

My topic today seems a narrow one, but we will see that there are broad implications for all schools in their relationship with families and with the government, raising questions that educators and policy-makers will be forced to wrestle with in the coming years

how did we get here?

My examples are from Europe and North America; I do not claim any expertise about the history of education in Taiwan or in China or other Asian countries; you will have to make your own applications!

The issues I will be discussing only arose over the past two hundred years. Until the fairly-recent past, what we will call 'popular education' - the schooling of most children - was not a concern of most governments.

Teaching had not emerged as a distinct profession with its own convictions about the goals and the means of education. In the United States, for example, college terms were arranged so that young men could teach school for several months each year to earn money. Young women would teach for a year or two until marriage; my own city, Boston, did not allow married women to teach until the 1950s.

And the great majority of parents had no choices about how their children would be educated, beyond what they provided in the home, or on the farm or workshop, or perhaps an hour a week in their place of worship.

The emergence of the role of the State in relation to popular schooling occurred at different times in different countries. To some degree it was a response to changing economies requiring more instruction in reading and arithmetic. To a greater extent, however, it was a response to concerns about national unity and the loyalty of future citizens. A French statesman in the 1830 said that France would be governed through a policeman and a school teacher in each village.

There were similar concerns in colonial situations in Africa, India, and elsewhere, though generally directed to forming a native elite capable of filling subordinate administrative

positions and loyal to the colonial authorities.

Here we should pause and note a distinction I've been making between *instruction* and *education*. These words are often used inter-changeably in English, but in French, Italian, or Spanish they have very distinct meanings which will be useful for our discussion.

Instruction is the process of teaching skills and knowledge, and occurs with young children in the home and then in schools.

Education is the shaping of the human person, of character and values and loyalties, of what philosophers call a "settled disposition" to think and feel and act in a particular way. While it also starts in the home and may (or may not) continue in school, it is a life-long process and occurs in a wide range of associations. Most notably, religious institutions were traditionally assigned a major role in this process of forming the human person.

In Europe, most popular schooling was under religious auspices until some point in the 20th century, or several decades earlier in the case of France. In Germany, for example, almost all schools were either Protestant or Catholic until the 1940s, and in the Netherlands most elementary and many secondary schools continue to have a religious character. Governments fund these schools with a religious character in almost every country in Western Europe, as they do in Canada as well.

In some countries (England, for example) these schools with a religious character are considered 'public' or government schools, while in others (France, for example) they are considered 'private'; or non-government schools operating under a contract with the government.

In the United States, by contrast, public funding of explicitly religious schools was not until recent years considered legally permitted, although in fact government schools usually had a strong Protestant character until the 1950s.

Along with government funding of these schools with a religious character, as well as of other distinctive schools such as Waldorf and Montessori schools, came a growing pressure that they be conformed to the goals and practices of the government's own schools.

This too-brief sketch of historical developments brings us to the questions I want to raise for you today: **Who should decide the goals and the means employed by schools, especially in the development of character?**

Many countries have systems of assessment of the outcomes of instruction, such as reading ability or familiarity with national history or performance in mathematics. These are usually, though not always, uncontroversial. But what about when government seeks to determine whether schools are forming good citizens, are shaping character?

The question arises dramatically for schools with a distinctive religious or philosophical character, such as a Catholic or a Waldorf school, but I would contend that we need to ask the same question with respect to 'ordinary' schools as well. Recent developments - bitter controversies - in the United States, in particular, show that the mission and character of the schools operated by local government can no longer be taken for granted.

I will come directly to the point by telling you what I have concluded after many years of experience and reflection in government, in academia, and as a parent of seven children and grandparent of thirteen children!

The first requirement would be to strengthen greatly the autonomy of individual schools, which requires that those who work in a school have chosen and have been selected to be there because of strong personal and professional convictions about the distinctive mission of that school. Public policy should respect and protect that distinctiveness of mission.

The mission of such a school should be explicit as to its goals both for instruction and for education, recognizing that how instruction is carried out can itself be rich in the formation of character. (Unfortunately, in too many cases schools now neglect this broader educational goal; they instruct but they do not truly educate).

The second requirement would be that parents be empowered to choose a school based upon its clearly-expressed mission. This implies that there be accessible choices which are distinctively different, and also that parents be helped to think through what they are seeking for their children and which local school will satisfy that, in terms

not only of preparation for careers but also of reinforcing the character and the convictions that the parents have been seeking to form in their children.

The third requirement is that government ensure that no child lack the opportunity (because of an inadequate school or a neglectful family) to develop the qualities needed for productive and meaningful adulthood.

Of course this includes instruction in the skills and knowledge necessary to function in a particular society, as well as in the emerging world economy. (But who determines what a meaningful adulthood is? See the Yeshiva example)

Some European countries allow Waldorf schools, for example, to propose distinctive outcome measures for their pupils; if approved by government authorities as equivalent to those for which other schools are held accountable, they may be used instead of the common assessments.

But what about education for loyalty and character? Should the State be able to set such standards and hold schools accountable for meeting them? Racial acceptance? Trans-gender acceptance? Some countries insist that schools teach that men and women are equal in all respects. What about traditional groups which hold that men and women have distinctive roles and strengths?

Such questions - and I will not attempt any answers - have been raised with increasing urgency by the growing role of government in seeking to oversee the performance of non-government schools. I would contend that they are just as serious for the government schools whose mission we have tended to take for granted.

For too long we have failed to ask how, in a pluralistic democracy, we can make space for different approaches to education while ensuring that every citizen possesses those qualities of character, those loyalties necessary to a healthy and open society.

The old consensus is breaking up, and these are exciting times to be joining in the emerging debates!