

Schools and Character

Educational Reform and Industrial Virtue in Iowa, 1890–1930

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A well-ordered school is one of the most effective agents in the formation of the child's habits and character. Children are taught co-operation, helpfulness, justice and are constantly trained in the social and industrial virtues.

—Chauncy P. Colgrove
Iowa Course of Study, 1913

REFORMERS of American education, throughout the nineteenth century, repeatedly stated that regular school attendance taught children the disciplined use of time and consequently made them more reliable workers. Horace Mann in Massachusetts and other school reformers in Boston consciously adapted the American system of manufacturing to their own ends in the 1830s and 1840s by reorganizing educational systems along the lines of factory production. The schools were to make better workers by instilling time discipline and the Protestant work ethic in their pupils and they were to do so by applying the factory model to facilitate the process. For educators, then, well-regulated schools trained students in industrial virtue, and thus made them productive "Yankees." In American Protestant culture, hard work was the core of moral life: it created useful, productive citizens; it enabled them to avoid the temptations of idleness which threatened society as well as the work place; and it opened the way for increased wealth and higher social status.¹

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1. Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation*

Trends in Iowa education from 1890 to 1930 reveal how educators in a rural, midwestern state used these earlier ideas and institutional models during the progressive reform era. Chauncy P. Colgrove, a leading Iowa schoolman of the early twentieth century, held ideas about school order and character formation similar to those of his New England predecessors. Other Iowa teachers expressed, modified, and implemented the same ideas in their movements to improve country life, to establish manual training, and to eliminate the teaching of useless subject matter. Colgrove and these movements still influenced Iowa schools during the 1920s as character education and community civics programs flourished. Iowa school reformers like Colgrove advocated the eastern-urban educational model because they thought its systems and values would modernize schools into more efficient instruments for ingraining industrial virtue, character, and citizenship. They encouraged professionalization and new educational methods for the same reason: better-trained and more closely supervised teachers employing more sophisticated methods would enable public schools to inculcate traditional economic and civic values. In this sense Iowa educators, like many progressives, were "evangelical modernizers;" they combined science, efficiency, and Protestant morality in their attempts to improve education.

Chauncy P. Colgrove, a representative of what historian David Tyack has called administrative and pedagogical progressivism, was an important figure in Iowa's educational establishment at the turn of the century. His ideas were those that many urban-minded reformers held about the school as a medium for modernization and training industrial virtue. Described as "Iowa's greatest educational orator," Colgrove received his A.B. degree at Upper Iowa University in Fayette in 1881 and served as a public school teacher, principal, and superintendent before earning his A.M. degree in 1896 at the

in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts (Cambridge, 1968), 87, 125, 131; Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860* (New York, 1973), 103-106, 126-141, 259-262; David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, 1972), 43-50, 73-74; Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago, 1978).

University of Chicago. The latter institution, then relatively new, was rapidly becoming a center for the "new education" under John Dewey's influence. Also in 1896 Colgrove was elected to the chair of psychology and didactics at the Iowa Normal School in Cedar Falls; he became head of the department of education there in 1913 and then president of Upper Iowa University in 1915.² Colgrove made several contributions to educational literature: *The Making of a Teacher*, a textbook published in Waterloo in 1908; its revised version, *The Teacher and the School*, published in New York in 1910; and the 1906 and 1913 editions of the *Course of Study*, which the Department of Public Instruction published and distributed to every Iowa school. He designed all of them to impart the latest professional wisdom to aspiring future pedagogues, whether trained at the Iowa Normal School (renamed the State Teachers College in 1909), or in the Normal Training High Schools established in 1913.

By publishing his ideas about education locally, then nationally, and by working with the Department of Public Instruction, Colgrove exhibited the professionalization of American education. The nation was standardizing educational practices and Iowa practitioners in turn were disseminating the standards statewide through the teachers college and the office of state superintendent. That Iowa educators generally shared Colgrove's conception of character education becomes clear through examination of the state superintendents' handbooks and courses of study and other books on didactics then published. Since instructors used the didactics textbooks to train new teachers; since the state distributed copies of the handbooks and courses of study to each school; and since county superintendents reported general reliance upon the latter, ideas on schools training character definitely dispersed widely among Iowa teachers.³

2. David Sands Wright, *Fifty Years at the Teachers College: Historical and Personal Reminiscences* (Cedar Falls, 1926), 195-196; Tyack, *One Best System*, 180, 188-189, 197.

3. See, for example, publications by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction (hereafter cited inclusively as Iowa, *Course of Study*): *Handbook for Iowa Teachers*, 1890, 39-40; *Handbook for Iowa Schools*, 1900, 155-158; *Handbook for Iowa Schools*, 1906, 202-207; *Course of Study and Manual of Methods*, 1913, 31, 305-310. On the use of state courses of study in the schools, see *Annual Reports of County Superintendents*, 1902, in the Iowa State Historical

Efforts to strengthen the school as a medium for training industrial virtue were apparently responses to the social tensions and conflicts of the 1890s. Although Iowa was an agricultural state with no major urban centers, Iowans perceived both immigration and industrial labor as problems close to home. From 1894 to 1900 the state saw 381 strikes which involved 32,930 strikers and 831 factories, mines, and shops. These events aroused the fears of many Iowans, including educators, who suspected anyone who did not fit their norms of citizenship and who thus tended to blame strikes and other social evils on the 16.9 percent of the state's population that was of foreign birth in 1890. Immigrants—and the ignorant, criminal, radical, or poor—symbolized an alien culture to Yankee, middle-class teachers who, despite their fears, remained confident that public education could transform a heterogeneous population into a united, productive people.⁴

This conversion could occur, however, only if schools became more efficient tools for character building. Accordingly, the Iowa educational establishment, which included the teachers association, the normal school and university, and the state superintendent of public instruction, began to lobby strongly in the 1890s for modernization using the corporate-bureaucratic model developed for the reform of urban education. Their demands became part of the movement which put Albert B. Cummins into the governor's office in 1902. These demands which administrative progressives put forward with the support of political progressives led to a program of school reforms. The progressives strongly advocated consolidation of the many rural schools, compulsory attendance, state certificat-

Department, State Archives, Des Moines. Similar ideas appeared in teaching manuals: Homer Seerley, *The Country School* (New York, 1913), 66-67, 124-126; Henry Sabin, *Common Sense Didactics for Common School Teachers* (New York, 1903), 124-181; William J. Shoup, *Graded Didactics for Teachers Normal Institutes* (St. Paul, 1889), 81-84, 90, 187-192; Wilbur H. Bender, *The Teacher at Work: A Manual* (New York, 1902), 16, 177, 181, 185-213.

4. Leland L. Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames, 1974), 201-202; Keach Johnson, "Iowa's Industrial Roots: Some Social and Political Problems," *Annals of Iowa* 44 (Spring 1978), 258. For expressions of fears about immigrants, strikers, and radicals, see "Editorial," *Iowa Normal Monthly* 11 (August 1888), 4-5; "Editorial," *Iowa Normal Monthly* 13 (August 1889), 1; A. R. Darling, "Thoughts on Moral Training," *Iowa Normal Monthly* 18 (August 1894), 35; "Patriotism in the Schoolroom," *Iowa Normal Monthly* 18 (November 1894), 147-148.

ion, and higher professional standards for teachers, a uniform sequential curriculum, and expanded powers and staff for the State Department of Public Instruction. These reforms occurred in succeeding years despite an ideology of democratic localism and opposition from farmers who feared higher taxes and the loss of local control.⁵

To its proponents, modernization of the Iowa school system was necessary because properly organized schools were themselves industrial organizations; by attending them, students automatically learned correct work habits. Modernization extended to methods as well as to institutional structures. Chauncy Colgrove's books revealed currents of thought from the new education, in their emphasis on psychology, child study, and the problems of habit formation. Colgrove's preoccupation with method indicates the increasing sophistication of Iowa educators about managing both the child and the school environment to better inculcate traditional values. Indeed, Colgrove believed that modern child study prepared the way for a correct system of moral training by demonstrating that one could not separate morality from other aspects of a child's life and that moral impulses had to find expression in right conduct if they were to become a permanent part of a child's character.⁶

The primary lesson of child study was clear to Colgrove: correct habit formation was the foundation of moral training. "Right habits are formed by right practice," Colgrove insisted. Therefore "the teacher must be a trainer," because "a trainer is one who by means of a systematic course of instruction and practice forms . . . a living organism according to a definite

5. Keach Johnson, "Elementary and Secondary Education in Iowa, 1890-1900: A Time of Awakening," *Annals of Iowa*, 45 (Fall 1979), 87-109 and (Winter 1980), 171-195; Richard J. Jensen and Mark Friedberger, "Education and Social Structure: An Historical Study of Iowa, 1870-1930," National Institute of Education Project, 1976, Newberry Library, Chicago, 7.1-7.2, 8.1; William L. Bowers, "The Fruits of Iowa Progressivism, 1900-1915," *Iowa Journal of History*, 57 (January 1957), 37, 52-53.

6. Chauncy P. Colgrove, *The Teacher and the School* (New York, 1910), 34, 40-50; Colgrove, *The Making of a Teacher*, (Waterloo, 1908), 93-94. Lawrence A. Cremin discusses the nature of child study and the diversity of the new education in *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York, 1961), viii-x, 100-112, 129-131.

plan." As good habits were the essential safeguards of society, and as changing bad habits required great struggle, the duty of parents and teachers was to "manipulate the child's environment in such a way [as] to make right-doing pleasant and easy, to furnish correct patterns for imitation, and to insist on sufficient amount of practice to fix the habit." At the same time parents and teachers were also to shield the child's "mind from vice, to keep him away from evil associations, to check the beginnings of evil, to starve out wrong tendencies, and nip in the bud every undesirable emotion."⁷

Two fundamental assumptions underlay Colgrove's argument; he believed that the school ought to be a model environment and that the teacher ought to control that environment for the child's moral benefit. He emphasized three ways that the school itself, apart from the formal curriculum, could actually train character. First, teachers should make the school-room "a positive and elevating moral influence in the life of every pupil." Invoking Plato on the close relationship between the beautiful and the good, Colgrove insisted that the school-room should be made beautiful, decorated with art works "that enrich the life by lifting up the soul to higher and purer ideas." Colgrove perceived school management, the second potential moral influence, in rigid, mechanistic terms: "Pupils should form the habit of performing all the necessary minor details of the school automatically, in exact time and with the precision of a machine." The teacher should manage all physical movements of the students with military precision and carefully plan the daily program to occupy pupils with "well-directed, continuous work." Finally, school government was essential to maintain good order because children thereby learned the habits of self-discipline that would make them fit citizens.⁸

A properly managed and governed school, Colgrove believed, developed habits of "regularity, methodical work, obedience to rightful authority, and a sense of personal re-

7. Colgrove, *Teacher and School*, 346, 357-358.

8. *Ibid.*, 202-203, 73, 176-177, 375-377. Also see David B. Tyack, "Bureaucracy and the Common School: The Example of Portland, Oregon, 1851-1913," *American Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1967), 478-479 and Joel H. Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston, 1972), 45-47.

sponsibility." An improperly managed or governed school had the contrary effect: it actually "trained [students] in habits of lawlessness, waste of time, disregard for all authority . . . [and] neglect of duty. . . ." Colgrove considered internalized discipline essential in a democracy where external authority frequently was weak; thus he made explicit the conservative power of habit in society: "It keeps the student at his books, the lawyer at his desk, the farmer at his task [and] the workers in mine and shop and factory at their weary round of daily toil." An orderly school prepared its students for democratic freedom because "freedom is never attained through anarchy and license." Colgrove defined freedom in positive, though moralistic, terms; it was "cheerful submission to an inner law which the mind recognizes as just and necessary."⁹ He fully expected school attendance to instill that "inner law."

The school was by nature an industrial organization which required a combination of effort, regularity, punctuality, accuracy, industry, and obedience. Both community and individual benefitted from the acquisition of these moral habits. As ignorant, immoral labor was costly labor, wasteful of materials and machinery and "easily misled by unscrupulous men and incited to riot, destroy property, and even murder," society could not afford to neglect public education. "There can be no doubt," Colgrove declared, "that habits which are formed by doing the regular daily tasks of a good school become a very important factor in the industrial efficiency and success of the pupils." Because a virtuous people was essential to good government and the economic welfare of society, every dollar contributed to education increased wealth, made property more secure, and decreased the taxes otherwise needed for support of police, courts, and jails.¹⁰

Colgrove's views were partly expressions of traditional economic beliefs and partly indications of the future influence that the new education would have on Iowa educators. His traditionalism becomes apparent when one compares his ideas with the content of nineteenth-century textbooks. As historian Ruth Miller Elson has shown, these schoolbooks stressed the

9. Colgrove, *Teacher and School*, 176-177, 351, 376-377.

10. *Ibid.*, 19-20, 71, 78, 87, 96-98.

Protestant economic virtues of industry, thrift, frugality, perseverance, and self-denial, and identified labor organizations with irresponsible violence and doctrines subversive to American institutions. The ideal American laborer, on the other hand, they portrayed as one who accepted American working conditions and who strove hard to get ahead. The persistence of such attitudes into the twentieth century is apparent not only in Colgrove's writings but also in the movement for more specific citizenship training. For example, S. E. Forman's *Essentials in Civil Government* (1908), a civics textbook used in Iowa, emphasized that a well-managed school which trained students in the seven cardinal virtues—"regularity, punctuality, neatness, accuracy, silence, industry, and obedience"—prepared good citizens. Training in these virtues, moreover, would help a student fulfill the important civic duty of earning a living. Forman declared, "Every citizen should try to earn an honest living for himself and those dependent upon him."¹¹

Colgrove's argument—that the findings of child-study and physiological psychology proved the great educational value of motor activity, and that industrial change made curriculum reform a necessity—indicated the future direction of Iowa education. Because neither the family nor the apprenticeship system educated children as it had in the past, and because schools took children out of the home earlier and occupied them longer, educators had to broaden the elementary curriculum to fill its growing role. Teachers had to make the "three Rs" more useful, and augment them with more utilitarian subjects such as manual training, domestic science, handwork, drawing, and nature study. These steps were basic to Colgrove's arguments and to the reform of Iowa schools.¹²

MOVEMENTS in Iowa to establish manual training, improve country life, and eliminate the teaching of useless subject matter expressed ideas similar to Chauncy Colgrove's. Those who demanded manual training—a movement which began to grow in the 1870s—maintained that such training was necessary to

11. Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln, 1964), 215-218, 248-252; S. E. Forman, *Essentials in Civil Government* (New York, 1908), 3-4, 15-18, 26, 28, 31, 57.

12. Colgrove, *Teacher and School*, 19, 37-40, 134.

realistically prepare people for life in a modern industrial society. During the 1890s the emerging Country Life Movement lent support to the cause. The National Education Association (NEA) *Report on Rural Schools* (1896), written and published under the committee chairmanship of a leading Iowa educator, Henry Sabin, in the 1898 edition of the *Iowa School Report*, criticized rural education for being unimaginative and irrelevant; for dealing too much with books and too little with life; and for educating people away from the country and toward the city. Therefore, stated the report, consolidation of rural schools and modernization of their curricula would improve the quality of farm life; would increase agricultural efficiency, and thus enable farms to produce cheaper food for cities; and would integrate once-isolated rural communities into an urban-industrial society.¹³

In their campaign to introduce manual training, domestic science, agriculture, and related subjects, Iowa educators advanced two distinct, but not mutually exclusive, lines of argument: the psychological argument held that since children learn naturally through activity, then active work more efficiently promoted their mental and moral development than did sedentary work; and the sociological argument advocated the teaching of new subjects to meet the new conditions which industrialization had wrought. By training the masses, most of whom would earn their livelihoods working with their hands, these subjects would create intelligent urban and rural workers, who would be content with the economic status quo, and who would be able to find useful employment immediately after graduation. Thus the schools could prevent idleness, immorality, and crime.¹⁴

13. Iowa Department of Public Instruction, *School Report* (Des Moines, 1898), 126-127, 167-173 (hereafter cited as *Iowa, School Report*); Cremin, *Transformation of the School*, 24-33, 43-44. For similar themes see Iowa State Teachers Association, *Report of the Better Iowa Schools Commission* (Des Moines, 1912), 43-46, 51-52. Also see David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban Education and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames, 1979), 57-58, 77-80, 113 and David B. Danbom, "Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920," *Agricultural History* 53 (April 1979), 463-469.

14. See, for example, Homer Seerley's address in Iowa State Teachers Association, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention* (Des Moines, 1905), 116 (hereafter cited as *ISTA, Proceedings*).

Two reports on the elimination of useless subject matter, which the Iowa State Teachers Association (ISTA) published in 1915 and 1916, similarly recommended a more functional education—one adapted to the developing industrial life of the child and the community—as the criterion for modifying, including, and excluding subjects. In reading and history, for example, the reports recommended that teachers interest pupils in the affairs of the present. Reading therefore should include newspapers, because they focused on current events, and magazines like *Popular Mechanics*, because it dealt with science, commerce, and industry. Teachers also could increase history's utility toward fostering industrious citizenship by emphasizing the development of industry, labor, and agriculture. By eliminating useless material, making academic subjects more utilitarian, and creating room for practical subjects in the curriculum, the schools would give students the opportunity to "develop the concrete efficiency required to found and maintain better homes; secure larger returns from labor; participate more intelligently in civic affairs; and live more healthful and efficient lives." Advocates insisted that such a functional curriculum would make public schools more democratic because they could better train students of all classes for all occupations. All pupils so trained would become happier in their vocations and thus more useful, productive citizens.¹⁵

With growing support from the educational establishment, the utilitarian standards and practical arts which Colgrove, Country Lifers, vocationalists, and promoters of school efficiency advocated gradually altered school curricula and thus made the school a better medium for inculcating traditional civic and industrial virtues. In 1902 only twelve institutions were giving special instruction in manual training and home economics. The number steadily increased until over 150 schools were offering such courses by 1913 when the general assembly enacted a law that required all consolidated schools to teach manual training, domestic science, and agriculture. The 1913 edition of the *Iowa Course of Study*, which Colgrove edited,

15. ISTA, *Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Subject Matter* (Des Moines, 1915), 5-6, 41-43; ISTA, *Second Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Subject Matter*, 1916, 3-9, 42-44, 143.

recommended these subjects for all rural schools and expected that all eighth-grade graduates should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the basic principles of agriculture and home economy. By 1923, with the aid of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act's federal aid for vocational education, over 940 Iowa schools provided vocational instruction, in which high school students and a small percentage of seventh and eighth graders had enrolled. The practical subjects (arts and crafts) also spread from high schools into the elementary grades, and somewhat displaced the traditional "three Rs." The 1928 *Course of Study* for example, recommended that the "three Rs" occupy approximately only one-half of the school week, and that students give 15 percent of their time to practical arts and related subjects.¹⁶

In the 1920s, the demands for greater utility, practicality, and methodological sophistication which Colgrove and other educators had voiced continued to find expression in the intertwined movements for community civics and character education. Reflecting pedagogical progressivism's emphasis on learning-by-doing and on community, Iowa institutionalized community civics with a 1919 law which required the teaching of American citizenship in all grades of all public and private schools of the state. The law was a product of the 100 percent Americanism which United States participation in World War I inspired, but it also represented ideas which Iowa educators had long advocated. As legally required, the Department of Public Instruction published the *Course in American Citizenship in the Grades for the Public Schools of Iowa* (1921) and distributed 100,000 copies to county superintendents, school officials, and teachers. This plan required that teachers set aside definite times each week in each grade specifically for citizenship training. Teachers should also correlate civic instruction with reading, geography, history, hygiene, and arithmetic, and use as opening exercises flag salutes, patriotic songs, and recitation of patriotic poetry. They should post American slogans, creeds, codes, and pictures in classrooms to ensure

16. Frank Johnson, "Manual Training in Iowa," (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1925), 11, 13-14; Iowa, *Course of Study*, 1913, 66, 106, 146-147, 300 and 1928, 16.

that just entering the school environment could develop in one proper civic ideas.¹⁷

The course emphasized the American ideals of thrift and saving money, and that an individual's primary responsibility was to earn a living and become a productive member of society. To these ends, pupils in the primary grades were to learn "habits of punctuality, thrift, and industry." Educators hoped that planned, regular programs of lessons and study would cultivate "the work attitude" in students and "give opportunities for growth of diligence and perseverance." Lessons utilizing the positive examples of great men—Washington, Franklin, and Lincoln—and of animals that work—ants, bees, and squirrels—could demonstrate the beneficial results of industrious effort. On the other hand, negative examples could show the harmful effects of laziness. Lessons in the intermediate grades stressed the interdependence of school, home, and local communities. Students were to transfer habits of industry learned in school to the home by beginning to help on the farm and in the store. In grades seven and eight, as pupils learned their rights and duties as citizens in state and national communities, the right of private property and the duty "to be self-supporting," gained prominence. To best contribute to community welfare, authors of the course insisted, a citizen should "be self-sustaining by his own work, and participate efficiently in the economic life of the world." In addition, future citizens "should be impressed with the necessity of choosing a vocation wisely and of adequate preparation for it."¹⁸

Similar traditional economic and civic beliefs, wedded to the sophisticated methodology of pedagogical progressives, also appeared in the prizewinning Iowa Plan of 1922, the first comprehensive program for character education. The Iowa Plan won a first prize of \$20,000 in a competition sponsored by the Character Education Institution of Washington, D.C. The plan's authors were a committee of nine which had Dr. Edwin Starbuck of the State University of Iowa as its chair and Upper

17. Iowa, *School Report*, 1922, 28 and 1928, 19, 80, 96-100.

18. Iowa Department of Public Instruction, *Course in American Citizenship in the Grades for the Public Schools of Iowa* (Des Moines, 1921), 5-7, 9, 25, 36, 47-48, 72, 86, 89, 114.

Iowa University President Chauncy P. Colgrove as a member. Starbuck, a member of NEA's Character Education Committee, chairman of the NEA Subcommittee on Tests and Measurements, and a speaker at the 1924 NEA convention, wanted to widen the range of moral training to include the interests of home, state, church, and industrial society. He also wanted public schools to create happy, contented workers who would accept the existing economic arrangements of society. The plan was similar to community civics in its attempt to educate "the whole child," as it included lessons in life adjustments, right living, vocational efficiency, and worthy use of leisure time. Pupils, through life in the school community, were to develop skills of moral thoughtfulness and moral living through practice in accordance with their stages of development. The plan combined modern and traditional elements; it emphasized child development, learning-by-doing, the school as model community, and the "science" of testing and measurement, but also retained the traditional emphasis on training industrial virtue as a central goal of public education.¹⁹ The plan circulated widely and influenced the creation and implementation of character-education programs across the country.

There was not only considerable continuity between this plan and the state's community civics program, but also, as Chauncy P. Colgrove's presence on the committee indicated, between the Iowa Plan and Colgrove's earlier *The Teacher and the School*. Both documents displayed the influence of pedagogical progressivism; both exhibited a concern with more sophisticated methods to better train pupils in the economic habits essential to good citizenship; both reflected a belief in the conservative power of habit formation to maintain social order; both substituted manipulative techniques for physical coercion as part of their methodological sophistication; and both revealed the protracted influence of the state educational establishment. College professors like Colgrove and Starbuck continued to influence Iowa public schools through the teachers association and the Department of Public Instruction. The

19. Stephen M. Yulish, "The Search for a Civic Religion: A History of the Character Education Movement in America, 1890-1935," (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, 1975), 79-83, 106-114, 256-262.

plan differed from Colgrove's document by substituting the image of the school as a democratic community for the old factory model with its military precision. Thus the growing influence of John Dewey's ideas supplanted the dominant image of earlier generations of Iowa educators. This shift, however, did not represent a change in the traditional goals of public education; Iowa educators simply adopted the new image as a better method for achieving the old goal of training future citizens.²⁰

By perceiving the school as a democratic community, authors of the Iowa Plan explicitly rejected the "Prussian model" of American education: "the setting in double rows of rigid desks screwed to the floor with pupils marching to and fro" which was "a relic of the military camp and factory ideals of the school and indicates usually that the pupils are also screwed down to a system. . . ." Instead of the military discipline of army camp or factory, kindly cooperation, with the teacher in the role of "companion and friend, a big sister, or a kindly mother," would characterize the school as community. Schools should also allow greater student participation in the institutions' organization and control, and teachers should forego harsh, repressive discipline to replace it with William James's principle of "moral sublimation"; they should translate students' fighting instincts into enthusiasm for combating difficult problems and should manipulate peer pressure to control misbehavior among students.²¹

To be sure, educators qualified these concessions to the child-centered classroom in significant ways. Behind the facade of kindly cooperation they still expected children to obey properly constituted authority. Student participation clearly did not mean self-government and whatever participation authorities would allow was to occur principally in the later grades and high school. Nevertheless, sharing the duties and responsibilities of the school would heighten pupils' personal responsibility for protecting school property, maintaining order, and completing assigned lessons. Allowing a student "to wrestle

20. Spring, *Education and Corporate State*, 44-61.

21. *Character Education Methods: The Iowa Plan* (Washington, D.C., 1922), 9-16.

out and solve an actual situation that arises in play and work among his fellows" grounded character formation in actual conduct and thus better prepared one to be a citizen of a functioning democracy.²²

Just as the school-as-community concept revealed an increasing methodological sophistication, so, too, did the plan's increased specificity concerning the tasks of character education. This specificity, already evident in the NEA's *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (1918), represented the emergence of "life-adjustment," which would dominate American education in the 1940s and 1950s. No longer was it sufficient for the schools to aim generally at creating an ideal citizen; they needed to prepare children more specifically to meet all situations in life. The plan listed eleven areas in which pupils should receive training: health, group life, civic relations, industrial and economic relations, vocation, parenthood and family life, mastery of tradition, appreciation of money, use of leisure time, reverence, and creative activity. With the goals specified, it was up to teachers to utilize all school activities to develop student abilities in each area. Actual situations served as the natural method of character training; they allowed children to discover most virtues through their own conduct by discussing what would be the morally right responses to circumstances close to their own experience. Thus the natural method was not liable to degenerate into empty generalizations about abstract moral virtues. The authors of the Iowa Plan, however, did not neglect the traditional virtues long associated with American heroes. They still advocated study of the noble deeds of American heroes as a method for instilling the virtues of industry, honor, and loyalty.²³

Another example of new methodological sophistication in the Iowa Plan was "scientific" measurement of progress in character development. Plan authors apologized for the primitive state of testing to establish norms for character development, but thought the tests they included were sufficiently accurate to aid teachers and pupils. Primarily self-measuring

22. *Ibid.*, 6-7, 12.

23. *Ibid.*, 6-8, 17-18; Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1964), 335, 360-361.

instruments, these tests were to help teachers recognize strong and weak points in the personal characters of pupils and to suggest what character traits students should work to improve. Teachers could administer the tests several times during the school year in order to measure student progress in character development.²⁴

Although the Iowa Plan employed several new techniques and concepts—testing, natural method, school as democratic community, life-adjustment—it still expected children to acquire traditional, conservative economic beliefs. It rejected the factory model of school organization, which had suited the era of entrepreneurial capitalism, but its conception of the school as community was nonetheless relevant to the emerging economic order of the 1920s. By emphasizing group activities, pedagogical progressivism better equipped students to serve the new managerial capitalism which stressed organization, team-work, and committee decisions. Attention to the interdependence of local, state, and national communities, moreover, taught future agriculturalists how Iowa fit into an urban-industrial society. The modern tests measured appreciation of time, work, and money as qualities of character. Teachers instructed children that satisfaction came through productive work; that waste and misuse of wealth were acts of violence against the framework of society; that they had to “produce or suffer social disgrace,”; that “crimes and misdemeanors in the school and in the state are caused by unused and misdirected energies”; and therefore that they should budget and use time and resources profitably.²⁵

CHARACTER and civic education ideas expressed in the Iowa Plan and in the community civics program influenced Iowa's schools during the 1920s. Meetings of the ISTA throughout the decade frequently discussed character and citizenship education, and as the state superintendent published and distributed the association's annual proceedings, the ISTA exposed many Iowa school administrators and teachers to these ideas. The

24. *Character Education Methods: The Iowa Plan*, 38, 38a-38d, 40a-40d; Edwin D. Starbuck, “Character Training in the Public Schools,” in *ISTA, Proceedings*, 1924, 97-101.

25. *Character Education Methods: The Iowa Plan*, 6-8.

results of a questionnaire which the ISTA Character Education Committee circulated in 1929, suggested that many rural schools implemented at least some aspects of the new character education. Students discussed concrete moral case materials and desirable trait actions in class groups—on language, literature, history, and civics—and in opening exercises. Iowa schools, in the view of administrative progressives and due largely to their efforts, were better able to inculcate these ideals than ever before. In 1927 the state created a new legal category for schools, "Standard Rural Schools," to help improve rural education. In order to qualify for this rating, schools had to receive recommendations from the county superintendent, receive visitations from the state rural inspector once each biennium, and achieve high scores on the quality of their grounds, buildings, equipment, books, teachers, organization, and activities. If a school qualified, it could receive state aid per pupil in attendance. During the first year only 615 schools qualified; by 1929-30, however, the number of Standard Rural Schools had increased to 2,399, or approximately 25 percent of all Iowa schools.²⁶

The 1928 edition of the Iowa *Course of Study*, further standardized testing by providing the bases for all examination questions prepared for eighth grade diplomas and for uniform county and high school normal training certificates. All schools received and generally followed the *Course of Study*, under the encouragement of increasingly active efficient state supervision, which indicates how the ideals that administrative and pedagogical progressives put forth permeated the elementary curriculum. In addition to the weekly lessons in citizenship which law required, educators directed other subjects to contribute to moral and civic instruction. The practical subjects—elementary agriculture, home economics, and industrial arts—were, for example, to introduce pupils to "the processes used in the production of life's necessities" and to give them "an appreciation of the skills and knowledge required in the various trades." Similarly history and literature (reading) as they utilized the life stories of leaders, heroes, and patriots to teach moral and civic virtue, were to better equip children to solve

26. ISTA, *Proceedings*, 1929, 60-61; Iowa, *School Report*, 1930, 6, 9, 37-39.

the problems that would confront them as active citizens. As was the case for Chauncy P. Colgrove and an earlier generation of Iowa educators, the school was to carry a message. The *Course of Study* argued that the everyday experience of attending the school community automatically trained children in life-long habits of good citizenship. The new science of child psychology seemed to prove the utility of such concrete school experiences. Science revealed that children had a natural tendency to organize and to act; thus the cooperative activities of the school should train them in "proper attitudes and correct conduct" which were far "more important than mere knowledges." Teachers were to use concrete situations, whether they arose within the classroom or on the playground, to train morality and citizenship. They were also to use special report cards to measure student progress in character development throughout the year. For all of its methodological ingenuity, the *Course of Study*, harnessed the techniques of progressive pedagogy to transmit the traditional values of punctuality, thrift, industry, and respect for order and property.²⁷

Iowa educators' ideas about character training and their arguments for school reform are significant for what they reveal about American social trends and social reform in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. On the one hand, Iowa education illustrates what historian Robert H. Wiebe has called "the search for order." These developments in a rural state were part of the professionalization of American education, as Iowa educators participated in a national movement to upgrade the standards of their occupation for the twin purposes of enhancing their own status and eliminating outside interference with their work. Developments in Iowa were also related to national demands of administrative progressives for the creation of a more rational educational system. Beginning in the 1890s, American education at all levels—elementary, secondary, and university—was becoming more precise and utilitarian in an effort to prepare students for an interdependent, national urban-industrial society rather than for independent, local, rural-agricultural communities. But Iowa

27. Iowa, *Course of Study*, 1928, 19, 77-102, 110-111, 222-223, 228-231, 321, 493-501.

educators, however, like most American progressives, were more than modernizers. They were "evangelical modernizers" because they consistently linked the development of more rational and efficient institutions with the task of inculcating traditional Protestant moral values.²⁸

From 1890 to 1930 in Iowa the well-ordered school remained, in the minds of most educators, an important agency for training character. Educators advocated and implemented modernization—whether through administrative progressives' methods of upgrading professional standards and improving institutions, or through pedagogical progressives' methods of teaching values—on the assumption that it would make the school a more efficient medium for transmitting the message of industrial virtue. By 1930 considerable progress along these lines had occurred. Governments spent more money on education, the curriculum had become more practical, professionals had established closer state supervision, and more sophisticated and precise methods were available. The state educational establishment disseminated knowledge of these reforms to teachers in professional journals and conventions, reports, and courses of study.

By 1930 Iowa schools were probably better organized and more orderly than they had been, and by attending them pupils were more liable than ever before to learn proper industrial habits. Educators could thus assert with greater confidence that the experience of school attendance trained students in the habits of right conduct upon which the health of the Republic depended. Iowa educators continued to combine the modern techniques of progressive education with the conservative concept of habit formation in order to instill traditional moral values. Iowa teachers in the 1920s, like their predecessors in the 1890s, taught future citizens to view industrial virtue as central to moral life, and to value it for making them useful, productive, and wealthy while it also preserved the social order of state and nation.

28. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1968), xiii-xiv, 57-58, 112, 118-119, 149, 157; Clyde Griffen, "The Progressive Ethos," *The Development of An American Culture*, ed. Stanley Coban and Lorman Ratner (2nd ed.; New York, 1983), 144, 148-150, 168-169, 175-177; John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1917* (New York, 1980), 112; Tyack, *One Best System*, 180, 188-189.

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