative educational continuum varied dependent on their discussion group leader, there was significant correlation between their position on the continuum or the degree to which they moved to the left, and the position of their instructor on the same liberal/conservative educational continuum. Figure 4 compares the position of instructor and their students on the educational continuum.

### Summary

Test results indicated a strong relationship between a student's completion of the course "Schooling in American Society" and his or her position on the liberal/conservative educational continuum. The course resulted in a slight, but significant shift from the middle of the continuum to the left, or liberal side of the continuum. Predictably, the researcher also found a very strong correlation between completion of the course and knowledge of the educational issues and problems discussed through the semester. There was not a significant relationship, however, between knowledge of these issues and positions on the educational continuum.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

#### Summary

This study was designed to measure the effect of the course "Schooling in American Society" on student attitudes toward educational issues, on a liberal/conservative continuum. The researcher addressed the relationship between completion of the course and knowledge of educational issues, then examined the impact of that knowledge on the students' placement on the continuum. Approaching the problem from a slightly different angle, the relationship between a student's performance in the course and his or her position on the spectrum was also investigated. Finally, the researcher attempted to determine the relationship between the attitudes of the students' discussion group leader on the continuum, and his or her own position on that continuum.

#### Conclusions

The study indicated a marked shift on the part of the sample, toward the liberal side of the continuum upon



completion of the course "Schooling in American Society." It is not clear, however, whether that shift resulted from a change in students' attitudes toward issues such as poverty and racism and their impact on education, or whether the shift was simply the result of a better understanding of the issues. The attitudinal pretest reflected uncertainty and confusion on the part of many of the respondents; there was a high proportion of "C" responses to the statements on the Scale of Educational Liberalism, indicating that students had not formed an opinion on the issue at all, or simply did not understand the statements. There were also numerous instances on the pretest where respondents strongly agreed or disagreed with both sides of a dichotomous statement. The incongruities were eliminated on the posttest, either because students had come to some conclusions about the issues presented, or simply because they had an understanding, for the first time, of what the issues were. In any case, completion of the course did result in a significant movement on the continuum, suggesting that the students either changed their views as a result of the course, or formulated a viewpoint for the first time on issues to which they had not been previously exposed.

The strongest relationship in the study emerged as that between a student's completion of the course "Schooling in American Society" and knowledge of educational issues as measured by the comprehensive exam

for the course. The sample's performance on the exam prior to the first week of lecture was abysmal by any measure. Only two students out of 248 answered 60% of the questions correctly. Students understood that they would not be held accountable for their scores on the first administration of this exam, and it is quite possible that many of them did not take the test seriously. However, the sheer volume of students in the sample who failed would indicate that few had any knowledge of the material prior to the time that it was presented in lecture. This data appears to correspond with the number of uncertain responses on the attitudinal pretest. It is possible that students did not have a strong knowledge base with respect to current issues and problems in education, and therefore, were unable to provide the specific information required on the exam, or to develop opinions based on that information for the attitudinal pretest.

Such was not the case for the second administration of the exam. Seventy-five percent of the sample answered at least 70% of the questions correctly. Twelve percent of the students scored 45 points or more out of a possible 50 points on the exam. It is evident that the overwhelming majority of the students who completed the course gained more information about educational issues than they had prior to enrolling in the course.

This was hardly a revelation. In fact, had students not learned something about current issues in education as

a result of their participation in the course, it would have been disconcerting to students and instructors alike. The researcher's primary concern was to carry the question one step further. Given the fact that students did learn about problems and issues in education as a result of the course, it was natural to investigate whether or not the mere acquisition of that information influenced their attitudes, as measured by the Scale of Educational Liberalism. The data was inconclusive with regard to this question, but the statistical analysis did not yield any evidence that there was a significant relationship between knowledge of educational issues, as measured by the comprehensive exam, and position on the liberal/conservative continuum. In other words, students who gained the most awareness of inequality and injustice in our educational system, did not necessarily demonstrate a corresponding shift in their attitudes toward these problems. There was a shift to the left of the educational continuum, but it was not connected with mastery of the information presented in the course as measured by the exam.

The researcher also examined the relationship between a student's semester grade in the course and his or her position on the educational continuum; once again, there was no significant relationship between the two variables. This confirmed the results of the earlier experiment, indicating that a student's performance in the course as

evidenced by either the exam or by the semester grade, was not related to his or her position on the continuum. Viewed from another perspective, the data also suggested that just as a student's performance did not affect his or her attitudes, the reverse was true as well. Students whose attitudes toward educational issues placed them at the conservative end of the continuum were not penalized for those attitudes in the course.

There was little evidence that the shift on the continuum was correlated in some way with a student's acquisition of the information presented during the semester. Eliminating this hypothesis, the researcher then examined the impact of students' discussion group leaders on their position on the continuum. The experiment was of interest because the sample group spent one third more time in discussion sections than they did in lecture. The discussion groups were conducted in such a manner that students had a chance to explore and discuss their attitudes toward the material from the weekly lecture. Students had more contact and more opportunity for interaction with the instructors of their discussion sections than they did with the lecturer. The researcher conjectured that this interaction might have more impact on the sample's position on the continuum than the acquisition of information, and that the instructor's position on the continuum might concomitantly influence the attitudes of his or her students. The latter part of this hypothesis

was not wholly supported by the data. Every discussion group leader scored to the left of the vast majority of his or her students on the educational continuum. There was no significant relationship between the score of the instructor and the degree to which students moved to the left.

The lack of correlation between the degree of movement on the spectrum by students, and the position of their instructors on the educational continuum, does not eliminate the possibility that there was a connection between the views of the instructors and the liberalizing trend in the attitudes of their students over the course of the semester. It is possible that all the instructors were so far to the left of the sample that the disparity in attitudes among individual instructors, as measured by the Scale of Educational Liberalism, was insignificant in the eyes of their students. It is also possible that individual teaching styles had as much, or more, impact on students' positions on the educational continuum than the position of their instructors on that continuum. These variables were not accounted for in the study.

One can speculate that the shift to the left of the educational continuum on the part of the sample, was the result of identification with the lecturer or the discussion group leader, or both. In that case, students were responding to the individuals presenting the information, more than they were responding to the information itself. There is no data to support or reject

this idea, as this study did not directly address that possibility.

The author cannot offer any definite conclusion as to the success of the course "Schooling in American Society" in promoting a more liberal view toward educational issues among students enrolled in the course. Evidence would strongly suggest, however, that the course did contribute to an improved understanding of and empathy with the liberal perspective on our educational system. If this is indeed the case, then the ramifications for educators are important ones. Confronted with the possibility that students' beliefs and values will be derived. In part, from their teachers, those in the business of teaching have an overwhelming responsibility to be accurate and objective in their scholarship.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

The following represent a few of the research topics which may be derived from this study:

1. A study might be conducted concerning the affect of student and teacher interaction on the beliefs and attitudes of the student.
2. A study of the relationship between the attitudes a student espouses and the behavior he or she demonstrates would be useful.
3. Research might be fruitful concerning the lasting impact of an apparent attitudinal shift.

4. A study investigating the relationship between a student's area of emphasis and his or her attitudes toward educational issues would be helpful.
5. A study might be conducted to observe the impact of peer influence on student attitudes toward educational issues.

TheodoreSizer notes that our schools devote little attention to helping children become honest, compassionate and responsible adults.<sup>1</sup> In the light of evidence suggesting that teachers play some part in determining what values these children will adopt as their own, additional research in the field should be encouraged.

## Endnotes

1. Theodore Sizer, Horace's Compromising, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), p. 121.



## A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Apple, Michael W. Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1982.
- Apple, Michael W. Ideology and Curriculum. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
- Apple, Michael W. and Lois Weis. Ideology and Practice in Schooling. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983.
- Aranowitz, Stanley and Henry A. Giroux. Education Under Seige. South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers Inc., 1985.
- Combs, Arthur W. The Professional Education of Teachers. Boston: Allyn & Bacon Inc., 1965.
- Combs, Arthur W. A Personal Approach to Teaching. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1982.
- Finn, Chester E. Jr., Diane Ravitch, and Robert T. Fancher, Editors. Against Mediocrity. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1984.
- Dobson, Russell, and Judith Dobson. The Language of Schooling. Washington, D.C. University Press of America, Inc., 1981.
- Dobson, Russell L., Judith Dobson, and J. Randall Koetting. Looking At, Talking About, and Living With Children. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1985.
- Anyon, Jean. "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work." Schools and Society. Jeanne H. Ballantine, editor. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1989.
- Bestor, Arthur. Educational Wastelands. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985.
- Bloom, Allan. The Closing of the American Mind. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

- Bowles, Samuel, and Herbert Gintis. Schooling in Capitalist America. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976.
- Elkind, David. The Hurried Child. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1981.
- FitzGerald, Frances. America Revised, Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1979.
- Friere, Paulo. The Politics of Education. South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1985.
- Gay, L. R. Educational Research. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1981.
- Goodlad, John I. A Place Called School. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984.
- Goodlad, John I. Toward a Mankind School. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974.
- Greer, Colin, editor. Divided Society. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974.
- Hirsch, E.D., Jr. Cultural Literacy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987.
- Hurn, Christopher J. The Limits and Possibilities of Schooling. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1978.
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy. Education for Children of the Poor. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1978.
- Johnson, Kenneth R. Teaching the Culturally Disadvantaged. New York: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1970.
- Kirp, David L. and Mark G. Yudof. Educational Policy and the Law. Berkely, California: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1987.
- Maslow, Abraham Motivation and Personality. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- Morris, VanCleve. Existentialism in Education. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Purpel, David E. The Moral & Spiritual Crisis in Education. Granby, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1989.
- Ravitch, Diane. The Troubled Crusade. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983.

- Ravitch, Diane, and Chester E. Finn, Jr. What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? New York: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Selakovich, Daniel. Schooling in America. New York: Longman Inc., 1984.
- Shaw, Marvin E., and Jack M. Wright. Scales for the Measurement of Attitudes. New York: McGraw Hill Publishing Company, 1967.
- Silberman, Charles E. Crisis in the Classroom. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Sizer, Theodore. Horace's Compromise. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985.
- Spring, Joel. The Sorting Machine. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1976.
- Tiedt, Sidney W. Teaching the Disadvantaged Child. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Violas, Paul C. The Training of the Urban Working Class. Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1978.
- Wigginton, Eliot. Sometimes a Shining Moment. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1986.

#### Newspapers and Periodicals

- Carnegie Foundation. "Minority Access: A Question of Equity." Change, 61 (May/June 1987), 35-40.
- Howe Harold. "Children Left Behind." Oklahoma Observer, 10 February, 1985.
- Martin, David. "Wake Up: The American Dream is Fading and Our Future is at Risk." American School Board Journal, (February 1988), 21-24.
- Pincus, Fred L. "From Equity to Excellence: The Rebirth of Educational Conservatism." Social Policy, (Winter 1984), 50-56.

#### Reports

- National Commission on Excellence in Education. A Nation at Risk. Cambridge, Massachusetts: USA Research, 1984.

## APPENDIXES

**APPENDIX A**

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAM FOR "SCHOOLING  
IN AMERICAN SOCIETY"**

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_
3. Classification \_\_\_\_\_
4. Section \_\_\_\_\_
5. Discussion Group Leader \_\_\_\_\_

CIED 2113

Please circle the best answer under each question. When you have completed the exam, hand it in at the front of the class.

1. Which of the following doesn't fit?
  1. A Place Called School
  2. A Nation at Risk
  3. The Rights of Students
  4. Action for Excellence
  
2. Which of the following is the least common public criticism of education:
  1. teachers are over-paid
  2. teachers are incompetent
  3. the curriculum is bad
  4. discipline is poor in the public schools
  
3. In the early years of our history public school was provided mainly for the:
  1. rich
  2. poor
  3. middle class
  4. city kids
  
4. Which of the following is a major reason compulsory school laws were not enforced in the 19th century?
  1. people didn't want compulsory schools
  2. workers were opposed to the laws
  3. there was no enforcement machinery
  4. none of these
  
5. Why did the state of Oregon pass such a strong compulsory school law?
  1. because of pressure from "nationalistic" groups
  2. because the legislators in Oregon were true patriots
  3. all the states had the laws and Oregon didn't want to get behind
  4. none of these
  
6. Which Amendment to the Constitution was involved in Pierce v. Society of Sisters?
  1. the First
  2. the 14th
  3. 10th
  4. 4th
  
7. In Pierce, which of the following Constitutional rights were violated by the state according to the Supreme Court?
  1. the property right of private schools
  2. parents rights to due process
  3. religious freedom
  4. none of these
  
8. Which of the following would be most likely to run for a school board position?
  1. a middle-aged woman
  2. a friend of present school board members
  3. someone picked by a labor union
  4. the school janitor

9. In terms of income, school board members tend to be:
  1. middle class
  2. very wealthy
  3. poor
  4. unemployed
10. Generally speaking, whose interests are served by school boards?
  1. a majority of the people in the community
  2. relatives of the school board
  3. their own
  4. the teachers and students
11. Which of the following makes the most decisions on educational matters?
  1. the local school board
  2. the state bureaucracy and state legislature
  3. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education
  4. The President of U.S.
12. School rules on behavior could be classified as efforts to:
  1. indoctrinate the students
  2. teach students useful values
  3. socialize students
  4. none of these
13. The practical definition of "good citizenship in most schools would refer to:
  1. students appreciation for the Bill of Rights
  2. good behavior as defined by teachers
  3. students who think critically
  4. students who challenge authority
14. The things we teach elementary children about our political system are:
  1. often inaccurate
  2. deliberate lies
  3. insightful and useful
  4. accurate descriptions of the way things are
15. School rules, teachers rules and standards set for student behavior is part of the:
  1. formal curriculum
  2. extra-curricular activity
  3. hidden curriculum
  4. state requirements
16. The prohibition against prayer in schools first came from:
  1. the U.S. Supreme Court in 1961
  2. a law passed by Congress
  3. local judges
  4. state supreme court decisions
17. In which of the following did the U.S. Supreme Court declare school prayer a violation of the First Amendment?
  1. Wester Virginia v. Barnette
  2. Engle v. Vitale
  3. Everson v. Board of Education
  4. none of these
18. What proportion of children in the public schools could be classified as poor?
  1. one in four
  2. one in eight
  3. about half
  4. less than ten percent

19. In general terms, there is a close relationship between level of income and:
  1. scores on intelligence tests
  2. school grades
  3. scores on reading tests
  4. all of the above
20. Most poor people are:
  1. white
  2. black
  3. Hispanic
  4. Indian
21. If you are born Black, Red or Brown, what are your chances of being born into poverty?
  1. 50 percent
  2. 30 percent
  3. 20 percent
  4. 10 percent
22. The heads of most poor families in Oklahoma and America:
  1. do not work
  2. live completely on welfare
  3. about \$700 per month
  4. more than \$700 per month
23. A major reason public schools are subjected to efforts of pressure groups to influence what they do is:
  1. schools are convenient targets
  2. many people believe that the schools influence values
  3. both 1 and 2
  4. none of these reasons
24. How would you characterize pressure group activity on education over the course of the 20th century?
  1. predominantly right wing
  2. predominantly left-wing
  3. cyclical
  4. continuous and determined
25. Which of the following would not be considered a goal of "right-wing" conservative critics of the schools?
  1. prohibiting school prayer
  2. teaching of patriotism
  3. cut taxes for schools
  4. a Constitutional Amendment for school prayer
26. Most teachers come from (which class)?
  1. lower class
  2. middle and working class
  3. upper class
  4. the under class
27. Although Blacks comprise approximately five percent of college educated population they:
  1. are under-represented in the teaching profession
  2. tend not to go into teaching
  3. comprise about ten percent of the teaching profession
  4. comprise about twenty percent of the teaching profession
28. The major difference between the NEA and the AFT is that the:
  1. NEA is affiliated with organized labor
  2. AFT is affiliated with organized labor
  3. NEA locals do not strike
  4. AFT is more militant



29. A system in which all cultures and languages are respected:
1. corporate pluralism
  2. ethnicity
  3. cultural pluralism
  4. melting pot
30. Which of the following statements is most true?
1. ethnic groups have very little power
  2. organized ethnic groups have had some political success
  3. ethnicity is not recognized in American Politics
  4. ethnicity is something that any country would be better off without
31. According to Colin Greer in the Great School Legend:
1. children of immigrants were not helped much by the schools
  2. schools contributed to upward mobility of immigrant groups
  3. schools were neutral, they neither helped nor hindered immigrants
  4. almost all immigrant children graduated from high school
32. Which of the following statements is most characteristic of school treatment of ethnics, past and present:
1. ethnic children have been recognized as important
  2. most ethnic children get a second-rate education
  3. most ethnic children have been successfully mainstreamed in school
  4. minority groups have done well in American schools
33. When the incomes of Blacks and whites with the same number of years of schooling are compared:
1. whites make 10 to 20 percent more
  2. Blacks make 50 percent of white income
  3. urban Blacks make 10 to 33 percent more
  4. rural Blacks make 30 percent less than rural whites
34. By 1985 integration of Black and white students in public schools was:
1. complete and effective
  2. incomplete, a majority of Black students still attended predominantly Black schools
  3. complete, a very small minority of Black students attended predominantly Black schools
  4. no longer a problem in the United States
35. "A denigrated group excluded from major institutions of the social structure"
1. class
  2. ethnic pride
  3. caste
  4. none of these
36. In which of the following ways does the school contribute to reproduction of the existing class system?
1. providing small group work for students
  2. treating everyone as capable learners
  3. ranking and labeling children
  4. providing compensatory education
37. The drop-out rate for Hispanics in 1985 was:
1. 20 percent
  2. 30 percent
  3. 40 percent
  4. 50 percent
38. Historically, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has held the following objective regarding Indian education:
1. promote Native language and culture
  2. try to "mainstream" Indians into the white culture
  3. let the Indians decide what kind of schooling they want
  4. promote language of the tribes but not their culture

39. Regarding Indian Education, which of the following would be most true?
1. the education of Indian children has been successful than efforts with any other minority group
  2. very little money has been spent on Indian education
  3. the education of Indian children has been less successful than for any other minority group
  4. it is not possible to "mainstream" Indians into white culture
40. Which of the following argued for sex equality:
1. J.S. Mill
  2. John Locke
  3. Rosseau
  4. none of these
41. Which Amendment to the constitution provided for national suffrage for women?
1. the 14th
  2. 20th
  3. 19th
  4. 15th
42. The largest women's organization in the U.S.:
1. National Organization for Women
  2. the Feminists
  3. the CIO
  4. Citywide Women's Liberation Coalition
43. What proportion of adults who are poor are women?
1. half
  2. two-thirds
  3. three-fourths
  4. one-third
44. It is unlikely that women will soon achieve full equality because;
1. their exploitation in the market place is profitable
  2. they are worth less than men in the job market
  3. women are less efficient than men
  4. they don't want equality
45. Which of the following is most accurate?
1. there is little or no correlation between IQ scores and class
  2. Mentally retarded children are equally distributed among all classes
  3. More low-class children than any other class have low IQ scores
  4. A low IQ score is a sure indication of mental retardation
46. Which of the following deals in some way with handicapped children?
1. Public Law 94-142
  2. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act
  3. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
  4. All of the above
47. In which of the following cases did the court rule that IQ tests were culturally biased?
1. Larry P. v. Riles
  2. Parents in Action v. Hannon
  3. Mattie T. v. Holliday
  4. none of these
48. The most serious problem with the property tax as a method of school finance is that:
1. it doesn't yield much money
  2. its yield varies greatly from district to district
  3. it results in equal spending
  4. no one really enjoys paying taxes

49. In comparison with other states, the Oklahoma tax effort is:
1. below average
  2. above average
  3. dead last
  4. in the top ten
50. A case in which a state supreme court declared the state system of school finance in violation of the state constitution:
1. Rodriguez
  2. Serrano v. Priest
  3. Hernandez
  4. Doe v. Plyler

**APPENDIX B**

**ATTITUDINAL TEST**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

SECTION \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

DISCUSSION GROUP \_\_\_\_\_

STATUS \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_

The following is a survey designed to test the attitudes of those in teacher education toward educational issues. There are no right or wrong answers; you are simply asked to place the letter which most closely corresponds with your position on the issue in the blank next to each question. It is important that you answer honestly. The results of this survey will not be used for individual evaluation. The information is necessary as part of a graduate research project.

-----

A. strongly agree                      B. agree somewhat                      C. uncertain

                    D. disagree somewhat                      E. strongly disagree

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The Federal government should spend more money and exercise more control over education.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Schools should be funded and policy should be enacted primarily at the state and local level.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Schools need to bring God back into the classroom.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional moral standards should be re-examined in light of the problems students face in today's society.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Pupils should be allowed more freedom to do as they please.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Students need and should have more supervision that they usually get.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Students should participate in developing classroom rules ad procedures.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ The teacher should have absolute control of the classroom.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Schools provide upward mobility and an avenue of escape from the ghetto.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ Schools do not provide upward mobility, but reinforce existing inequalities among members of different social classes and racial groups.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Students benefit from heterogeneous grouping, that is, classes with students from different backgrounds and with different abilities.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Students work best when assigned to classes with other students of equal ability.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Schools should emphasize the "3 R's"; reading, writing and arithmetic.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ School curriculum should be dictated by individual student needs and interests.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ It is more important for students to learn to work together cooperatively than it is for them to learn how to compete.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Competition should be fostered in the classroom since we live in a highly competitive society.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ The main goal of schooling is to prepare students for life.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ The main goal of schooling is to prepare students for the work force.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ The state should decide what is taught in schools, along with the residents of local communities.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ Educators should decide what is taught in schools.
21. \_\_\_\_\_ Good teachers can be identified through their performance on competency tests.
22. \_\_\_\_\_ "Good" teaching is an art, and cannot be measured.
23. \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers should encourage appreciation of, and allegiance to America's governmental and economic systems.
24. \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers should encourage students to question and criticize our own and other governmental and economic systems.

APPENDIX C

KEY TO SCORING ATTITUDINAL TEST

### KEY TO SCORING ATTITUDINAL SURVEY

A maximum score of 100 and a minimum score of 20 were possible on the pre-and posttest attitudinal survey. Responses to Statements 1-4 were not incorporated into the scores. On each statement, a score of 5 was considered the most conservative response and a score of 1 was considered the most liberal response possible. Scoring was based on responses to a Leikert-type scale, i.e. A - strongly agree or E - strongly disagree. Statements identified as "conservative" by the author required a response of "A" to receive a score of 5 points. A response of "E" to a conservative statement in a score of 1 point. For a statement identified as "liberal" by the author, 1 point was assigned for responses marked "A" or strongly agree, and 5 points were assigned to responses marked "E", or strongly disagree. The point value for all 20 questions was added in order to reach the cumulative score.



VITA<sup>2</sup>

Janys E. O'Connor

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: A STUDY OF "SCHOOLING IN AMERICAN SOCIETY" AND  
ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD  
EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Provo, Utah, April 9, 1959,  
the daughter of Daniel F. and Gladys E. O'Connor.

Education: Graduated from Charles C. Mason High  
School, Tulsa, Oklahoma, in May 1977; received  
Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism from the  
University of Oklahoma in 1981; enrolled in  
Masters program at Oklahoma State University in  
1987; completed requirements for the Master of  
Science degree at Oklahoma State University in  
May, 1989, with a major in Curriculum and  
Instruction.

Professional Experience: Legal Assistant, 1982 -  
1987; Teaching Assistant, Department of  
Curriculum and Instruction, Oklahoma State  
University, January 1988 to May, 1989.