Educare and Educere: Is a Balance Possible in the Educational System?

by Randall V. Bass and J. W. Good

When Jamison T. Rock, the new superintendent of schools in the local district, turned his car into the parking lot at the elementary school, he was shocked to see that all of the spaces were filled. He left the parking lot, drove into the service entrance, and parked near the activity field. As he made the long walk to the school cafeteria, Jim wondered about the huge turnout for a meeting to discuss the direction of the district's academic program. He had received a request from a group of parents to discuss this issue with them. He had decided that all parents should be informed of the meeting and have the opportunity to attend. So he had sent out an announcement of the meeting to all parents whose children were enrolled in district schools. He assumed the meeting would be as poorly attended as all the other meetings involving parents had been.

"Man, did I ever misjudge this one," he thought to himself as he walked through the maze of hallways leading to the cafeteria. He heard the buzz of a hundred conversations well before he turned the final corner.

As the meeting got underway, it was clear that there would be no unanimity tonight. Jim opened the meeting by saying that he had no prepared remarks, but was simply there to participate in a discussion about the direction the academic program should take, adding that a group of parents had requested the meeting. The manager of a local industry immediately stood and said that he wanted the schools to implement practices that would make students good workers when they graduated from high school. "We need more and better art and music programs," one woman added. Someone else said she wanted students to be prepared for college. Others raised issues such as preparing good citizens, making students computer literate, getting back to the basics, doing a better job of teaching reading, and questioning the value of the current math instruction. Someone said, "I'd like to see our test scores improve. Wonderland district beats us every year, and I'm tired of it."

Finally a man who had been listening quietly said, "What is the pur-

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pose of education, anyway?" Silence reigned. The meeting ended with Jim asking for volunteers to serve on a committee, along with teachers, to address the concerns that had been raised. A few of the more vocal participants volunteered, as well as the man who had asked the final question.

DEMANDS ON THE SYSTEM

More demands are placed on the educational system in America than ever before. Not only are expectations higher, but schools are receiving specific directions from those outside the educational establishment on how to meet those expectations. For example, several state legislatures have enacted bills requiring public schools to teach phonics in their reading programs. The "back-to-basics" movement gained strength several years ago and continues to be influential in shaping curricula, though the term is used less than in the past. The vocal presence of the religious right in shaping this movement has given the back-to-basics movement the status of being unquestionable. In effect, it has become an unstated assumption in curriculum construction (McNeil 2000).

Standardized testing has further institutionalized the basics as the inviolable principle in deciding what to teach and how to teach it. When teachers' pay and continued employment are dependent on how students perform on standardized tests, teachers will teach in the way they think is most likely to produce satisfactory scores. Teachers most often see memorization and drill on the basics as the most effective way to teach. As a result, the function of the educational system changes from providing students with a well-rounded education to preparing them to pass the all-important test. In effect, what were intended to be minimum standards rapidly become maximum standards (Kohn 2001).

TWO MEANINGS OF 'EDUCATION'

Clearly, the basics are important in the education of any individual. A person who is schooled only to pass the test, however, is ill prepared to cope with today's rapidly changing world. Something more is needed to make the student successful in today's world. Some perspective on this issue can be gained from looking at the word "education."

Craft (1984) noted that there are two different Latin roots of the English word "education." They are *educare*, which means to train or to mold, and *educere*, meaning to lead out. While the two meanings are quite different, they are both represented in our word "education." Thus, there is an etymological basis for many of the vociferous debates about education today. The opposing sides often use the same word to denote two very different concepts. One side uses education to mean the preservation and passing down of knowledge and the shaping of youths in the image of their parents. The other side sees education as preparing a new generation for the changes that are to come—readying them to create solutions to problems yet unknown. One calls for rote memorization and becoming good workers. The other requires questioning, thinking, and creating. To further complicate matters, some groups expect schooling to fulfill both functions, but allow only those activities promoting educare to be used.

THE NEED FOR BALANCE

Bass (1997) maintained that the tension between the advocates of the two sides maintains a balance that results in appropriate levels of educare and educere. As he noted, however, this constant struggle results in an ineffective system that consumes many available resources.

If the extremes of the two positions could be avoided, many of the shifts in curricula, with their accompanying purchases

of new materials, would be unnecessary. Time and money for professional development could be devoted to improving and extending teachers' skills and understandings of a variety of instructional techniques instead of learning the idiosyncrasies of new curricula. Hilliard noted that effective implementation is the single most important factor in the success of instruction (Mabie 2000). Teachers could be involved in activities leading them to become more effective at implementing instruction, rather than starting over with a new approach and a new curriculum every few years. Thus, much more could be accomplished using less time and money.

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This change would not be easy to effect, however. Henry (1963) argued that education is primarily a conservative enterprise. Its primary purpose, he maintained, is to perpetuate the culture. Thus, educare was the root Henry thought of when he said "education." Clearly, this has been the case throughout most of human history. Any society with few outside pressures could focus on being sure that each generation learned what previous generations had learned through experience. When challenges—such as changes in climate, a neighboring society with new weaponry, or a brilliant tactician—presented themselves, however, the old tried-and-true approaches often proved to be inadequate. Thus, some cultures have disappeared and countless societies have fallen to outside forces with superior armies. Societies that survived threats such as these usually did so because someone was creative enough to come up with a new solution to the new problem (Bass 1997).

CHANCE IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE

Leaving the solution of these problems to chance may have been acceptable when major threats occurred only every few generations, but such a position is untenable today. There are at least two reasons why the leave-it-to-chance approach will not work now.

Things happen too fast. First, and most obvious, everything happens faster now, and everyone knows what's happening. While a flaw in a society's defense or in its economic structure could have gone unnoticed in the past, these things are quickly discovered and flashed around the world now.

We depend on formal education. The second reason is our dependence on formal education, or schooling. Education always has taken place, but schools are a relatively new method of providing it. Children in primitive societies received education by participating in adult activities. Not only did they see the tried and true practiced daily, but they also saw adults' attempts to solve problems in new ways. They actually got a dose of educere to go with their educare. When schools were invented, most children did not attend. Those who did attend typically did not do so for extended periods. Most children continued to work side by side with their parents or other adults when they were not in school.

Even the advent of compulsory attendance and child labor laws did not change this scenario immediately. Those students who were successful often stayed in school until economics forced them out or lured them out. Others faded

from view as their interest level or academic achievement proved to be limiting factors.

EDUCERE IS IN SHORT SUPPLY

In the United States and most other western countries over the last 150 years, school has been thought of as a system to prepare well-behaved citizens and good workers (Parsons 1985). Neither of these functions requires much educere. Students who demonstrated a significant capacity for creativity were viewed with alarm, because they could not be counted on to follow orders. Those who questioned the wisdom of the ages and suggested alternatives to the tried and true were dealt with harshly, and they too eventually faded from the educational scene. History is littered with creative geniuses who were less than exemplary students but went on to make significant contributions to society. Even one of the latest transforming forces—computer technology—is not immune to this phenomenon. Bill Gates, the world's wealthiest man, is a college dropout; and he is only one of many in the field with less than stellar academic achievements.

As schooling has become more universal and longer in duration, the relative shortage of educere has become more important in our society. When students spend more of their time in institutions that don't teach in educere-friendly ways, and even condemn initiative and creativity, they have less opportunity elsewhere to learn to question and create. Correcting this problem is not a simple undertaking. A culture has been established that is remarkably resistant to change. When new teachers or administrators enter this culture, they are pressured from every side to conform to the cultural norm. If the culture cannot change them, it attempts to drive them out. Generally, it is successful in one or the other of these endeavors.

BALANCE IS ESSENTIAL

Clearly, the preceding scenario does not exist in all schools today. It does, however, accurately represent what takes place in many schools. In many others, there is constant movement along the continuum between educare and educere. It is this vacillation between the two that consumes so many resources. The result is much time, money, and effort put into education, producing little net result.

In the overall scheme of things, educare and educere are of equal importance. Education that ignores educare dooms its students to starting over each generation. Omitting educere produces citizens who are incapable of solving new problems. Thus, any system of education that supplies its students with only one of these has failed miserably.

> *The group had been discussing, arguing, and rehashing the issues raised at that first meeting. Little progress had been made toward reaching agreement. Several plans had been presented by one faction or another, but all had been quickly rejected by a majority of the group. Then one day, at the beginning of a meeting before the ever-increasing acrimony had time to take over, the quiet man spoke. "We have all been making legitimate points," he said. "But we have been too narrow in our approaches. We must come up with a plan that addresses all of our needs. Before you condemn my suggestion as being a dead skunk in the middle of the road, consider this. We do not know what the future holds. We don't want to reject the lessons of the past, but we must remain flexible and able to respond to new challenges in the future. To do both of these things, we must have a balanced program that addresses all sides." Again silence reigned as the*

wisdom of the man's words became apparent. Finally, one of the most vocal critics of almost every idea said, "Where do we start?"

HOW IS BALANCE ACHIEVED?

How, then, are we to implement a system of instruction that will ensure a balance between educare and educere? What changes in the thinking of educators need to occur to achieve a balanced approach to education? What changes in the organizational structure must occur to achieve this balanced approach? The following is an attempt to address some of these issues.

Developing personal mastery and challenging mental models that impact the aim of balance in education are critical to changing thinking and actions.

According to Deming (1994), parameters and expectations for educators as members of an organization are established by the aims and structure of the organization itself. Thus, educators tend to assume roles shaped by the organizational design in place. To be effective, all educators must first understand the aims of the organization before they can organize their work.

Organizational Design Determines Results

Though organizational designs have typically evolved through unconscious choices by educators, these designs nevertheless determine the behavior of the educators who work in them (Green 1999). People, no matter how different they are, when placed in the same organizational design, tend to produce similar results (Senge 1990). Structure or design in this sense refers to the interrelationships among educators and how they make decisions—in other words, how they shape their professional aims. Because of this relationship between structure and action, the question concerning organizational design must be addressed first if the change to a balanced approach to education is to be achieved.

Public Demand for Balance

The design itself is determined by public influence on political and educational leaders with the authority to shape and influence the organization in terms of human, financial, and fiscal resources as well as in terms of its aims. According to a Rose and Gallup (2000) survey, the general public in the United States supported a design that provides a balanced education. A *balanced education* was defined (Rose and Gallup 2000) as one in which basics are only one factor in the total learning experience. Further, in examining the ranking of specific educational aims, the public ranked preparation of responsible citizens and preparation for economic self-sufficiency first and second, respectively (Rose and Gallup 2000). It follows that a balanced education must be designed to contribute to what a well-educated child should know and be able to do.

From the survey data, it appeared that the public as a whole expected a balance in educational aims. The teaching and testing of basic subjects has become a political response to accountability demands by the public. Perhaps the response has been a necessary one, but not a sufficient one to

achieve the desired balance. McNeil (2000, 733) concluded that accountability "rules out the possibility of discussing student learning in terms of cognitive and intellectual development, in terms of growth, in terms of social awareness and social conscience, in terms of social and emotional development," thereby reducing the "whole child" to a "stick figure." In consideration of policy changes impacting educational aims (Rose and Gallup 2000, 51), the following implication was noted: "The public expects students to receive a balanced education. Policy makers should anticipate and prepare for the negative public reaction that is almost sure to come if school improvement efforts focus on the basics to the exclusion of other subjects."

Let's assume that the reform now being shaped by political platform is responsive to these policy implications. In defining the structural criteria needed for role clarification, we must define the official curricula to be delivered, the educator's new role, and a model of communication for stakeholders in the organization.

Curricula Must Provide Balance

In the area of curricula, teachers have a firm understanding of the curricula they teach to children. They have a much less firm grasp of what is stated in the official curricula. Therefore, the first structural criterion is the definition, development, and implementation of official written curricula, developed collaboratively by all stakeholders and taught by all teachers. A systemic approach in addressing the key educational aims identified by Rose and Gallup will determine balance in curricula.

Vision Is the Key to Performance

Covey (2000) maintained that commitment and creative excitement are the human responses within the organization when there is improved agreement on the aims of the organization. Educators will get on the same page when a principle-based value system in which the principles remain constant is established. The challenge of the organization is to provide leadership around principles with a common aim. If not, Covey (2000) concluded, "you will have chaos." Blanchard (2000) noted that establishing the vision of the organization is a key to managing performance. Also known as "performance planning," Blanchard (2000) referred to this as "giving people the final exam ahead of time." Wheatley (1999, 107) added that once a clear aim is established, people in the organization "will be able to figure out what and how to do their work."

Redirecting Roles

A second structural criterion requires a key shift in roles for all stakeholders. The dilemma for policy makers is that though they may have a clear idea of roles needed to implement a balanced curriculum, stakeholders generally are reluctant to take on roles that are forced on them without their input. This shift requires a modeling approach in role definition and in what changes are required in thinking by educators.

Specifically, leaders must facilitate the voluntary redefinition of roles. Educators have mental models of how they are to perform in their roles. Leaders need to understand the existing models teachers have and facilitate the process by which stakeholders come to new agreements on their roles in the new design of the organization. Blanchard (2000) noted that leaders should be coaches on a daily basis in this effort, providing formative feedback and redirecting efforts based on the established aims of the organization.

Teachers as Facilitators

To achieve balance, the teacher's role becomes one of a facilitator of learning with

students, parents, and other colleagues. Learning becomes balanced if parents are involved as teachers—knowledgeable about the curricula and prepared to work with their children.

A change in thinking on the part of educators comes through ownership of the process for role redesign. Stakeholders must be involved actively in shaping their roles if they are to be committed to the changes envisioned. Teachers must be allowed to define their professional aims. A change in thinking will occur as roles are shaped.

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Learning Organizations

Senge (1990) cited the importance of certain components in contributing to a learning organization—one that harnesses energy from the commitment and capacity of individual members to learn. One component is personal mastery in which educators must clarify their own aims and focus their energies accordingly. A second component that impacts a change in thinking is the concept of mental models (Senge 1990). In terms of the educational organization, these are assumptions and generalizations formed by educators to help them simplify the decision-making process and take action based on current conditions. Developing personal mastery and challenging mental models that impact the aim of balance in education are critical to changing thinking and actions.

Wheatley (1999, 107) concluded the following about the behaviors of members of an organization:

> *Their individual decisions will not look the same, and there is no need for conformity in their behavior. But over time, as their individual solutions are fed back into the system and as learning is shared, we can expect that an orderly pattern will emerge.*
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> *Educational leaders must take action to support education as a learning organization. Most importantly leaders must provide the conditions favorable for a learning organization. These include facilitating development of personal mastery in schools and providing information to challenge existing mental models of educators. Specific actions include involving stakeholders in decision making, encouraging creative actions in the classroom, and supporting educators with sufficient resources.*

Balance Requires Dialogue

Communication and understanding of what students are learning also contribute to balance. For example, there must be a change in thinking from importance of grades to importance of learning. A grade is devoid of balance and, by itself, connotes no evidence of achieving balance. Only dialogue about learning will achieve balance. To achieve understanding, it is necessary to focus on what is learned and not learned rather than on a grade representing the learning. Focused thinking comes as a result of examining personal mastery and existing mental models.

Balance in educational aims is a valid focus for educators. To achieve balance, we must start by changing the organizational

structure or the ways in which decisions are made. Utilizing stakeholder perceptions in determining aims, establishing a shared vision of education, and facilitating a change in educators' roles are initial steps. To accomplish a change in thinking, educators must examine their own personal mastery and mental models of education.

Jim Rock was excited to receive the interim report of the committee. He had followed its progress closely over the entire time it had been in existence. He had often dropped by as the meetings were about to get underway, but always left before the work began because he did not want to be seen as trying to influence the work of the committee. He was aware of the initial dissention, but realized that once a common purpose had been agreed on, the committee had worked diligently gathering informabe revolutionary. Can we pull it off?"

tion and hammering out an approach to achieving the changes they sought.

As he read the report, Jim thought, "There's nothing really new here, but they have put together some interesting ideas in a way that is unlike anything else in the literature." Most importantly, the committee had realized that the changes they desired could not be achieved by administrative decree. They could come only as a result of a change in the thinking of many educators and their constituents. But for thinking to change, organizational structures must change first. "It is almost as if you have to break the old mold to keep the new ideas from being forced into the same old shapes," Jim mused. "This means much work for all of us as we figure out how to restructure to implement these changes. The individual ideas may not be new, but implementing them as a whole will

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