
Are government agencies pressuring school administrators to regiment teachers and pupils to a precision characteristic of a military manual or a Ford production schedule?

Military-Industrial Thinking Finally Captures the Schools!

KENNETH S. GOODMAN*

I'M known among my close friends as a reasonably sane guy. But lately I've been having this wild paranoia. I fancy that there is a military-industrial conspiracy to capture control of education in America. Now don't laugh.

I imagine state legislatures imposing an industrial cost accounting system on the schools of their states. I hear initials like PPBS and it seems to me that someone is trying to cost out education on cents per unit of information added per learner.

Thoughts of military sounding "systems approaches" overwhelm my reason. I think that government agencies are pressuring school administrators to regiment teachers and pupils so that time, space, movement, deployment of staff, allocation of materials, decision-making procedures, and authority all take on a precision characteristic of a military manual or a Ford production schedule.

In this dementia I seem to read technological treatises which offer feasibility studies for the replacement of human teachers with computers and technology.

When I sleep I dream of schools turned over to private industry at so much per head. I see long lines of curriculum directors happily waiting to be next to contract out their responsibilities to Xerox, General Learning, or Westinghouse. I see deans of colleges of education marching under the AACTE banner gleefully dismantling their curricula while they build modules and mini-modules. Student teachers turn before my eyes into look-alike, sound-alike teachers who are doing the same thing at the same time in look-alike classrooms peopled with look-alike, sound-alike children.

I thought I had myself convinced that this was all the result of my own anxieties, produced by an undigested late evening off-campus workshop. But then I had a weird hallucination. It was so vivid, I cannot yet make myself believe that it didn't really happen.

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In my "trip" it began with an invitation from NCERD (National Center for Educational Research and Development), a subsidiary of USOE (United States Office of Education), to join a panel of outside "experts" to evaluate the educational labs and R&D centers. We were to recommend whether their efforts were of value and whether they should receive the funds they were seeking for the following year. My panel's area of responsibility was "curriculum."

You will understand how absurd it is for me to believe in the reality of this fantasy when I tell you that NCERD, after organizing a "systems approach" to the whole evaluation process, self-destructed. We were, however, subsequently contacted by a new group, the Task Force on Labs and Centers, National Institute of Education. Mysteriously their address is "Code 600."

The curriculum programs we dealt with ranged from aesthetics to computer programming. Several dealt with math. A number focused on reading and other aspects of language arts. One proposed to spend one mil-

lion dollars in the next five years on children's folklore. (Now that surely couldn't be, since the world hasn't spent that much on studying children's folklore in all time.)

Three of these PPBS's were entire lab or center programs. One stands out even against this surrealistic background: The Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL is its acronym. How could that be real?).

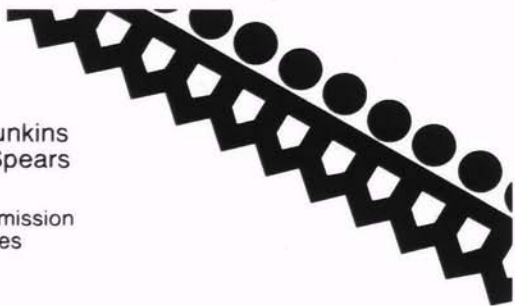
SWRL Has a System

SWRL had just moved into its four million dollar building. SWRL has a system. It is producing a text which describes the documented experience of construction of their building. It applies the "principles of 'construction management' and 'fast tracking' to the planning and construction of a facility dedicated exclusively to the conduct of educational research and development" (SWRL, p. 76). This building cost slightly less than \$100 per square foot of floor space to build. "Sample forms and procedures for every stage from defining the appropriate planning prin-

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ciples to scheduling the move-in will also be provided," the description says (SWRL, p. 76).

SWRL has a system. Its PPBS contains an eight page document, *SWRL Documentation Guidelines*. "If documentation is to be an aid not an aversion, the function and flow of various kinds of documents must be clearly specified" (SWRL Appendix B, p. 1). All forms of documentation from personal correspondence through the technical memorandum to official reporting documents are covered. Every professional paper or article must be reviewed by the division head or director.

SWRL had its inspiration from Systems Development Corporation (SDC) which, like RAND, is a creature of the Pentagon set up as a private corporation to work on Pentagon problems.

At SWRL, R&D activities "are essentially a sequence of trial-revision interactions with modification after each test to successively approximate the consequence being sought" (SWRL, p. 21). Trial-revision interactions must mean something other than trial and error because who would give \$17 million over seven years for trial and error?

Unfortunately the documentation dealing with trial-revision interactions did not clarify the matter. Development of products at SWRL goes through seven stages: (a) *Formulation*, outcomes are identified and strategies for producing methods and materials to achieve outcomes are designed. (b) *Prototype*, potential strategies are tried under contrived but representative conditions. (c) *Component*, a segment is tried in a natural setting. (d) *Product*, combinations of components are tried out and revised until acceptable performance levels are attained. (e) *Installation*, programs are combined with existing school instruction to become operational. (f) *Manufacturing*. (g) *Marketing*. These last two bring a commercial corporation into the picture (SWRL, pp. 22-23). In the case of the kindergarten program, that corporation is Xerox. Xerox owns Ginn and University Microfilms and publishes *My Weekly Reader* and *The School Library Journal*.

The long-range product of SWRL, says

my boggled mind, is the school of Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. In SWRL's new facility they can modify the "prevailing school ecology" and become a developmental bridge from "the present group-based teacher-generated system" to an "individual-based, computer-generated instructional system" (SWRL, p. 42).

The kindergarten program is the only one of SWRL's products, after seven years, which has reached the manufacturing or marketing stages. Those in the installation stage are: Speech Articulation, Language and Concepts for Spanish Speakers, and the Learning Mastery Systems for three reading programs.

The installation phase is a "holding pattern" waiting for manufacturing.

Like the aerospace industry it emulates, SWRL gets additional appropriations every year by asserting its system is economical even when the costs of its products mount higher and higher and never seem to fly.

Says SWRL, their products differ from "extant products not in terms of superficial appearances but in terms of demonstrated effectiveness. Effectiveness is not veiled in mysticism, it is gauged in terms of the utility of a given outcome, the reliability with which the outcome is produced, and the *time and cost* required to produce it" (SWRL, *italics theirs*, p. 7). In my befuddled condition I was glad to hear that SWRL would avoid mysticism. Still it remained a mystery what the cost of any particular product had been up to the current stage of its development.

Kindergarten: Off and Away!

The one product which is flying and for sale is the kindergarten program. SWRL and Xerox have an interesting new marketing technique. "School districts will be assisted in implementation of new products as part of a federally supported incentive program" (SWRL, p. 69). School systems are being given federal funds to install the SWRL program because it is proven "cost-effective." But if that's so why are special funds needed?

The efficiency of SWRL programs is shown in this comment about SWRL's new

"broader area of training systems": "when teacher training and skill requirements are program specific, training for year-long programs can be accomplished very briefly, often in less than a day" (SWRL, p. 70). Riddle: What is it that a teacher can learn to teach in a day that will last a year? Answer: *The SWRL Kindergarten Instructional Concepts and Beginning Reading Program*.

Not only teachers but paraprofessionals, parents, and child tutors from older grades are also easily trained to teach the program.

In my vivid hallucination I saw a California kindergarten room where a Distar-like program was being used by a variety of teachers and tutors. Only the fourth grade tutors were distinguishable from the other instructors. They were smaller. If a pupil failed to respond in the way the program said he should the instructor gave him another chance. Neither teacher, paraprofessional, nor tutor showed any ability to consider why he might not be responding as the program said he should and no instructor chose to vary the sequence or method. The pupils were treated equally, as if they were alike and interchangeable with the same attention span.

The cost-effectiveness of the program was doubtful unless one visualized replacing expensive college-trained teachers with cheaper paraprofessionals or free parent volunteers.

Have You a Manuscript?

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Concern for superficial behavior stands out in this program. So does a confusion of technology with science. Playing school is equivalent with teaching and the whole is reminiscent of a Rube Goldberg device with great amounts of motion and energy being expended for no useful end. How many PMY's (SWRL's unit of staff is a "professional man year") and how many dollars has it taken to turn a kindergarten into a Rube Goldberg cartoon? Only SWRL's computer knows.

My paranoia is almost complete. I'm talking as if all this really exists, really was experienced by me.

SWRL has another marketable package, its Learning Mastery System. This is a manual version of the "knowledge generated by the laboratory in developing computer-based systems to provide instructional management capability" (SWRL, p. 35).

The LMS has been applied so far to three reading programs on the state adoption list in California. It turns them all into rigidly sequenced skill programs starting with phonics and leading eventually to comprehension though the teacher is advised to stop at the phonics if that's all he has time for. My uncontrollable mind now sees a vision from a Greek myth; the bed of Procrustes appears. If the guest is too short his host stretches him, if too tall he cuts off his feet.

SWRL can eliminate the difference between reading programs making them all alike and providing instant quantitative data about how well the developing reader fits the measurements of the Procrustean bed.

SWRL's is not the only system oriented, technology worshipping, dehumanized organization in education today. It is just the epitome, the distillation to a pure form.

Enter: Accountability

SWRL is a prototype for NIE (National Institute of Education) which now has been created to manage all federally funded educational research and development.

The design for NIE was done by Roger Levien from RAND Corporation. The director of NIE is Thomas Glennan who spent

eight years at RAND Corporation and whose degrees are in electrical engineering, industrial management, and economics. As deputy director of OEO, he sponsored the voucher plan which promised a marketing bonanza to franchise school operations.

In state after state, cost accounting based on legally mandated tests and industrial management systems is being required as the basis for part or all of state funding.

Schools in Michigan getting special state money for low achievers in reading must use a management control system starting with pretesting at school entrance. They must guarantee a month's progress in reading for each month a child is in school as measured by "criterion" referenced tests.

In Arizona the law now says any pupil graduating from high school must score above the ninth grade norm on a standardized test.

From Florida to California, legislatures are forcing schools to translate curriculum into lists of behavioral objectives and to provide precisely quantified data on pupils' performance on tests of these trivia which are then equated with learning.

Accountability means that Big Brother is getting his systems ready to watch and control us all from birth to death. Even one's dealings with God are not immune. In Brooklyn the Catholic Diocese has set up a system of accountability for priests. The system will furnish the priest and his superiors with information on his performance, improve his effectiveness, and be the basis for transfers, reassignments, and special ministries (George Dogan, *New York Times*, May 28, 1972, quoted in *Council-Grants*, September 1972).

One could visualize eventually the priest like the teacher being replaced by "computer generated systems."

What would you think of a computer terminal confessional? It would certainly eliminate the human variance the priest introduces in dealing with sin. And it could remind a confessor of all his past sins in specific detail.

I've met Big Brother in education. His name is SAM (Student Achievement Moni-

toring). The state superintendent in Michigan has great hopes for SAM. If all goes well, long before 1984 one may have SAM report exactly what performance criteria any child in Michigan (or even further if other states employ SAM) has mastered in any school subject up to that very day.

To accomplish this the schools in Michigan are being given lists of sequenced skills in each subject which must be mastered each year. Reading, Language Arts, English, all will be treated the same. Data will be fed into the computer on a continuous basis. SAM will know and because SAM will know all children will master skills or at least that's the way the theory goes.

My paranoia has produced a sense of outrage that I fancy is shared by many. I see an opposition to the military-industrial cabal forming.

I have another dream and in it I see educationists, academicians, teachers, parents, and kids massing for a huge demonstration of resistance. There's a philosopher with a sign which reads, "Where have all the values gone?"

Here comes a group of parents marching under a banner that says, "The Child Buyer can't have our children. They're not for sale!"

Following is the whole faculty of a public school whose sign says: "The Open School Shall Overcome."

But stretching as far as the eye can see are kids of every size and shape and color. No two are the same. A disadvantaged group stops to burn their Hostess Twinkies sold by ITT as cost-effective and nutritionally balanced to the OEO School Breakfast Program. And still more thousands of kids march along, joyfully out of step, and as they march they shout, "Power to the Pupils!"

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