

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS - 13 THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION'S
"RENEWAL SITES" STRATEGY AND THE
BRITISH EXPERIENCE OF CURRICULUM
REFORM

44 Canfield Gardens,
London, N.W.6.
England.

21st January 1972

Mr. Richard Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017
U S A

Dear Mr. Nolte:

In my last two newsletters I described and analyzed the Schools Council for England and Wales and the development of teachers' centers as part of a British approach to curriculum reform. While completing the writing of these two newsletters, I received a copy of an article by the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sidney P. Marland, Jr., in the New York Times of Monday, the 10th of January, 1972, which was entitled "A U.S. Plan for Education Renewal." (See Appendix)
*This article outlined a new approach to the allocation of federal funds to local authorities and invoked the British experience with teachers' centers as an analogy to part of this new program.

Because of certain difficulties which I believe to be inherent in the details of the suggestions made by the Commissioner and because of the lessons which the British experience could teach -- but obviously as yet has not taught -- the policy makers in the Office of Education, I take this opportunity to present a critical review of the Commissioner's suggestions as outlined in the article, which I offer within the context of my analysis of the Schools Council and teachers' centers in IJS-11 and IJS-12.

Let me state at the outset that the key element in the Commissioner's strategy is an important step forward in the reform of federal involvement in American education and therefore, hopefully, in the reform of education. The Commissioner intends to coordinate the award of most discretionary funds -- those not distributed according to a precise legislative formula -- to approximately one thousand high priority groups of schools in disadvantaged areas, which will be called "Renewal Sites." Other state and private agencies, such as

* This article was sent to me by Harold Alprin, who, along with Dick Nolte, is my major source of current news about American problems and policies.

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universities, will be encouraged to cooperate in the activities of these Sites.

The Commissioner's approach to the allocation of discretionary funds is quite sound, because it concentrates scarce resources in the highest priority areas in a manner which is likely to create the critical mass of money and people necessary to change the process of education in the particular areas. Also, these sites will be funded for five years, which will allow the time necessary for actually implementing and evaluating a wide range of reforms.

But the Commissioner makes a claim for these "Renewal Sites," which neither past American nor British experience will support. Dr. Marland claims: "These sites ... will serve as demonstration models for encouraging change in schools throughout the region." Yet he offers little information about how these Renewal Sites are expected to encourage these changes in other districts. One must guess that these sites are expected to be models for other districts, inspiring change by example. This particular strategy, which is typical of Office of Education programs attempting to initiate change, has proved in the past to be quite inadequate. An effective strategy for change must focus on the creation of agencies for change within every educational district, not just a few, and the provision of adequate financial support for them all.

An effective system of change agents ready to promote the models for reform found to be helpful must be created in each and every organization which is the target for change. Great changes require large numbers of relatively small change agents. Commissioner Marland addresses this problem with three suggestions, which deserve careful analysis.

I. TEACHERS' CENTERS

First, each Renewal Site is expected to have a teachers' center "on the British model:" "The linchpin of each renewal site will be a teachers' center where teachers and other educational personnel from renewal site schools will be able to come together to discuss problems in an atmosphere free of competition or compulsion, receive assistance and advice, improve their competencies, and exchange experiences." (My underlining) A number of comments are in order about this vision of teachers' centers.

First, these centers will serve only the Renewal Site, not whole districts and regions. Therefore, one cannot look to the teachers' centers themselves to be agencies for change outside of the Renewal Sites. The British experience indicates that the proposed size of the Renewal Sites is such that the centers could serve a slightly

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larger population of teachers, but not much larger. So the proposed scale of teachers' centers could not be dramatically enlarged without increasing the total number of them.

Also, Marland's conception of the Teachers' center places the teachers in a passive role; his verbs are: "receive," "improve," "exchange." There is no emphasis at all upon the teachers themselves using the centers as places where they devise their own strategies for change and develop their own curriculum materials. Whereas at least the ideal, if not the actuality, of the British teachers center is one which focuses on the actual professional role of the teacher as innovator within the center. The British conception of the teachers' center would be a helpful addition to the Commissioner's conception of this institution.

From Marland's brief remarks it is not clear exactly how teachers' centers will relate to the overall operations of the Renewal Sites. In resolving what will of necessity be an ambiguous situation, the British example offers a lesson. Part of the genius of teachers' centers in Great Britain has been that they have not been encumbered with administrative obligations outside of encouraging curriculum innovation. Where they have been successful, they have been involved in many substantive programs of the local educational authorities, without ever developing the image or the actuality of a bureaucratic operation. If the teachers' centers within the Renewal Sites are to succeed, they and their staffs must not be obligated to administer the various programs operating on the Renewal Sites. But of course the teachers' center and its staff must be considered to be an integral part of the activities of all of the site's programs. The balance between involvement and bureaucracy will be difficult to strike, but the risks involved must always be in sight.

II. STATE RENEWAL CENTERS

A second element in the Commissioner's strategy for change is the State Renewal Center, which will coordinate the activities of Renewal Sites in the state.

An examination of the relationship between the Schools Council and the teachers' centers in Great Britain indicates how important the role of the State Renewal Center will be. If the Renewal Sites and the teachers' center components of them are to be effective, they will need strong support from central agencies. But the role must be one of support, not direction. The Schools Council has never attempted to direct the operations of local teachers' centers. Neither should a State Renewal Center bully the local teachers' centers, nor, for that matter, the activities of the Renewal Sites as a whole.

But such centers should actively encourage the dissemination of educational ideas and curriculum materials -- some of which might originate from the new National Institute for Education, others of which will emerge from various renewal sites themselves -- and provide resources for local educational development.

The risk which the State Renewal Centers will create is that they will become administrative agencies for the Renewal Sites. If the purpose of the program is to get money into local hands to create facilities for change at the local level, then it is there that administrative authority ought to be. State Renewal Centers must be discouraged from acting as directing authorities for the various Renewal Sites. Of course there will have to be some auditing role, but the actual strings should be kept to an absolute minimum. This threat of interference from the states, which is in fact much greater than the similar threat from the federal government, must be considered one of the most important problems to be dealt with in actually implementing the Renewal Program.

III. EDUCATION EXTENSION AGENT

The third component of Marland's Renewal Program is the development of "education extension agents, not unlike agricultural extension agents, to stimulate the use of new materials and techniques." There are British models relevant to this innovation too.

The field staff of the Schools Council has been an important element in whatever success has been achieved in curriculum reform through teachers' centers. However, the Schools Council has not been able to provide sufficient field staff support to meet the needs of the teachers' centers and the teachers in the schools. Indeed, one of the most difficult problems facing the Schools Council is how to improve the support provided to a decentralized curriculum reform system; a problem which will face the Renewal Program.

Another British model for the educational extension agent is Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMIs, as they are called). These men are really the educational extension agents for the national government in Great Britain; although in the past they have served other roles as well. One problem facing the HMIs is relevant to the American plans. In the 19th Century, the HMIs served as evaluators of the quality of schools, and their opinions determined the allocation of money to particular schools. This role ended early in the 20th Century, but the HMIs image still must live down the scepticism of local teachers who view HMIs as evaluators. It is crucial that American educational extension agents be insulated from any role which might make them any more of a threat than that entailed by their role as agents for innovation. Although one would

hope that state and federal governments would solicit the views of these educational extension agents in developing policy, just as the HMIs advise the British government.

A more detailed analysis of the role of the modern HMI will be presented in a series of newsletters based upon research which I shall complete in the next two weeks. The important point to be noted now is that two British examples of educational extension agents do exist. Indeed, there is a third, the local education authority advisors, who act as advisors to teachers in the schools as well as policy advisors to the education committees of local educational authorities. American policy makers can see, by looking at the experiences of Great Britain, some of the problems of implementing such a program for people who deal with children instead of cows.

A final note on the proposed educational extension agents must again emphasize their restricted scope of activity. It appears implicit in the Marland article that these men and women would operate only on Renewal Sites. If one really wants to develop an extensive network for educational reform, he must think in terms of extension agents for all local districts, not just a few Renewal Sites.

IV. THE ISSUE OF SCALE

Explicitly stated as part of my criticism of the various components of the Commissioner's Renewal Program is the issue of the scale of implementation. "The renewal program will be in on a pilot basis in some school systems in fiscal year 1973 -- which corresponds to the 1972-3 school year." Dr. Marland goes on: "Eventually the plan calls for the establishment of some 1000 "renewal sites" encompassing about 10,000 schools serving an estimated 5.5 million children from kindergarten through high school." This is out of a potential student population of over 50 million.

My first response to Dr. Marland's estimate of the time scale of implementation may be too facile but needs to be said nevertheless: to paraphrase Lord Keynes -- eventually, we shall all be dead. But even eventually he sees such centers serving only ten per cent. of the school population. What about educational reform for the other ninety per cent?

The second response is that it is well enough to implement some pilot projects immediately, but the pilot program should be considered the first step in a comprehensive program for change, not a partial palliative for a system which is literally crying out for new mechanisms for reform.

Dr. Marland observes that: "No matter how good an innovation may be, no matter how promising a technique, unless the teacher truly accepts it, believes deeply in it, and possesses it as his own, no change will occur. Once the classroom door closes, the teacher is in charge." It is for this very reason that the Renewal Site Program as presently formulated will not succeed in reforming American Education. It does not create agencies for reform which can reach every teacher in every school.

It is quite incorrect to characterize the Renewal Sites Program as a "U.S. Plan for Education Renewal." Not until every teacher has an opportunity to be exposed to and to develop for himself new approaches to educational problems will one be correct in talking about a "U.S. plan for education renewal." The emphasis on the role of the teacher as a professional, which is implicit in Dr. Marland's position and which has been so important in the curriculum reform efforts in Great Britain, demands local opportunities for teacher involvement in these changes. Model Renewal sites will provide such opportunities only for teachers within these districts and for no one else.

The current administration has consistently taken the position in regard to educational investment that it does not want to throw good money after bad. Therefore, it wants to be shown that educational programs can deliver the goods in pilot projects before committing vast sums. This is a fair position. But only if the pilot projects are on a scale which gives them a fair test. And not if the argument is used to justify no real increase in educational investment at all. The Marland discussion of the Renewal Program is consistent with past administration statements: it makes much of the fact that it will be, in the main, a reallocation of existing resources. This is an admirable position. But it also means that actual accomplishment is postponed until "eventually."

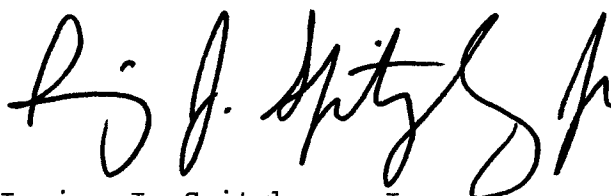
If the Office of Education really wants to establish new institutions to promote educational change, which will have a meaningful impact, then it will establish 1000 Renewal sites within the immediate future (say the next two fiscal years) and be prepared to undertake the funding of renewal sites in every school district in the United States (and many more than one in some) within the next four years.

And one comment should be made about evaluating the success or failure of Renewal Sites. If these sites are considered to be agencies for change now and in the future, they must be evaluated not just in terms of present programs implemented but also their track record for anticipating future changes and helping teachers and students deal with changing educational problems. What one might

call "change process criteria" must be developed to evaluate these sites in cost/benefit terms; a difficult task.

Dr. Marland's 1000 neediest districts are exactly where one should start -- now, not eventually. But this is a first step; an important one, but only the first. The real test will be how quickly the federal government, the states, and the local school districts can move to an effective system of agents for educational change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.", written in dark ink.

Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

Received in New York on January 25, 1972

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 1972

A U.S. Plan for Education Renewal

By SIDNEY P. MARLAND Jr.

"American education is in urgent need of reform," President Nixon declared in 1970. His charge has been echoed by virtually all responsible educational leaders, teacher organizations, and local school board members.

To meet the President's challenge, the United States Office of Education has developed an education renewal strategy designed to help American schools reform themselves.

By concentrating selected Federal funds on the nation's neediest school districts, the plan will provide parents, teachers and school administrators with an opportunity to develop and carry out renewal programs tailor-made to meet specific local pupil achievement problems.

Renewal, as we are developing the theme in the Office of Education, implies change from within, change involving every aspect of the schooling process, change regarded not as a short-term luxury or fad but rather as a continuous process, change geared to meeting local problems as discerned by local teachers and other citizens.

'Renewal Sites'

The renewal program will begin on a pilot basis in some school systems in fiscal year 1973—which corresponds to the 1972-73 school year. Eventually the plan calls for the establishment of some 1,000 "renewal sites" encompassing about 10,000 schools serving an estimated 5.5 million children from kindergarten through high school.

These sites, each of which will be funded for five years, will serve as demonstration models for encouraging change in schools throughout the region.

The program envisions the establishment of a State Renewal Center in each state, to coordinate the several renewal sites in the state, the creation at each renewal site of a "teacher center" on the British model, and the use of "education extension agents" not unlike agricultural extension agents to stimulate the use of new materials and techniques.

The Office of Education administers two kinds of Federal support programs, formula grant and discretionary. More than 85 per cent of all Federal education funds are earmarked for formula grant programs. That is, each state receives a proportionate share of the program appropriation based on the number of children between certain ages or the number of children from low-income families or some such criteria.

The remaining funds are termed "discretionary." They are awarded on a project-by-project basis at the discretion of the commissioner within limits established by the Congress.

These are research and development funds, teacher-training and retraining funds, and funds for meeting specific problems such as bilingual education, dropout prevention, drug abuse education, and environmental education.

The essence of the education renewal strategy is best stated in two words—coordination and concentration.

Instead of awarding hundreds of separate grants for several different discretionary programs, many of them to the same school system, the Office of Education will concentrate in a single grant to each renewal site a package of programs to be administered locally in a coordinated fashion.

Eligibility requirements for such coordinated grants will, of course, be consistent with the legislative requirements of each of the separate programs included in the package, and appropriate accounting procedures will insure that local school districts receiving renewal grants satisfy the purposes for which Congress appropriated the funds.

In effect, the Office of Education intends to provide a more efficient and effective means of delivering discretionary grant program services to local school districts, thus enhancing the legislative intent of a variety of programs.

What is even more important, the local school district

with the will and wisdom to renew itself will have concentrated funds to effect comprehensive change, rather than continue to tinker with bits and pieces of innovation. This packaging process is similar to the education revenue-sharing bill President Nixon has proposed as a means for the more efficient and effective delivery of formula grant funds to the states.

Each local renewal site, selected with the active participation of the chief state school officer, will consist of an average of 10 schools, elementary and secondary, serving approximately 5,000 pupils, kindergarten through high school. All renewal sites will be in areas of concentration of disadvantaged children, two-thirds of them urban and the remainder in rural locations.

Function of States

Each state education agency will receive funds to establish a State Renewal Center, and state education officials will share the leadership responsibility with the Office of Education, not only in selecting sites but also in facilitating the spread of new practices and techniques from the demonstration sites to the state school system at large.

The initiative for participating in the renewal program will rest primarily at the local level. Local school officials in each prospective site will be asked to get together with teachers, students, parents, and community residents to develop a local needs assessment.

It will be the Office of Education's responsibility to match local needs to available programs and funds.

The Office of Education will be responsible for preparing the Federal program package, which may result in a single renewal grant award under a variety of programs authorizations. The average annual grant award for each renewal site is expected to be about \$750,000.

The linchpin of each renewal site will be a teacher center where teachers and other educational personnel from renewal site schools will

be able to come together to discuss problems in an atmosphere free of competition or compulsion, receive assistance and advice, improve their competencies, and exchange experiences.

No matter how good an innovation may be, no matter how promising a technique, unless the teacher truly accepts it, believes deeply in it, and possesses it as his own, no change will occur. Once the classroom door closes, the teacher is in charge.

As a further means of stimulating the dissemination of new materials practices, the Office of Education intends to establish an adaption of the agricultural extension agent model.

This will create a new career in American education—the education extension agent. Just as agricultural extension agents carry to the farmers information on Government-financed agricultural research and development, education extension agents will provide a link between teacher and other practitioners and those who are developing new educational materials and techniques.

Dr. Marland is U. S. Commissioner of Education.