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Foreword by John I. Goodlad

Stories of the Eight-Year Study

Reexamining Secondary Education in America

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In Recognition of the Work of the Curriculum Associates
of the Commission on the Relation of School and College

Harold B. Alberty, Paul B. Diederich,
H. H. Giles, S. P. McCutchen, and A. N. Zechiel

"And perhaps the greatest stimulus of all was the sense of belonging to an adventurous company which placed a premium upon the contributions of each of its individual members."

H. H. Giles, S. P. McCutchen, and A. N. Zechiel,
Exploring the Curriculum
(New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942): 308.

I would like to place on the record the fact that my teaching [at the George School, a participating site in the Eight-Year Study] was one of the finest experiences I've had in my life. I saw the very best of contemporary education conducted in a no-nonsense way. . . . I have always viewed with mild amusement the loose charges that Progressive Education was a failure or that it promoted laxity in either study or morals. My classes, if I say so myself, were among the best being taught in America at that time, all with a far above average model of deportment and learning. And through the years my former students constantly write to tell me that they evaluated those years in the same way. A failure? One of the greatest successes I've known.

As to the effect on me: it made me a liberal, a producer, a student of my world, a man with a point of view and the courage to exemplify it. I wish all students could have the experiences mine did. I wish all teachers could know the joy I found in teaching under such conditions.[1]

James A. Michener, 1986

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Foreword: A Tale of Lost Horizons

John I. Goodlad

From time to time in recent years, various educators have raised the question of whether an initiative comparable to the Eight-Year Study should be undertaken. Since nearly all those introducing the query either were not yet born or were children during the years of planning and conducting the study (the early 1930s into the 1940s) and its reports received little attention, one wonders what they have in mind.

Our memories even of studies gaining much initial attention tend to be short. World War II was just beginning for the United States as the Eight-Year Study was ending. The war overwhelmed almost all else. For example, the paper shortage forced limited editions of the Commission on the Relation of School and College's 1941, 1942, and 1943 major reports. There was no surge of interest when the war ended in 1945. Those of us studying in the University of Chicago's graduate department of education in the concluding years of the 1940s were looking ahead. We failed to take advantage of the rich educational experiences brought by Ralph Tyler and his clutch of colleagues who had just come from the Study's fountainhead at Ohio State University. The Study was marginalized in the history of secondary schooling in the United States. The good news is that this book, the most intimate and comprehensive history of the Eight-Year Study of which I know, comes to us at what well may be the most opportune time in decades.

It is ironic but not surprising that many of those educators suggesting replication of the Study envision a carefully controlled comparison of the academic achievement of students in two sharply differentiated samples of secondary schools. This is the image most commonly represented in references to the Eight-Year Study. It fits today's dominant ideology of what is worth measuring in judging the quality of our schools. But to advance this orientation as the conceptual core is to both distort

and minimize the intent, conduct, and comprehensiveness of this incredibly complex, bold, and innovative enterprise.

To launch something intended to be a near-repetition of the Eight-Year Study without first reading and reflecting on what Craig Kridel and Robert Bullough have written about it would verge on irresponsibility. What were the credentials of those involved? How were they able to schedule the time they put into the work? How were so many of the most respected educators of the time able to hammer out some major common agreements, even as they differed, often profoundly, in their educational beliefs and perspectives? Was there a chief worrier for the whole? How were the major commissions and committees constituted? What did members talk about, how did they connect with the working parties that were most practice oriented, and how did they move from dialogue to decisions, action, and appraisal of their work? How was the whole financed, and at what level of expenditure? What would be required to bring off a comparable study today? Kridel and Bullough do not answer all of these questions, but they make clear that such questions ran through and were addressed in the work—indeed, had to be addressed.

No, we do not need another Eight-Year Study. We would find out pretty much what was found then. Policy makers would not pay much, if any, attention to it. And educational researchers and critics would have a great time arguing over methodology and implications. However, what we should do is examine the whole as a case study, learn from it, and use our learnings to help guide the long-overdue redesign of public education. Reading this book is a promising place to begin.

Even though I have read a good deal and written a little about the Progressive Education Association's project, *Stories of the Eight-Year Study* served as a primer on the subject, ridding me of myths, misunderstandings, and false premises. I was startled to find out that the study stretched over a dozen years, not eight. The title came from the fact that it was directed to the nature and relationships of four years of high school followed by four years of college. To think of the whole as largely a quantitative evaluation and comparison of two differing samples of schools is a gross distortion. I was barely into the introduction when I began to realize that I was in for a provocative, humbling intellectual journey.

For me, the most significant learning about this near-motheaten landmark educational enterprise is its contemporary relevance. Usually when my errant thoughts lead to something appearing to be novel, I soon find myself talking to colleagues thinking along the same or parallel lines. Perhaps this is because there is a surprisingly small number of good *new* ideas worth talking about. Some of these gain enthusiastic attention for a few years, are implemented in some form in a few

educational settings, fade away, and then reappear in new dress a couple of decades later before disappearing once more. Meanwhile, the same old ideas and structures of schooling are burnished in still another era of "school reform," crowding out whatever innovative pea patches have managed to gain a brief footing.

The members of the several commissions and committees constituting the infrastructure of the Eight-Year Study managed to come up with an interconnected array of good ideas regarding nearly all of the key elements of schooling. Although what they proposed was progressive, not regressive, they largely left the rhetoric of progressive education to the Progressive Education Association. Fresh ideas were transformed into organizational, curricular, and instructional specifics and introduced into selected schools such as the laboratory school of Ohio State University. And, of course, many were picked up by the member experimental schools of the Eight-Year Study. There was, of course, the slippage from concept to reality with which all of us who have been engaged in the processes are only too familiar.

What comes through to me from *Stories of the Eight-Year Study* is that most of those involved believed in both the necessity and the *possibility* of profoundly changing our schools along lines derived from intensive inquiry. They were not seeking a litany of "what works" but scenarios of what should and could be. The thirty (more or less) schools of the Eight-Year Study served as the "proofing ground." This was no linear process of progressing from wheat to bread. Leave that to the reformers, who so often take failure as a challenge to try a misguided model one more time. The creative minds of the Eight-Year Study pioneered in the workshop ways of learning for individuals, particularly teachers, while opening up new horizons for institutional renewal.

Why do I view the educational implications of what Kridel and Bullough describe as contemporary? And why do I see what they have written as coming to us at an opportune time? The answer to the first question derives from the degree to which the roots of contemporary "good new ideas" can be so readily discovered in the concepts and principles seen decades ago as sound by leading educators of the time. The answer to the second derives from the fact that the last half century of tinkering is now so clearly exposed as a failure that the need for the dawning of a new day is even more obvious.

There was, of course, opposition to and disagreement with the new dawning envisioned by many of those caught up in the ongoing work of the Eight-Year Study. I did not, however, find in *Stories of the Eight-Year Study* any mention of federal mandates that might have gotten seriously in the way. The concepts of local control and state responsibility for schooling were not threatened as they are today. However, dissatisfaction

with federal intervention and its consequences is growing, even among policy makers and opinion leaders.

The time has come to align the course of school renewal with the public purpose of education in our social and political democracy and what we already know about both the change process and the powerful ideas that have surfaced again and again only to be pushed aside by the sheer weight of what exists. The center of attention must be, of course, the one currently most ignored—the school and its students, teachers, and parents. All else is supportive. The driving force must be educators. Who else are to be so charged and held accountable?

The urgency of the necessary alignment must not override the exercise of wisdom. The first steps taken are the most critical. We might well begin with a careful reading of the pages that follow. Surely that reading will dissuade us from delaying action until we have before us the results of an Eight-Year or Flexner-type study, valuable though these most assuredly were and still are. And let us be spared still another education summit or commissioned report.

Acknowledgments

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To Paul R. Klohr, professor emeritus, Ohio State University and former director of the Ohio State University School, who first introduced us to the Eight-Year Study and who upheld the spirit of the project throughout a long and productive career.

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To Louise DeSalvo, professor of English at Hunter College, whose biographical research and essays have shown that educational researchers and historians have much to learn from the area of creative nonfiction writing.

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Throughout our research, we enjoyed meeting Eight-Year Study participants and their family members. Some are no longer with us and we hope this volume serves as a testimony to the work of Paul Diederich, Wilfred Eberhart, Mary Frank Perry, Robert Gilchrist, Lou LaBrant, Ross Mooney, Chandos Reid, Louise Rosenblatt, Harold Taylor, V. T. and Florence Thayer, I. Keith Tyler, Ralph W. Tyler, William Van Til, and Margaret Willis. We appreciate the kindness and assistance of Helen van Dongen Durant, Heather Jackson, H. S. Thayer, Beatrice Van Til, Nancy G. Zachry, and Stephen Zachry. Our treatment of the Eight-Year Study is merely a beginning which, we hope, will offer new perspectives for research by others. Much more needs to be examined about the Aikin, Thayer, and Keliher Commissions and the Eight-Year Study progressives, that too-long neglected group of educators whose effort to better understand the place of secondary education in a democracy remains both challenging and inspiring.

Introduction

> There is currently afoot a simple story of the rise of progressive education, one that has fed mercilessly on the fears of anxious parents and the hostilities of suspicious conservatives. In it John Dewey . . . awakes one night with a new vision of the American school: the vision is progressive education. Over the years . . . he is able to foist the vision on an unsuspecting American people. The story usually ends with a plea for the exorcising of this devil from our midst and a return to the ways of the fathers. This kind of morality play has always been an influential brand of American political rhetoric, used by reformers and conservatives alike. But it should never be confused with history! (Lawrence Cremin, 1961)[1]

This simple tale of progressive education has not changed much since the publication of Cremin's *The Transformation of the Schools* over forty-five years ago. Dewey remains the constant in the morality play—blessed or damned—and accolades or darts are thrown depending upon one's ideology and understanding of progressivism. Much confusion continues today as educators praise and curse progressive education, embracing certain tenets as justification for their work and ignoring other practices as reasons for supposed failings of the public schools. From this commotion has arisen renewed interest in the Eight-Year Study, a project sponsored by the Commission on the Relation of School and College of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) during the 1930s and early 1940s and staged in twenty-nine secondary school sites throughout the United States. After years of neglect, references both complimentary and critical are appearing in the contemporary literature. No curriculum textbook writer now fails to mention Wilford Aikin, director of the Commission, in a typically brief historical overview of curriculum development, and John Lounsbury and Gordon F. Vars have popularized the Eight-Year Study to generations of members of the

National Middle School Association. David Tyack and Larry Cuban present the project as a case study in *Tinkering Toward Utopia* to show schools' resistance to change in what they call the "grammar of schooling." The Commission on the Relation of School and College occupies a prominent place in Ellen Lagemann's *An Elusive Science* as an important moment in the history of educational research, setting the stage for the crucial conceptual move from measurement to evaluation. Looking for examples of successful reform involving teachers, Linda Darling-Hammond finds much to praise in the Eight-Year Study as she notes the importance of staff working together and forging shared goals. The project was featured in *Education Week*'s twentieth century historical overview of schooling in America, *Lessons of a Century*, and criticized by Diane Ravitch in *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*. Alfie Kohn, writing for the general public in *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, describes the Study as "the best-kept educational secret of the twentieth century," while Patricia Graham, in her recent history of American education, *Schooling America*, dismisses the project as culturally blind.[2]

Why is the Eight-Year Study drawing increased attention now?[3] Does its rediscovery reflect a rekindled appreciation of "democracy as a way of life," a phrase common in the tenets of 1930s progressive education? Or, perhaps, with today's emphasis on high-stakes testing and its stranglehold over experimentation, educators are beginning to question the innate weaknesses of standardization. Regardless of the reasons, we hope that examining the Eight-Year Study might spark a reconsideration of secondary education's purposes and practices. From the outset of our research, we have been struck by the boldness and ambition of its leaders, and we can only begin to wonder what might have happened if educators had drawn upon the insights of this project. Both beguiling and disconcerting, this grand experiment continues to capture our imagination. Not only does the work of the Commission on the Relation of School and College invite a reexamination of taken-for-granted public school practices, the research supports a hopeful and an optimistic view of the ability of teachers to improve schools. After years of examining PEA materials, we now view our scholarship as *an act of reclamation*: an opportunity to recall what can be accomplished when educators, students, and parents come together to explore values and to develop practices that represent and reflect the desire to realize our national democratic commitments.

Cremin notes that "Progressivism implied the radical faith that culture could be democratized without being vulgarized."[4] Confidence in a democratic society; trust in thoughtful, open, and civil discussions about values and ways of living; belief that this trust in troubled times

is justifiable—these are more crucial today than ever before. Presently, when Americans have lost faith in public education and when democracy is seen merely as the right to choose, we turn to the Commission on the Relation of School and College to recall how educators sought to build a way of life based upon a rich and generous social vision, quite unlike many views prevalent today. The Eight-Year Study reminds us that holding "an essential faith" in school experimentation and in the ability of teachers is not misplaced but vital for school improvement and renewal. True, the policies and practices championed by PEA leaders often seem inappropriate for current times, yet fundamental questions have a way of enduring from generation to generation. Contexts and people change, but the issues persist.

A Brief Description of the Eight-Year Study

The Eight-Year Study, also known as the Thirty School Study, arose from two rather innocuous goals: "To establish a relationship between school and college that would permit and encourage reconstruction in the secondary school" and "To find, through exploration and experimentation, how the high school in the United States can serve youth more effectively."[5] The popular impression, however, that the project was staged from 1933 to 1941 in thirty high schools across the United States is somewhat misleading. Composed of three closely related PEA commissions, the Study actually evolved over a twelve-year period, from 1930 to 1942, and ended only because additional funding was not forthcoming. In fact, the project had no completion date. The general use of the term "eight-year" refers less to the duration of the program and more to the general impression that eight years of a student's academic experiences—high school through college—would be examined. No students, however, were followed for a full eight-year period. And in terms of "thirty schools," only twenty-nine school sites ultimately participated in varying degrees of commitment. Initially, twenty-seven secondary schools volunteered—three sites were added between 1933 and 1934 and one withdrew in 1936—and 284 colleges and universities agreed to cooperate with the proposed college admissions process. Yet among these twenty-nine sites, approximately forty-two high schools and twenty-six junior high programs were directly involved with the experimentation of the Aikin Commission. When all schools that had participated in the activities of the three commissions are tallied, the number more than doubles and touches the educational lives of thousands and thousands of students.

At a 1930 PEA board meeting, the Committee on the Relation of School and College (the Aikin Commission, named for its chair, Wilford

M. Aikin) was proposed. Formal commission status was conferred in 1932, and a five-volume report, aptly titled *Adventure in American Education*, was released in 1942–1943 as the commission officially disbanded.[6] The Aikin Commission brought together educators from schools and universities to examine the relationship between secondary and postsecondary education and to experiment with new school programs in thirty different settings throughout the United States. As efforts proceeded, PEA leaders realized that new types of curricular materials were needed, and in 1932 the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum (the Thayer Commission, chaired by V. T. Thayer) was formed. The Thayer Commission completed its research in 1940, and eleven commission reports were published addressing particular aspects of adolescent research and articulating guidelines for curriculum and instruction in specific subject areas. The Commission on Human Relations (the Keliher Commission, chaired by Alice Keliher), appointed in 1935 and continuing until 1942, extended the Eight-Year Study's research in adolescent development and the social sciences and released six final reports. (See Annotated Bibliography.)

While few contemporary accounts include the Thayer and Keliher Commissions as part of the Eight-Year Study, our review of committee reports revealed overlapping purposes and memberships to the degree that, at times, we were unable to determine which meetings represented which commissions. Many of the actual participants felt the same confusion. One school director described summer workshops where staff members from all three commissions were present. "When Caroline Zachry and Eugene Smith spoke, we didn't really know or care if they were representing the Aikin or Thayer groups. It didn't matter. We were all together and we were trying to sort out how to better our schools. When our teachers came together to work on materials, Aikin workshop activities turned into reports for the Thayer Commission."[7] Alice Keliher deliberately selected members for her commission who served on the Thayer Commission, and activities of Aikin Commission committees were directly linked to those of the Thayer Commission. Aikin Commission staff were also involved in the evaluation of Keliher Commission programs.[8] Clearly the Thayer and Keliher Commissions grew out of the Commission on the Relation of School and College in response to the needs of the participating faculties of the thirty schools. And in the 1938 PEA publication, *Progressive Education Advances: Report on a Program to Educate American Youth for Present-Day Living*, this single program devoted one chapter to each of the three commissions.[9] To approach the Eight-Year Study without recognizing the intertwined purposes of the Aikin, Thayer, and Keliher Commissions overlooks the breadth and vision of this effort to redesign secondary education.

During the 1930s, *exploration* and *experimentation* were hallmarks of progressive schools as teachers sought ways to continuously improve the educational experience for all youth. Commission leaders realized that to experiment meant breaking the hold of the Carnegie unit on secondary school curricula. If programs of study could be developed embracing the tenets of progressive education without sacrificing the academic preparation of the college-bound student and others, then the PEA would have greatly advanced its case for experimentation. This goal came to represent the underlying mission of the project: to design experimental programs "without compromising any student's chances of a successful college education."[10] Select high schools would experiment with curriculum, and as later decided, hundreds of their graduates would be followed into college; yet the overall effort to better articulate instruction between colleges and high schools was initiated to help *all youth* and not just those moving on to postsecondary education. As curriculum design, teacher development, student assessment, and educational aims were reexamined and reconceived, courses of study were changed without losing their emphasis upon subject matter. Contrary to a common misperception, the Eight-Year Study never excused the participating high schools from standardized testing or from various measures of accountability. Numerous tests were administered to students, and data were gathered on the effects of implemented programs. Increased freedom was granted to experiment with the basic structure of schooling, but teachers and administrators were still held responsible for the quality of their academic programs. A focus on course content was never lost.

Accounts of the Eight-Year Study characteristically describe the college success of a matched set of students, one group having attended the participating progressive high schools and another group attending traditional programs. Known as the College Follow-up Study, this research component is often mistaken for the entire project. As we will discuss, the Thirty School Study involved much more than merely comparing students' college achievements. More importantly, the Aikin, Thayer, and Keliher Commissions encouraged in many of the schools dramatic departures from common curricular practices. The commissions constructed a complex conception of adolescent needs and of core curriculum, explored new roles and responsibilities for teachers, developed creative types of student assessment and innovative teaching materials, and clarified the meaning of democracy for themselves and for others. The lasting testimony of the Eight-Year Study demonstrates that educators can experiment with secondary school practices in ways that lead to greater curricular coherence, stronger democratic communities for teachers and students, and innovative programs that are

responsive to the needs of adolescents, regardless of their career and education choices. The Commission's experimental methods opened up numerous fresh possibilities for educating the young, including many avenues for college preparation. In essence, the project proved to be an experiment in support of experimentation rather than the mere comparison of a group of college-bound students.

The Perceived "Failure" of the Eight-Year Study

We must discuss one more dimension of the Study, a myth that has permitted the project to be unfairly dismissed by some critics. At issue is a conception of educational success and impact, a view of what educators should expect from school renewal and systemic reform. The Eight-Year Study is too often judged by the outcomes of the College Follow-up Study, which compared the college grade point averages of 1,475 students who had attended participating schools to the averages of 1,475 students who had attended an assortment of traditional high schools. The project is typically deemed unsuccessful based on these oft-cited results: "*slightly* higher total grade average" and "*somewhat* better job than the comparison group." Since the students' college grades were not notably superior, critics began to cite these results shortly after the publication of the final reports to suggest that progressive schools were no better than traditional high schools. We believe this conclusion is unwarranted.

The Follow-up Study was conceived well after the selection of the participating schools, and we are convinced that the Eight-Year Study was never regarded by its leaders as a scientific experiment to determine progressive or traditional schooling as the best preparation for college-bound students. Fitting together the activities of all three commissions supports our conclusion. In fact, this issue was addressed specifically at a 1939 PEA Board of Directors meeting: "The point was emphasized that the distinguishing factor was not one of 'progressive or non-progressive' but of freedom from a fixed pattern of preparation for college versus the traditional preparation."[11]

Other, more serious problems arise with this limited view of the Study. The participating schools identified themselves as "progressive" in many different ways, and these characterizations of progressivism varied considerably. Even the Aikin Commission staff realized that not all of the participating schools were innovative, and some offered strikingly traditional college preparatory programs. When planning the Study, Commission staff members sought participation from a loosely representative cross section of America's schools, including traditional college preparation to highly experimental programs and from conservative to radical schools.[12] The staff recognized that avoiding a dichotomous

sample offered a truer picture of what most secondary schools could initiate if college entrance requirements were lifted. Further, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the first funding agency of the project, insisted that rather conservative academic schools participate, urging the Directing Committee to include more private boys' academies.[13] While many of the participating schools would not necessarily be classified as "innovative," then or now, their graduates were expected to represent the success of progressive education as part of the experimental group in the Follow-up Study. A review of Appendix A, descriptions of the Aikin Commission schools, shows the great diversity among the sites and causes one to wonder how these 1,475 students could have ever been expected to carry the mantle of progressive education.

Further, teachers brought differing degrees of enthusiasm for curricular experimentation too. As late as 1938, schools were assessed by Commission staff as having initiated little real experimentation, and even Frederick Redefer, executive director of the PEA, noted that most of the curriculum revision had not begun until after 1936, when the Follow-up Study students had already been selected and were beginning their college years.[14] In essence, not only did many of the participating teachers fail to embrace the spirit of progressivism or engage in serious innovation, but amazingly the Follow-up Study that now commonly defines the Eight-Year Study included many of the "wrong students"—those who graduated before secondary school experimentation was fully underway. While the worth of the Eight-Year Study may be judged through a variety of criteria, success or failure of innovative curricular practices cannot be determined by the results of its own College Follow-up Study. A sounder basis comes from the typically overlooked "Study within the Study," a comparison of students from what were considered by the Aikin Commission's Evaluation staff as the six most experimental schools. In this sampling, the college success of 323 students was compared to traditional school matchees as well as to students from the other "progressive" schools; college achievements of those graduates from the six least experimental Aikin Commission high schools were also compiled. The graduates from the six most experimental schools substantially outperformed their peers in terms of academic averages and honors, intellectual traits, and personal and social responsibility.[15] While we do not dismiss the Follow-up Study, we consider its value questionable at best when compared to the results of the Study within the Study.

Charges of limited impact for the Eight-Year Study began shortly after the conclusion of World War II and were reaffirmed in an oftencited 1950 *Progressive Education* journal article in which Redefer summarized his dissertation.[16] In "The Eight-Year Study . . . After Eight Years,"

he reported that of the fifteen schools that responded to his survey only two maintained the "spirit" of the project. Redefer inferred that the Eight-Year Study had no influence on American education and also little enduring impact on its original participating schools. His data, however, are insufficient to support these conclusions. He admits that he was unable to gather information on eleven other schools. Having broken his research codes, we know that Redefer received information from only four of the eight more experimental schools involved in the project (as well as from three of the six least experimental schools). He also notes that ninteen of the twenty-six administrators he contacted were new to the schools since 1941; thus most of those judging the long-term influence of the project were not even present in the schools during the active work of the Study. Ralph Tyler took exception to Redefer's conclusions: "[He] did not realize that the Eight-Year Study was guided by principles of learning and not by a particular curriculum form [pattern]. So he reached the conclusion that the Eight-Year Study had no effect because the forms that were established in various places were not continued thereafter."[17] Nonetheless, many contemporary views of the Eight-Year Study are grounded in Redefer's dissertation research which, clearly, has taken on much more contemporary significance than even he would have expected.[18]

Impact, to Redefer, meant permanence—that programs would persist, relatively unchanged, across time—and proof of the Study's impact would have resulted in a massive transformation of secondary education. Given the vastness of the American school system, this would be overly ambitious for any single project, even one much larger than the Thirty School Study. Herbert Kliebard, when discussing the Eight-Year Study, affirmed, "It appears naïve to assume that the interest of public school people on one hand and academicians in colleges and universities on the other would give way in the face of results from a single experiment, however ambitious and far-reaching."[19]

Rather than speak of success or impact, we have chosen to examine the *significance* of the Eight-Year Study as one of the more important historical examples of educational experimentation. In spite of their organizational sameness, schools are dynamic yet fragile places with shifting faculties and ever-changing student bodies, as Redefer's study showed. School cultures can be destroyed easily and quickly–a principal retires, a teacher-leader is transferred. No specific educational changes endure forever. Knowing this, the Eight-Year Study leaders focused on people rather than on programmatic permanence, recognizing that the most direct and powerful way to improve education is through educating educators and then working to create organizational systems that support and sustain their continued development.

Problems of Representation

We have decided not to write a history of the Eight-Year Study per se but instead to tell some of its many stories. Taken together, these narratives constitute the basis of an argument about the nature of school change and educational reform. We are more interested in exploring the contemporary significance of the project which, of course, required that we work from an historical perspective. We have devoted years to acquisitions: sorting through library remainder tables, uncovering forgotten archival collections, and interviewing Eight-Year Study teachers, students, and Commission members. Yet we always return to the present, even as we have enjoyed exploring the past and delighted in the archival chase. In the process we have come to see the PEA not only as an historical organization, existing from 1919 to 1955, but as a vibrant association encompassing many dynamic and interconnected communities composed of remarkable individuals. The Eight-Year Study produced one such group within the PEA, a community that struggled with certain perennial problems of education. We discuss the Thirty School Study participants knowing full well that they lived within their sensibilities and not ours. At times we wish they had addressed more directly such issues as class, race, and gender. On other occasions we regret the important topics left unattended and those crucial decisions that in hindsight proved unfortunate. We ask readers not to mistake our admiration for uncritical acceptance of their policies and practices. Perhaps we are less prone to judge because we recognize that, with its strengths and limitations, the Eight-Year Study was both a work in progress and an uncompleted project. We know that Commission leaders wished to examine the careers of non-college graduates from the participating schools, and teachers and staff initiated efforts to assist southern African American secondary school leaders to examine their high school programs. Loss of funding prevented these and many other activities from being completed.[20]

Other descriptions severely distort the project. Some accounts refer to Ralph Tyler rather than Aikin as director of the Commission on the Relation of School and College, thereby misrepresenting the orientation of the project from school reorganization to evaluation. In other depictions, the goals of the project have been inaccurately described. Claims were made that the Study sought to prove college admission requirements unnecessary (a point never asserted by the Aikin Commission) or to eliminate college admissions testing (a practice never disputed by the commissions). The Study has been accused of attempting to disseminate progressive education practices to the nation's high schools; however, no specific "progressive" practices were ever endorsed.

Further, the participating schools are at times portrayed as child-centered and ungraded, when in fact one of the most important outcomes of the Study was the development and dissemination of content-oriented secondary school tests.[21] Many questionable assertions emerge as one begins examining how the Eight-Year Study has been characterized in both the professional and popular literature.

We are well aware that our image of progressive education contradicts that of others who have depicted "the movement," in part because we focus on a specific group of Eight-Year Study progressives who worked within as well as outside of the PEA. Further, our interpretations are atypical: recognizing the three PEA Commissions that constituted the Study, for example, or describing the project without including comprehensive accounts of each participating site. Some schools will not be discussed, although Appendix A provides brief descriptions of all. A hallmark of the Eight-Year Study, however, was that there was little "common" practice. All participating school faculties were encouraged to innovate and experiment in different ways. A research program involving hundreds of schools and colleges, hundreds of teachers, and thousands of students cannot be portrayed adequately without such selectivity. Some may feel we have overlooked questionable or misguided methods or ignored unique educational programs from among the participating sites in order to sustain our views. We realize that such criticism inevitably flows from the act of interpretation.

We draw primarily from those public schools selected for the "Study within the Study" as representing the most significant departure from traditional practices and reflecting basic tenets of a very contested and non-uniform progressive education ideology. As others have studied progressive education, we too feature our favorite educators, schools, and universities. Cremin and Patricia Graham refer regularly to John Dewey, Harold Rugg, Teachers College, and progressive schools in New York City. Larry Cuban displays affection for East Denver High School, David Tyack describes Ellwood Cubberley and Stanford University, and Arthur Zilversmit turns primarily to the Winnetka public schools.[22] We focus frequently on the Ohio State University (OSU) School, a public laboratory school particularly representative of the ambitions of the Eight-Year Study, founded at the beginning of the project and starting at its inception to experiment with secondary education. The OSU School represented a literal response to the fundamental question: "What would the secondary school look like if one could start afresh?" There are many other replies, of course, as each school site addressed reorganization in ways that were most appropriate for its specific setting. The first-volume report of the Aikin Commission was titled *The Story of the Eight-Year Study*; in contrast, we offer some of the *many* stories of the project.

Portraying the Thirty School Study has become even more difficult with the resurgence of interest in progressive education and the many definitions and impressions of that term. Often we have found ourselves unraveling good-natured summaries of the PEA and wrestling with definitions of progressivism that are too grand or too narrow. In many respects, this semantic struggle has been ongoing for years. Cremin maintained that "the [progressive education] movement was marked from the very beginning by a pluralistic, frequently contradictory, character."[23] Nonetheless, we feel we must use the descriptor and at times situate the project within the shifting boundaries of this slippery term. For some readers this admission and caveat are meaningless, while for others the use of "progressive education" alone constitutes a red flag.

This brings us to a fundamental question: For whom have we written this book? Most certainly we have not written for the traditional historian who leads a life of facts and footnotes and seeks to document events for the record. Instead, we speak to those educators who may have never come across the Eight-Year Study during their undergraduate and graduate work or who view the project as nothing more than an ill-fated experiment. We are not suggesting that old practices should be restaged but, instead, we are examining experimentation as a process for educational change. We hope our portrayal fosters a curiosity about what could have been, what now could be, and how ideas and practices from the past may help us reexamine secondary education in America today.

Believing in School Experimentation

> Efforts to restructure [education] in general like the *Nation at Risk* are absurd. You can't change a whole system that way; you have to begin with problems . . . identify particular problems and actually work with them as was the case with the Eight-Year Study. (Ralph W. Tyler, 1993)[24]

Educational institutions are difficult to change, and as John Goodlad reminds us, "School renewal is context specific." What may "work" in one locale proves disastrous in another.[25] Reforms that merely release schools from bureaucratic strangleholds, without providing clear directions for improvement, do not succeed. And changes in policy do not necessarily touch practice. "For schools to become good, the entire culture of each must be renewed through an intensive process of inquiry. The challenge is how to make this uncommon process common—in other words, how to scale it up without flattening it out to the near level of the conventional."[26] Commission leaders quickly learned that an integral aspect of school reform would include the painstaking

process of forging a shared school philosophy through a continuous process of inquiry. This method could not be accomplished merely by sending memos or following district office guidelines. Change requires framing and attacking practical, specific problems. Creating a shared social vision involved exhaustive discussion of solutions as they were conceived, reformulated in the light of data and experience, restated, and restated again and again. Belief in democracy and experimentation represented the most fundamental features of the Eight-Year Study. With faith in the ability of otherwise ordinary persons to live democratically, leaders opened up this process to all. Many teachers deepened their understanding and appreciation of democracy, created and shared a social vision, and pushed well beyond the established schooling practices of the day. Others became frustrated by tedious discussions of educational aims that sometimes led them to unacceptable ideological stands. Yet through intensive study and dialogue, communities formed and strengthened, and common beliefs were articulated and clarified.

Equally important, the participants—teachers, administrators, and Commission staff—viewed their work as having social consequences. Their assorted goals for the project were to transform school practice and thereby to enrich the lives of Americans, young and old. Teachers came to be trusted and their views ultimately respected and valued. Information of various kinds, gathered and analyzed by teachers and Commission staff rather than by distant experts completing their accountability records (as is common practice today), was used for decision making. Definitions of what constituted data were exploratory and expansive; conversations were open-ended, driven by questions that mattered, in search of conclusions hard won but often uncertain. Emerging communities were democratic—and more. These were not mere groups: teachers were given a "*sense of belonging to an adventurous company*," and accordingly they displayed the courage needed to engage in educational change.[27]

By joining such adventurous company, participants gained confidence, believing that results would contribute to the common good. School experimentation and exploration, when pursued with committed others in good faith and with thoughtfulness, ultimately leads to good outcomes. From our research we have come to recognize this as the basic moral framework underpinning the Eight-Year Study: (1) *trust* in the ability of teachers and school administrators to reason through complex issues toward sensible and worthy conclusions; (2) *belief* in democracy as a guiding social ideal, a basis for a community of investigation and endeavor; and (3) *faith* in thoughtful inquiry, including school experimentation, to find ways to make education more life-enhancing for students and teachers. These values resonate throughout

each of the subsequent chapters, and from this perspective we write with three aims in mind:

1. We question certain widespread beliefs about progressive education and underscore differences between conceptions of progressivism among elementary educators and the much-overlooked work of secondary progressive educators. We describe a perspective that is markedly different from the so-called child-centered and "free school" definitions common today, one that shifts the focus *from* the child *to* the teacher-pupil relationship. With this change in emphasis, the Eight-Year Study becomes an experimental venture in staff development as much as a curriculum project, revealing rich, dynamic educational venues that were constructed not only for students but also for teachers.

2. We attach faces to the names of those educators who shaped the project, most of whom have been forgotten, obscured by today's progressive education icons. To this end, we include vignettes on specific Thirty School Study participants. Biographic but not comprehensive, the portrayals share what we see as interesting and curious aspects of these individuals' lives and work. While preparing the vignettes, we have come to recognize an overlooked group of educators who do not fall neatly into the past or current categories of progressives. Represented by V. T. Thayer, Margaret Willis, Eugene Smith, Harold Alberty, and Ralph Tyler (who thought of himself as a progressive yet is seldom described as such), these "*Eight-Year Study progressives*" followed Dewey's call to combat "either-or" thinking and thus sought to achieve a balanced position—a middle way—recognizing the complexity of education, the need for continuous experimentation, the value of disciplinary knowledge to solve problems, and the crucial juxtaposition of school, society, and the individual's needs and interests.[28]

3. We portray the Eight-Year Study's educational significance rather than its impact for contemporary school renewal. This will not be done by describing a vast array of contemporary schools whose programs are reminiscent of progressive education practices. We believe the project's importance revolves around the *commitment to and practice of school experimentation*, as demonstrated by developing core curriculum, forming school philosophy, and reconceiving evaluation and assessment. This is what we seek to articulate. Presently much has been written about

> the difficulties of school reform and the federal government's expanding role in fostering—some say forcing—school change. The Eight-Year Study brings forth another dimension of change: the need to engage in site-based, context-sensitive, ongoing school experimentation. The PEA supported the view that all school faculties should be actively engaged in such exploration as they conceived their own adventures in teaching and learning. We aim to reemphasize experimentation as a basic and foundational need, not a luxury, for healthy schools and school faculties.

Significance for Education Today

> To judge from the ahistorical character of most current policy talk about reform, innovators may consider amnesia a virtue. And in those rare occasions when reformers do discuss the history of schooling, they often portray the past in politicized, stylized ways as a golden age to be restored or a dismal legacy to be repudiated. (David Tyack and Larry Cuban, 1995)[29]

The Eight-Year Study holds valuable insights for those who work with schools, students, and teachers. In the history of American education, such a remarkable collection of talent as found among the three PEA Commissions has not been duplicated. The Study brought together a rising generation of educators and social scientists from secondary schools, colleges, and universities who, nurtured by a distinguished group of elders, would become significant leaders of American education. Several fields of educational study were transformed by the work of the three commissions. Rarely has such an academically diverse group come together not as mere figureheads but as *active* participants in an ambitious educational enterprise without specific predetermined outcomes. In contrast to current practices, these educators and social scientists worked closely together without interference from politicians and well-meaning business executives who would press for quick results. The smaller directing committee of the Aikin Commission included presidents of Bennington College, the University of Cincinnati, Bryn Mawr College, and the University of West Virginia; deans of Columbia University, Lehigh University, and the University of Minnesota; professors from Princeton University and Ohio State University; and school superintendents and directors from the East Coast and West Coast (as well as the editor of the *New Republic).* All academic fields were represented for significant contributions, not for mere appearances or publicity. Commission participants—Ralph Tyler, Erik Erikson, Margaret Mead, Peter Blos, Ruth Benedict, James Michener, Helen Lynd, and Benjamin Spock,

among others—represented an emerging new era for the social sciences. They came together with a common interest beyond their own focused work—namely, to discuss matters of secondary education and, with faith in experimentation and democracy, to attempt to synthesize new forms of high school and college education.

The words of PEA President Eugene Smith, in the first volume of *Progressive Education*, the house journal of the organization, resonate across the decades: "Progressive education cannot be static; it must be ever searching, ever experimenting, ever moving on towards higher ideals and more complete realization of them."[30] So it is with education today. The times are different, but the essential issues and concerns are the same. There have never been blueprints—not in 1942, not today. What remains is a desperate need for more searching, more experimenting, and ever more risk-taking in order to realize our society's highest educational ideals.