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HOW DEWEY LOST:

The Victory of David Snedden and Social Efficiency in the Reform of American Education

In a book about the role of pragmatism in modernization, this paper provides a look at one alternative set of ideas – social efficiency – which competed quite successfully with John Dewey's pragmatic vision for the heart of American education. I approach this analysis as a sociologically oriented historian rather than as a philosopher. From this perspective, the contest over competing visions of schooling is not judged according to the rules that govern formal debate, such as rigorous logic and solid evidence. Instead, reform ideas win or lose according to the way they resonate with a particular social context, attract or repel particular constituencies, and respond to the social problems that are seen as most salient at the time. Ironically, the most successful reform ideas, as they become part of the natural landscape of schooling, tend to lose their connection to the original author and to disappear from view. In contrast, losing ideas tend to remain identified with their creator and preserve their visibility, precisely because they are still outside the walls of the school trying to find a way in. In this chapter I explore a particular debate in the history of American education that demonstrates some of these characteristics of educational ideas in school reform. Along the way, this analysis tries to sort out why Dewey, America's most enduringly visible educational thinker, has had so little impact on the way schools work.

In 1977, the American academic journal *Curriculum Inquiry* devoted most of its spring issue to a debate about liberal and vocational education between John Dewey and David Snedden that took place 60 years earlier. The issue included Snedden's 1914 speech on the subject to the National Education Association and a series of pieces that were published in *The New Republic*[1] in the following year, including two articles by Dewey, Snedden's response, and Dewey's counter; Walter H. Drost, Snedden's biographer, provided an analysis of the issues in the debate. If readers of the journal were wondering why it was devoting all this space to the subject, an editorial explained that the concerns raised on both sides of the debate were emerging once again in the 1970s with the discussion of the latest incarnation of vocationalism known as "career education."

To the contemporary eye, however, this does not look like much of a debate. Dewey is arguably America's greatest philosopher, educational thinker, and public intellectual, whereas Snedden is now largely forgotten. As the latter's biographer, Drost needed to revive the debate with Dewey in order to introduce Snedden to a modern audience and establish him as a once credible figure in the field. And when we read the debate today, Snedden's ideas come across as educationally narrow,

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politically conservative, and quaint. He argues that "social economy" calls for a system of vocational education that prepares the "rank and file" to become efficient "producers," asserting that this form of schooling needs to be separated from liberal education, which – although its purposes "are as yet shrouded in the clouds of mysticism" – may still be useful for those who are going to be "utilizers." In contrast, Dewey's ideas seem to resonate better with current political, social, and educational thinking. He charges that Snedden's system of "narrow trade training" leads to "social predestination" and argues instead for a broad vision of vocational education that has "as its supreme regard the development of such intelligent initiative, ingenuity and executive capacity as shall make workers, as far as may be, the masters of their own industrial fate."

Dewey had the last word in the debate in *The New Republic*, and reading both sides today, he comes away from the exchange as the clear winner on points. But if Dewey won the debate, it was Snedden who won the fight to set the broader aims of American education in the twentieth century. The debate was followed quickly by two events that set the tone for educational system for the next 100 years – the passage of the *Smith-Hughes Act* (1917), establishing a federal program of support for vocational education, and the issuance of the NEA report, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (1918). Both documents reflected key elements of the social efficiency vision that Snedden espoused and Dewey detested. Snedden's vision has shaped the practice of schooling in the United States ever since, whereas Dewey's more liberal vision has persisted primarily in the rhetoric of educators.

In this paper I seek to answer the question, How could someone as utterly forgettable as David Snedden trounce the great John Dewey in the contest to define the shape and purpose of American education? Drost is circumspect in judging his subject, but two reviewers of his biography of Snedden are less cautious in assessing the educator's stature. Willis Rudy (1968, p. 171) put it this way: "David Snedden, professor of educational administration, emerges from these pages as the very prototype of the stock pedagogue-philistine figure of modern times, half-educated, anti-intellectual, instinctively hostile to humanistic culture." Robert L. Church (1969, p. 394) reviewed the Drost book in conjunction with a biography of Edward L. Thorndike titled *The Sane Positivist*, and in his view, "If Thorndike was a 'sane positivist,' perhaps we should brand David Snedden an 'insane' one."

I begin with a review of the major issues in Snedden's debate with Dewey. Then I examine his career in the context of the larger educational reform movement for social efficiency and his growing marginalization just at the point when this movement emerged triumphant. Since he is the unfamiliar character in the story, I focus my attention primarily on him rather than the world-famous Dewey. Finally, I explore what we can learn about the history of school reform in the United States from the short-lived fame and lasting impact of a figure like Snedden. I close with an analysis of why ideas like Dewey's have more impact on educational thought than educational practice, and why the ideas of a figure like Snedden can win and then disappear into the grammar of schooling, leaving the author largely forgotten.

THE SNEDDEN-DEWEY DEBATE

The exchange in *The New Republic* was triggered by an earlier debate about the meaning of liberal and vocational education that took place between Snedden and William C. Bagley at the 52nd annual meeting of the National Education Association. At that point (July, 1914) Snedden was Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts, while Bagley was a professor of education at University of Illinois. The debate arose from the educational implications of the emergence in the early twentieth century of the United States as a world economic power and its growing competition with Germany.

Snedden began his speech stating that the world was changing and education must change with it. Under these conditions, we could no longer rely on a general or liberal education, which was grounded in custom and a prescientific belief in its usefulness that bordered on "mysticism":

> But in education the ages of faith are coming to an end and the age of science is drawing on. Education henceforth can rest on a basis of custom and dogma hardly more than can medicine, engineering, agriculture, and war. The public is forcing the demand for a more purposeful, a more scientific, and a more efficient liberal education in the schools. (Snedden, 1914, p. 151)

Even more important, the speaker said the public demanded a scientific form of vocational education, which he initially defined as "some form of education designed to equip a young person for a recognized calling" (p. 154). Later on Snedden developed a more telling distinction between the liberal and the vocational:

> It is the writer's conviction that the most useful definition of liberal education now available is that which defines it primarily in terms of education toward higher utilization. Man stands, to the world about him, in a twofold relationship. He is a producer of utilities on the one hand, and on the other, for his own growth and development, he must utilize utilities. That education which trains him to be a producer is vocational education. That education which trains him to be a good utilizer, in the social sense of that term, is liberal education. (p. 157)

For students in the younger grades, a more efficient form of liberal education is appropriate, and this is also true for a small number of older students "who have the time and the inclination" (the future utilizers). But for the large majority of students between the ages of 14 and 20 (those who will become producers), the focus should be on vocational education. Since the purposes of vocational education differ greatly from those of liberal education, so too must the organizational form and curriculum content. Vocational preparation needs to take place in separate schools, which "must, to a large extent, reproduce practical processes, must give the pupil many hours of each working day in actual practical work, and must closely correlate theoretical instruction to this practical work." As a result, "The vocational school should divest itself as completely as possible of the academic atmosphere, and should reproduce as fully as possible the atmosphere of

economic endeavor in the field for which it trains." In addition, "the pedagogical methods to be employed must be those involving concentration, painstaking application to detail, and continuity of purpose," and these need to be precisely tailored to the skill demands of each occupational specialty (p. 160).

In his response, Bagley rejected both Snedden's diagnosis of the problem with education and his prescription for a cure. Bagley (1914) defended traditional liberal education against the charges made by his opponent, arguing that "The evidence for these sweeping indictments has, as far as I know, never been presented" (p. 162), and he asserted that Snedden's distinction between education for production and utilization merely reproduced the old discredited distinction between education for gentlemen of leisure and education for workers. At the end he warned about "the danger of social stratification...inherent in separate vocational schools" (p. 170).

When this debate took place, Dewey had been in the midst of thinking about the relation between education and economy in the context of contemporary competition between the United States and Germany. He had just completed a series of lectures published in 1915 as *German Philosophy and Politics*, and he was in the process of writing his magnum opus, *Democracy and Education* (1916). As a result he felt the need to develop his own response to Snedden, one that did not incorporate Bagley's academic essentialism, his defense of traditional liberal education, and his suspicion of all kinds of progressive educational reform. So he wrote a series of two articles for *The New Republic* on industrial education. The discussion, which never referred to Snedden by name, was relatively mild and indirect, including a long and opaque discursus on the minutia of a law promoting vocational education in Indiana. He made two main arguments against the vision of vocationalism promoted by people like Snedden: This form of education was politically slanted toward the interests of manufacturers, and it was impractical in application. Dewey (1914/1977) noted that though manufacturers had long provided special skill training to their employees,

> It is natural that employers should be desirous of shifting the burden of their preparation to the public tax-levy. There is every reason why the community should not permit them to do so.... [E]very ground of public policy protests against any use of the public school system which takes for granted the perpetuity of the existing industrial regime, and whose inevitable effect is to perpetuate it, with all its antagonisms of employers and employed, producer and consumer. (1914/1977, p. 55)

In addition he noted that the very factors that led to the destruction of the apprenticeship system – particularly "the mobility of the laboring population from one mode of machine work to another" (p. 56) – would also make vocational training in specific job skills impractical.

Snedden wrote a long letter in response to Dewey's argument that was published in May of 1915, three months after Dewey's second article. He sounded a bit puzzled and hurt to find Dewey disagreeing with him:

> We have...reconciled ourselves to the endless misrepresentations of numerous reactionaries and of the beneficiaries of vested educational

> interests and traditions. But to find Dr. Dewey apparently giving aid and comfort to the opponents of a broader, richer and more effective program of education, and apparently misapprehending the motives of many of those who advocate the extension of vocational education in schools designed for that purpose, is discouraging. (Snedden, 1915/1977, p. 33)

Following a pattern he pursued throughout his career when he encountered opposition to his proposals, he responded by patiently repeating his points and redefining concepts in his own terms without ever engaging the more fundamental critiques of his opponent. Ignoring Dewey's point about the social functions of vocational education in a capitalist economy, he restated his own view that "Vocational education is, irreducibly and without unnecessary mystification, education for the pursuit of an occupation" (p. 34). He went on to say: "Now, many of us have been forced, and often reluctantly, to the conclusion that if we are to have vocational education for the rank and file of our youth as well as for the favored classes, we shall be obliged to provide special vocational schools for this purpose..." (p. 35).

Dewey's reply was uncharacteristically blunt and forceful in rejecting Snedden's arguments, as he deepened and clarified his own vision of vocationalism. It is worth quoting at length, since it defines the stark contrast between the two visions, a contrast that Dewey (1915/1977) saw much more clearly than his befuddled opponent:

> I would go farther than he is apparently willing to go in holding that education should be vocational, but in the name of a genuinely vocational education I object to the identification of vocation with such trades as can be learned before the age of, say, eighteen or twenty; and to the identification of education with acquisition of specialized skill in the management of machines at the expense of an industrial intelligence based on science and a knowledge of social problems and conditions. I object to regarding as vocational education any training which does not have as its supreme regard the development of such intelligent initiative, ingenuity and executive capacity as shall make workers, as far as may be, the masters of their own industrial fate. I have my doubts about theological predestination, but at all events that dogma assigned predestinating power to an omniscient being; and I am utterly opposed to giving the power of social predestination, by means of narrow trade-training, to any group of fallible men, no matter how well intentioned they may be....
>
> Dr. Snedden's criticisms of my articles seem to me couched in such general terms as not to touch their specific contentions. I argued that a separation of trade education and general education of youth has the inevitable tendency to make both kinds of training narrower, less significant and less effective than the schooling in which the material of traditional education is reorganized to utilize the industrial subject matter – active, scientific and social – of the present-day environment. Dr. Snedden would come nearer to meeting my

> points if he would indicate how such a separation is going to make education "broader, richer and more effective"....
>
> Apart from light on such specific questions, I am regretfully forced to the conclusion that the difference between us is not so much narrowly educational as it is profoundly political and social. The kind of vocational education in which I am interested is not one which will "adapt" workers to the existing industrial regime; I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that. It seems to me that the business of all who would not be educational time-servers is to resist every move in this direction, and to strive for a kind of vocational education which will first alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it. (pp. 38-39)[2]

Understandably, perhaps, Snedden never responded to this final blast, so Dewey had the last word in the debate. His statement remains to this day the most insightful and compelling critique of the social efficiency movement. But Dewey's rejoinder had no apparent effect on Snedden, who continued making the same case for a socially efficient and vocationally useful form of education throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the only difference being that his arguments grew increasingly extreme and his influence within education grew increasingly weak. More significantly, however, Dewey's critique of social efficiency also had no significant effect on the direction of American public education, which by the early 1920s was lining up solidly behind the social efficiency vision. Herbert Kliebard (1987, p. 149) put it this way, in commenting on the long-term outcome of the debate, "Needless to say, Snedden's version with its emphasis on occupational skill training was the ultimate victor in terms of what vocational education became, while Dewey's 'industrial intelligence' in the sense of an acute awareness of what makes an industrial society tick is almost nowhere to be found." In short, the administrative progressive vision of David Snedden, with its focus on social efficiency and educational utility, defeated the alternative progressive vision of John Dewey, with its focus on social justice and educational engagement.

ADMINISTRATIVE VS. PEDAGOGICAL PROGRESSIVES

The positions taken by Snedden and Dewey in this debate capture the core of the two central tendencies within the larger movement for progressive education in the United States in the early twentieth century. David Tyack has labeled these strands administrative progressivism and pedagogical progressivism. What the two had in common was a strong distaste for the traditional school curriculum and a belief in the need for developmentally appropriate schooling. But the differences between them were stark and fundamental.

On the one hand, the administrative progressives (Snedden's group) primarily focused on making education socially useful for the emerging social conditions in twentieth century America, which included a highly differentiated industrial economy and a large urban population stratified by class and ethnicity. They argued that these conditions required the United States to abandon its old form of general education for citizens within the old structure of the common school in

favor of a new form of education for workers in a newly stratified structure of secondary schooling. This would call for using the tools of science to create distinct forms of curriculum for students with different levels of intelligence and different social trajectories, so they could become productive workers in the wide variety of occupations that characterized the new economy. The watchwords for the administrative progressives were utility and social efficiency, and their central practical legacy for the workings of American schools included the structure of curriculum tracking in secondary schools, the tailoring of instruction to the academic skills and social trajectories of individual students, the use of standardized testing for student placement, and the shift from purely academic studies to those of a more practical nature. Their main ideological legacy was the now-canonical utilitarian rationale for education, which meant seeing education as a means to solve major social problems, particularly to maintain social order and promote economic growth. Their view of education remains the dominant view in early twenty-first century America, that education is a solid social investment in the social and human capital needed for a healthy society and productive economy.

The intellectual foundations for the administrative progressives were laid by two psychologists, Edward L. Thorndike and G. Stanley Hall. Thorndike developed an extraordinarily influential theory of learning that overthrew the theory known as faculty psychology, which had long framed education thinking. Instead of viewing curriculum as a medium for developing mental faculties, which could then be transferred to other content areas, he argued that curriculum constituted the substance of learning since the transferability of knowledge was a myth. This meant that it no longer made sense to pursue general liberal education through the study of Latin or poetry or mathematics; instead educators needed to design particular curricula to match the abilities and future occupational roles of particular students. Hall, in turn, led the child study movement, which spelled out the way learning capacities develop gradually as students grow older, which meant that curriculum not only had to be adapted to abilities and jobs but also to what was appropriate for the student at a given stage of development. However, most of the leaders of the administrative progressives were not researchers and thinkers but were rather practically-minded educational administrators and reform entrepreneurs, like Snedden, Ellwood P. Cubberley, Clarence D. Kingsley, Charles A. Prosser, Ross L. Finney, Edward A. Ross, Charles H. Judd, Charles C. Peters, Leonard Ayres, W. W. Charters, and John Franklin Bobbitt.

In contrast to the focus of people like Snedden on creating a differentiated and socially useful school curriculum, Dewey and the pedagogical progressives focused primarily on developing a new process of teaching and learning in the classroom. They sought to ground learning in the needs and interests and developmental capacities of the individual student; to organize this kind of child-centered instruction around the principle of stimulating the student's natural desire to learn about the world through an active engagement in discovery in the classroom; to focus on learning to learn rather than learning specific bodies of knowledge; to involve students in self-directed projects and activities instead of drilling them on content; and to develop a classroom process that modeled and promoted values of community, cooperation, justice, and democracy. If the central

vision of education promoted by the administrative progressives was utilitarian and socially efficient, the central vision of the pedagogical progressives was romantic and naturalistic. All children can learn because learning is natural; and a good system of education not only seeks to stimulate the learning process but deliberately tries to get out of the way of student learning. The complaints that the pedagogues had about their administrative counterparts in the progressive movement were that the stratified and vocationalized curriculum promoted by the latter would stifle the student's urge to learn, block student access to a broad range of educational and social opportunities, and thereby reproduce rather than challenge the existing social structure.

The pedagogical progressives were a much smaller group than their counterparts. Dewey was the movement's dominant theorist, promoter, and spokesperson, even though he later became of critic of what he saw as some of its excesses. Unlike many of his followers, he saw education as an effort to create a balance between "the child and the curriculum" (in the words of one of his most famous essays), arguing that learning is a journey of inquiry and discovery but that it also requires a curricular map. Yet he frequently abandoned this balanced perspective in his eagerness to attack the traditional curriculum and the new curriculum-driven education of the administrative progressives. Other intellectual influences on the pedagogical progressives included Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Froebel, Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Johan Herbart. Primary actors in the movement itself were people like William Heard Kilpatrick, George S. Counts, Harold O. Rugg, and Boyd J. Bode.

DAVID SNEDDEN AND EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL EFFICIENCY

Walter Drost captures the central story of Snedden's career in the title of his biography of the man, *David Snedden and Education for Social Efficiency*.[3] In this section I sketch the course of Snedden's career as the prime proponent of social efficiency.

Born in 1868, Snedden grew up on a modest ranch in northern California, where he helped herd cattle and was educated in a one-room log schoolhouse. He attended St. Vincent's college in Los Angeles (later Loyola University) and took a position as an elementary teacher in 1889. In short order he became an elementary principal and then high school principal before quitting to pursue a second bachelor's degree in education at Stanford University in 1895 (just four years after Stanford opened). After graduating two years later, he took a position as a high school principal and superintendent in Paso Robles, California. In 1900 he addressed the Stanford Alumni Association and sufficiently impressed President David Starr Jordan that the latter offered to hire him as a professor of education if he would first earn a master's degree. He did so at Teachers College and then returned to teach at Stanford until 1905, when he went back to TC to pursue a doctorate.

Snedden's interest in education for social efficiency appeared quite early in his career. As a teacher in the early 1890s, he avidly read the works of Herbert Spencer, which he acknowledged in his memoirs as having "laid the groundwork

for [his] subsequent thinking" (Snedden, 1949, p. 12). As a student at Stanford, his strongest connection was with Edward A. Ross, a sociologist who at the time was developing the ideas for his most influential book, published in 1900, called *Social Control*. From these two thinkers, he drew a rather literal understanding of their central constructs – social Darwinism and social control – which shaped all of his later work as an educational reformer. Two early pieces of writing in particular show these influences and set the tone for his later work: his 1900 speech at Stanford and his 1906 doctoral dissertation at Teachers College.

His address to the alumni was titled, "The Schools of the Rank and File." As he told the audience, he wanted to talk with them about public education:

> I want especially to consider that education as it affects the rank and file of society; for it we are right in thinking that training for leadership will largely become the function of the university, it still remains true that the most careful consideration must be given to those who will do duty in the ranks, who will follow, not lead. (Snedden, 1900, pp. 23-24)

Noting that the rapid expansion of the high school at the start of the twentieth century meant that it "has ceased to be for the leisure class alone," he went on to explain what character this evolving institution should now assume:

> And in the nature of our civilization to-day there are the strongest reasons why the system of public education should increasingly continue to absorb, not only training for culture's sake, but that utilitarian training which looks to individual efficiency in the world of work. (p. 24)

If this was the direction the high school should head, then the curriculum would need a complete transformation. Instead of focusing on the classics, the new foundation of education would be vocational training for the many instead of an education in high culture for the few. In this new educational order, traditional school pursuits – such as the study of classical languages, math, science, and English literature – were no long useful for most students. While acknowledging that "these subjects may represent the best preparation for higher education," he concludes that "the demand is general for education more nearly related to the necessities of active life, and, as far as the ordinary ranks of society are concerned, I am unable to see that the demand is a mistaken one" (p. 33).

This speech launched Snedden's career as an educational reformer and education professor, winning him a job on the Stanford faculty and the opportunity to pursue a doctorate at Teachers College. He completed his doctoral program in 12 months (this was common at the time, but it does resonate with Willis's depiction of him as "half-educated"), after writing a dissertation on juvenile reform schools. If his Stanford speech worked out the social efficiency theme in his future work, the dissertation connected that with the social control theme. For Snedden did not see reform schools as a marginal educational enterprise for delinquent youth; instead, he saw them as a model for the new schools of the rank and file. Unlike traditional schools, reform schools focused on a troubled subset of the population rather than the heterogeneous whole; they provided targeted training in particular occupational skills for these students rather than a general liberal

education; they did so in a highly structured manner, based on scientific placement in the right program; and their educational process emphasized the discipline of the workplace. If only schools in general would adopt this mix of differentiated vocational skill training and social discipline.

His dissertation won him an appointment at Teachers College as adjunct professor of educational administration, which he held until 1909 when he assumed the newly created position as Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts. This was the role that brought Snedden to national prominence as an educational reformer. He came in with a strong mandate to create a separate system of vocational schools in the state, following on the recommendation of the Douglas Commission, and he pursued this goal with zeal.

Snedden immediately hired his former student at Teachers College, Charles A. Prosser, as deputy commissioner for industrial education. Like Snedden, Prosser was a former superintendent with no experience in vocational education, but that did not deter the two of them from pushing hard to establish the kind of distinctive vocational schools that Snedden had been arguing for, unburdened by the traditional baggage of general liberal education and unattached to regular high schools. Once his career was launched by Snedden, Prosser became a leading figure in the administrative progressives, serving as the national high priest of American vocational education. In 1912, he resigned his post in Massachusetts to become the full-time executive director of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NSPIE). He almost single-handedly wrote the landmark federal legislation that established the aims and funding for a national system of vocational education, the *Smith-Hughes Act* (1917), and he served as the first executive director of the new Federal Board of Vocational Education. He spent the remainder of his career as the director of the Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis, a privately funded vocational school designed to be a model for the rest of the country (Wirth, 1972).

As Commissioner, Snedden appointed another figure who became a national leader of the administrative progressives, Clarence Darwin Kingsley, assigning him in 1912 to be the board's agent for high schools. Kingsley was a mathematics teacher at the New York Manual Training School who became a leader in the New York High School Teachers Association. He first gained national visibility as the chair of the NEA Committee of Nine on the Articulation of High School and College, and had just been selected as general chair of the NEA Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE). Under Snedden's direction, Kingsley had the opportunity in Massachusetts to apply some of the social efficiency ideas that eventually became embodied in the CRSE's influential 1918 report, *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education.*

In 1916, a year after his debate with Dewey, Snedden returned to Teachers College as a professor of vocational education and educational sociology, and he remained there until his retirement in 1935. He had been writing and speaking about social efficiency in education during his term as Commissioner, but his productivity went up substantially upon coming back to Teachers College. Over the course of his career, Snedden wrote 25 books. Among his more prominent works were: *The Problem of Vocational Education* (1910); *Problems of Secondary*

Education (1917); *Vocational Education* (1920); *Educational Sociology* (1922); *Foundations of Curricula* (1927a); *What's Wrong with American Education* (1927b); and *Towards Better Educations* (1931). In addition, he published a large number of journal articles, at the rate of a half dozen or more per year, most often in *Teachers College Record*, *Journal of Educational Sociology*, or *School and Society*. On top of this, he was a tireless speaker, who spent as many as six days a week speaking to groups of educators about vocational education, social efficiency, and the need for applying science to the construction of effective curriculum. Most of these speeches ended up in print in one of his books or journal articles.

As the leader of the social efficiency wing of the progressive movement, Snedden exerted a powerful influence on the reform process in American education. In part this was the result of his energetic efforts to get out the message, both in person and in print. But his effectiveness was the result of more than his energy and productivity. He was also remarkably well placed to exert an impact on schooling. He had the dual credibility that came from being both an accomplished practitioner and a prolific academic. As an experienced teacher, superintendent, and state commissioner, he could speak to other educators as a knowledgeable insider and fellow reformer in the trenches. And as a professor at Teachers College, he occupied the most prominent pulpit in the progressive movement, both wings of which often seemed to be a wholly owned subsidiary of this institution. Most of the notable administrative and pedagogical progressives in the first half of the twentieth century either taught at TC or were educated there. In addition, Snedden directly launched the careers of a number of leading administrative progressives, including Prosser and Kingsley, and his acolytes extended well beyond his immediate protégés because of the extensive reach of his teaching, speaking, and writing.

THE TRIUMPH OF SOCIAL EFFICIENCY REFORM

The extent of Snedden's influence makes it striking to observe how quickly this influence began to fade in the 1920s and 1930s. Ironically, the downturn began with the two most signal accomplishments of the administrative progressives – the passage of the *Smith-Hughes Act* in 1917 and the issuance of the *Cardinal Principles* report in 1918, both written by his own protégés.

The *Smith-Hughes Act* established vocational education as a national force in American education, with federal funding and with a clear definition of vocationalism that matched the social efficiency agenda. As head of the industrial education organization, Prosser wrote the text of the law and ushered it through the political minefields in Washington. Overall, there was close fit between the ideas of Snedden and Prosser and the terms of the Act. Funds only would go to support vocational training classes, leaving states and districts to pick up the cost of general education, and half of the time in vocational classes needed to spent doing "practical work on a useful or productive basis" (Wirth, 1972, p. 369). Prosser immediately became the first director of the new Federal Board of Vocational Education, and in 1918 Snedden was elected president of the former NSPIE, now

renamed the National Society for Vocational Education. What a triumph for the two men most identified with this issue.

One year later, the National Education Association's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, which was chaired by Kingsley, issued *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (Commission, 1918). The Commission took the central tenets of social efficiency and proposed them as the defining principles for all of American education. At the very beginning, the report announced its basic themes: Schools exist to help individuals adapt to the needs of society; as society becomes more complex, schools must transform themselves accordingly; and in this way they will help citizens develop the socially needed qualities of "intelligence and efficiency."

This focus on social efficiency, however, did not deter the authors from drawing on political rhetoric to support their position. In a 12,000 word report, they use the terms "democracy" or "democratic" no fewer than 40 times. But what did they mean by democracy? They spelled this out in two statements in bold-faced type in a section called "The Goal of Education in a Democracy."

> The purpose of democracy is so to organize society that each member may develop his personality primarily through activities designed for the well-being of his fellow members and of society as a whole....
>
> Consequently, education in a democracy, both within and without the school, should develop in each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits, and powers whereby he will find his place and use that place to shape both himself and society toward ever nobler ends. (Commission, 1918, p. 3)

So democracy is about organizing individuals for the benefit of society, and education is about readying individuals to assume their proper place in that society. This is as crisp a definition as one can find for socially efficient education.
The Commission (1918) follows up on this statement of principles to spell out the implications for the high school curriculum:

> This commission, therefore, regards the following as the main objectives of education: 1. Health. 2. Command of fundamental processes. 3. Worthy home membership. 4. Vocation. 6. Citizenship. 6. Worthy use of leisure. 7. Ethical character. (p. 5)

In comparison with Horace Mann's earlier grand vision of schooling for the republic, we have a list of useful functions that schools can serve for society, only one of which focuses on citizenship. Furthermore, this list confines the rich array of liberal arts subjects to a single category; the authors give it the dumbed-down and dismissive title, "command of fundamental processes;" and they assign it a parallel position with such mundane educational objectives as "worthy home membership" and "worthy use of leisure."

Later in the report, the Commission (1918) spells out an important implication of their vision of secondary education. Not only must the curriculum be expanded radically beyond the academic confines of the Committee of Ten's vision, but it

must also be sharply differentiated if it is going to meet the needs of a differentiated occupational structure:

> The work of the senior high school should be organized into differentiated curriculums. The range of such curriculums should be as wide as the school can offer effectively. The basis of differentiation should be; in the broad sense of the term, vocational, thus justifying the names commonly given, such as agricultural, business, clerical, industrial, fine-arts, and household-arts curriculums. Provision should be made also for those having distinctively academic interests and needs. (p. 16)

The commission was explaining that their call for a socially efficient education in practice meant vocationalism, with the vocational skills required by the job market driving the curriculum and slicing it into segments based on the specific jobs toward which students are heading. Any leftover space in the curriculum could then be used for "those having distinctively academic interests and needs."

These two texts – a federal law and an educational policy document, approved back to back at the close of the First World War – established the dominance of the social efficiency agenda in American education. Between them they asserted that utility and efficiency were at the heart of the school system, whose primary purpose now was to prepare people to become productive workers, which called for a curriculum that was stratified by the abilities and social trajectories of individual students.[4]

A TURNING POINT IN SNEDDEN'S INFLUENCE IN THE SOCIAL EFFICIENCY MOVEMENT

At the moment of greatest triumph for his social efficiency agenda, David Snedden experienced first disappointment and then a gradual decline in his influence. The *Smith-Hughes Act* was a very close representation of the position that he and Prosser had been taking about vocational education. But there was one annoying way in which it strayed from the party line. In order to gain buy-in from all of the necessary political constituencies, Prosser had to abandon the Snedden mandate for rigid separation between vocational and general education; the Act gave states discretion about whether to combine or separate administration of these two programs. Since the text was so clear in restricting funding to the "practical work" of vocational instruction and since Prosser was the director of the federal agency running the program, this would not seem to have made much of a difference. But still it violated Snedden's principle of clear separation.

The *Cardinal Principles Report*, however, elevated the mingling of vocational and general education into a defining component of the new secondary education. True, the report was unwavering in its support of the central ideas of social efficiency – it vocationalized the purpose of the high school and marginalized liberal education within this institution – but it came down on the wrong side of the debate about separate schools for vocational and general education. Kingsley and the commission endorsed the principle of the differentiated comprehensive high

school, in which students could pursue a variety of curriculum tracks within the same institution.

This was too much for Snedden. In 1919 he published a response to the report in the educational journal, *School and Society*. He started out with some backhanded compliments to Kingsley and the commission for their "partially successful endeavors to find valid aims for secondary education somewhere else...than in some mystic principles of 'character,' self-realization,' or 'disciplined mind'..." (Snedden, 1919, p. 519). But then he got to the point: "In the estimation of this writer the report almost completely misses the significance of the contemporary movement for the extension of vocational education through schools" (p. 521). The problem, of course, was the fact that the report endorsed the indiscriminant mingling of vocational and liberal education in the same institution. "Is this to be interpreted as meaning that the committee would ban all public school vocational education that could not conveniently be brought within its 'comprehensive high school?'" he asked (p. 523) He then proceeded to repeat his standard rationale for the separate vocational school aimed solely at the preparation of "efficient producers" (p. 526).

In his rejoinder, Kingsley restated a point that was quite apparent in the report: that the Commission was strongly in favor of encouraging vocational education and curriculum differentiation within secondary education. But he made an interesting link between these central educational elements in the reorganized high school and the political need for interaction between students in the different program tracks. He quoted one line from the report that speaks to this directly: "Above all, the greater the differentiation in studies, the more important becomes the social mingling of pupils pursuing different curriculums." He went on to say:

> it holds that the interests of American society are best served when these vocational undertakings are conducted in schools where the public mingle freely with those in other curriculums and where the interrelations of different vocational groups find expression in the school itself. (Kingsley, 1919, p. 20)

This exchange elucidates the nature of the divide that emerged between Snedden and the rest of the administrative progressives with the emergence of the CRSE report and that only widened during the 1920s and 1930s. It shows Snedden as the ideologue of social efficiency, insisting on doctrinal purity beyond reason, whereas people like Kingsley demonstrated more sensitivity to what it would take, both politically and fiscally, to actually implement social efficiency within the American educational system. What Kingsley and others recognized was that the rigidly separate vocational school for the rank and file was simply not going to sell in the politics of American education. For one thing, there was the practical issue that building a separate system of vocational high schools would be prohibitively expensive when there were already high schools that could incorporate the vocational track within their programs.

More important, as Kingsley's response to Snedden demonstrates, he and the other commission members realized that a physical separation between vocational and liberal education students would be politically untenable, since it would look

too much like what Snedden explicitly wanted it to be – a way of segregating education by social class into two systems of schools, one for leaders and another for followers. There was simply too much opposition to such an overtly undemocratic form of education, not just from liberals like John Dewey, but more consequentially from the nascent labor movement, which wanted an education that might help workers advance into the skilled crafts but was opposed to a stratified system that would block mobility out of the working class. The vocationalized and tracked comprehensive high school was a compromise institution that both labor and the more realistic administrative progressive leaders could live with. The way the *Cardinal Principles* report wove together the themes of social efficiency and democracy provided the rhetorical structure for this compromise. It is this approach that allowed the social efficiency strand of the progressive movement to have such a lasting impact on goals and curricular organization of American education, not Snedden's adamant insistence on pursuing his own vision of schooling that would make the rank and file into efficient producers.

THE EMERGENCE OF SNEDDEN THE STRANGE

By the early 1920s, Snedden was beginning to lose connection with his own movement. Not only was Kingsley going his own way, with great success, but even the vocational educators, his most devoted following, were backing off from him. Drost (1967, p. 157) suggests that the members of the National Society for Vocational Education, who elected him president in 1918 and again in 1919, did so less as a vote of confidence in his ideas than as recognition for his past efforts on behalf of their cause. By then, they were increasingly comfortable with the CRSE's vision, which normalized vocational education within the comprehensive high school instead of isolating it in the vocational-school ghetto. Since Dewey's attack, Snedden had been the object of criticism from the pedagogical progressives, but now critics were emerging from educational practice as well. In 1921, for example, a New Hampshire school trustee spoke out sharply against a tendency within school reform that he called "Sneddenism." "'Unskilled minds,' he said, were being 'crammed with knowledge of facts and processes' when 'trained brains' were needed, and they alone would find a useful place in society" (Drost, 1967, pp. 182-183).

If anything, the threat of marginalization spurred Snedden to ever greater feats of speech-making and publication, producing a flood of work that in retrospect made him seem not so much prolific, which he had always been, but incontinent.[5] His central themes remained unchanged from his 1900 "rank and file" speech – this was not a man whose ideas evolved over time – but he expressed these themes in ways that became increasingly extreme and downright strange.

The first step in this direction was to take the notion of specialized vocational education into increasingly narrower channels. In his 1920 book, *Vocational Education*, he argued, again in response to the *Cardinal Principles* report, that

> From the psychological point of view there is not the slightest reason why suitably qualified persons should not, through special schools, be trained effectively for such vocations as tailoring, jewelry salesmanship, poultry

> farming, coal cutting, stationary engine firing, waiting on table (hotel), cutting (in shoe factory), automobile repair, teaching of French in secondary school, mule spinning, power machine operating (for ready made clothing), raisin grape growing, general farming suited to Minnesota, linotype composition, railway telegraphy, autogenous welding, street car motor driving, and a hundred others. (p. 95)[6]

From here he moved on to an ever more finely tuned analysis of the elements that would make up a scientifically based and educationally effective curriculum. In the name of science and out of simple oddness, he felt compelled to develop his own terms for the elements of scientific curriculum construction.

At the highest level of curriculum planning, he proposed engaging in "strand analysis," which would disentangle the core elements of adult life and work for curricular purposes:

> The typical farmer's vocation is...capable of being stranded into scores, if not hundreds of operations, processes or activities that recur yearly or even daily. Similar strandings are possible for the vocations of physician, street-car motorman, primary school teacher and the rest. (Snedden, 1925b, pp. 287-8)

This stranding would then provide a frame for locating the basic element of the curriculum, which he called a "lotment," defined as "the amount of work that can be accomplished, or the ground covered, by learners of modal characteristics (as related to the activity considered) in 60 clock hours" (Snedden, 1924, p. 741). As an example, for "at least some of the pupils in junior high schools," he sketched out 56 groupings of possible lotments, including "One or two lotments of 'make-up' projective penmanship," "One or more development lotments of 'appreciational' mathematics," "One to six lotments of 'general science,' developmental," and so on (p. 742).

But these units he saw as too crude to serve as more than general categories of learning. Within the lotment was the basic building block of curriculum construction, which he called the "peth":

> The peth is in fact a 'piece of learning' – a piece purposely made so small that, like a brick, a bookman's volume, a speaker's sentence, a town lot or any other convenient unit, can be handled, studied, valued and adjusted into large composites.... For convenience of designation we may call...the amount of learning required for the word 'foreign' a spelling peth and the process of acquiring needed associations with '1776' a peth in American history.... Learning to write the words New York' might be taken to constitute a suitable 'peth sized objective' in studies of the needs and values to control in teaching handwriting. (1924, p. 263)

When one multiplies out the possibilities – the number of peths per lotment times the number of lotments per occupation times the number of occupational specialties – the complexity of the resulting curriculum structure is staggering. Other administrative progressives who worked the domain of scientific curriculum-making, like W. W. Charters and John Franklin Bobbitt, also pursued this kind of reduction of curriculum to its elements, but no one took the process to the extreme

of Snedden. Is it any wonder that even the most dedicated vocational educators thought this a bit much?

The point of all this fine tuning of the curriculum machinery for Snedden was to make every student a better "socius," someone who would play a useful role in a complex society. And this required a careful system of classifying students according to their social and intellectual characteristics in what he called a "case group," using criteria such geographical location, race, sex, age, intelligence, family income, and cultural background.[7] Once this classification was complete, then the educator could determine which curricular lotments would be best suited to a particular case group.

In the early 1930s, when his career was nearing the end and his connection with the movement he had helped launch was growing more remote, he turned his attention from the increasingly depressing present toward the hopefully more promising future of education. He wrote a book in 1931 in which he described the state of *American High Schools and Vocational Schools in 1960* to an imagined group of Chinese educators who were visiting the United States in that year. At that point, he saw vocational education turning into a postgraduate affair, noting that "shortly after 1930 all vestiges of supposed vocational training were withdrawn from high schools" with "specific vocational schools open only to mature learners" (Snedden, 1931, p. 77). His hopes for vocational training were now directed toward students over 18, and the degree of specialization he anticipated was extraordinarily high. At the end of the book, he proudly told his Chinese visitors the "There are now about 6,500 *kinds* of vocational schools in the United States – that is, for that number of clearly differentiated vocations" (p. 115; emphasis in original).[8]

In other futuristic writings from this period, he speculated about the promise of social engineering through education in a way that was beyond bizarre, bordering on fascism. He imagined 50 years ahead, "after certain present more or less incipient developments shall have matured in approved standardized practices" and the science of education had sufficiently advanced to create the ideal society, which he sometimes called the "province of Zond" (Snedden, 1934, p. 138). In this new world, a mixture of educational eugenics (which he called "eudemics"), scientific curriculum directed at the appropriate case groups, and an energized system of social control showed the promise of his social efficiency vision for America:

> In the poorer quarters of all large cities the department of domestic police requires those parents who, for whatever reason, can provide only defective and unwholesome environment – household and neighborhood environments – to send their children two to eight years of age to special nursery and kindergarten schools...The same domestic police, after presenting their cases to the proper court, also require parents of wayward or antisocial children eight to sixteen years of age to send these to special schools, the sessions of which usually last twelve hours per day, seventy-two hours per week, and fifty two weeks per year – each year including a six weeks' summer camping season in the woods or on the seashore. (Snedden, 1938, p. 138)

In an essay in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* titled, "The Socially Efficient Community," Snedden (1929) talked about fostering civic virtues (which he frequently called "civism") in this future society.

> Throughout adult years Zond expects all adult members to be especially strong in conformist civic virtues – especially to the will of the majority as formally expressed in laws, ordinances, etc. But it keeps wide open channels for sects, parties, and other groups to educate towards collective formation of new laws, choice of new executives. Habitual or confirmed offenders, whether willful or because of natural defect, it painlessly destroys – not as a punishment, but as "social surgery." (p. 469)

It is no wonder why other administrative progressives withdrew quickly from the long association with Snedden, for fear that they would be tainted by association with his increasingly bizarre view of the world.

WHY SNEDDEN WON AND DEWEY LOST

So, to return to the original question about the debate between Snedden and Dewey: How can a man like David Snedden – "the stock pedagogue-philistine figure of modern times, half-educated, anti-intellectual, instinctively hostile to humanistic culture" and increasingly "insane," even in the eyes of his fellow zealots in the social efficiency wing of the progressive movement – defeat the great John Dewey for the soul of the American educational system? How could someone whose ideas proved so forgettable – or, when revived, so embarrassing – trounce the ideas of someone whose writings on education continue to be seen as a model for enlightened thinking about the relationship between school and society?

Let me break down this question into two parts. First, I explore the more general question of why the administrative progressives triumphed over the pedagogical progressives in the early twentieth century by managing to stamp their social efficiency vision onto the goals and structures of American education. Then I take up the more difficult question of how Snedden could have defeated Dewey.

HOW THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRESSIVES WON

A number of scholars have written about the way progressive reform tended to follow the lead of the administrative rather than pedagogical progressives, including Herbert Kliebard (1986, 1987), Ellen Condliffe Lagemann (1989), Larry Cuban (1993), Diane Ravitch (2000), and Arthur Zilversmit (1993).[9] For example, Kliebard (1987, p. 139) summarizes one major theme in his history of the U.S. curriculum in the progressive era by arguing that "John Dewey's curriculum work remained largely confined to the world of ideas and had relatively little impact on school practice." He goes on to say, "If there is a public elementary or secondary school anywhere that self-consciously or conspicuously follows even the most elemental curricular principles that Dewey set forth, then I certainly do not know of it" (p. 140). Why did things turn out this way?

- First, the administrative progressive message of educational utility and social efficiency had great appeal to policymakers and people in power, since it offered to answer the great social problems of the early twentieth century in a manner that was in line with their own top-down orientation and social location. It promised to use education to promote economic productivity. It offered a way to integrate immigrants and keep the peace in a complex industrial society through a mixture of targeted programs to promote vocational opportunity and a differentiated structure to promote social control. And it approached this task in a classic managerial way, developing plans for administering the new era schools in a manner that could be implemented from the top down and that took the executive perspective.
- Second, the administrative progressives grounded their educational proposals solidly on the authority of science. They developed apparently objective and valid techniques for measuring ability and classifying students, and they used these measures to develop appropriate curricula and organizational structures for schools. The language of science ran through their literature, which helped them make the case for their vision as the truly modern one, a vision of the future with credible answers to the central emerging problems of modern life. It also helped make their approach seem data-based while making that of the pedagogical progressives seem romantic.
- Third, a utilitarian vision is easier to sell politically than a romantic one, especially when it comes to a large and very expensive publicly-supported institution like education. The pedagogues talked about engaging the interest of the child, promoting a richer understanding of the world, and making a more just and democratic society, whereas the administers talked about fixing social problems and expanding the economy – and doing so in a provably effective and efficient manner. The administrative progressives invented the vision of education as a sensible investment in the future health of economy and society, which carried the air of prudence and reason. They offered a vision of the kind of education we need instead of the kind we might like.
- Fourth, as Lagemann (1989) has noted, the leader of the pedagogical progressives left the field of educational practice early in the game, when Dewey abandoned his work in the lab school in Chicago in 1904 and moved to the philosophy department at Columbia. But the administrative progressives were just that, primarily educational administrators in origin and orientation, even when they generally ended up, like Snedden, in a university school of education. They were deeply engaged in the work of designing curriculum, developing tests, consulting with educational leaders, carrying out school surveys, and in a variety of other ways making themselves useful to educators (or at least educational administrators) in the trenches.
- Fifth, their close connection to the administrative structure of schools and their deep interest in improving that structure gave the administrative progressives an important advantage in implementing their ideas. They focused on a market of school administrators that was both receptive and empowered to serve as the troops on the ground in putting these reform ideas into educational practice. But the pedagogical progressives, with their focus primarily on teaching and

learning in classrooms, had to rely on individual teachers to adopt their vision and implement it one class at a time. Not only were teachers in a weak organizational position to bring about the Deweyan vision, but they found themselves trapped within an organizational and curricular structure of schooling that was shaped by the administrative progressive vision of social efficiency.

HOW SNEDDEN WON

But even if it is understandable that the social-efficiency orientation won out in the struggle to reshape American schools, that still leaves open the question of how someone as narrow, wrong-headed, and strange as David Snedden could have been its leader and major spokesman. The simplest way to unravel this paradox is to see Snedden's life and work as confirmation of a sociological truism – that being there is more important than being right. Snedden was the right man in the right place wielding the right idea for his times.

The ideas that shape history are those that history is ready for, the ones that resonate with the concerns of the time and help frame a response to these concerns. Snedden's career in education was launched at the turn of the twentieth century, when the United States was faced with a transition from a tradition of republican community to a new state of corporate complexity, in which the old forms of political and social organization seemed no longer adequate to the challenges of the emerging modern age. In particular, the old system of common schooling for all, aimed at providing broad education for the citizenry of a republic, seemed increasingly out of touch with the social and economic order, with its radical division of labor, growing class and ethnic differences, and explosively expansive mode of corporate capitalism. This was a time that was primed to be responsive to the argument that the new order required an educational system that aimed to be useful and socially efficient in dealing with the period's emerging social problems. Snedden was pushing just this idea.

And during this time of social and ideological change, Snedden was also perfectly positioned to be an influential actor in the domain of educational policy and practice. As I noted earlier, he had enormous positional credibility as both a practitioner and academic in education – with strong experience as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and state commissioner, with academic credentials from Stanford and Teachers College, and with a long-term professorship at the latter that put him at the center of the progressive movement in education and gave him instant access to the broadest audience in the field. As we have seen, he used those advantages to the fullest extent, with his energetic efforts as a speaker, writer, and teacher to promote social efficiency as the answer to the most troubling educational issues of his day. His memoir is titled, *Recollections of Over Half a Century Spent in Educational Work* (1949), and as his biographer reminds us, he treated his educational efforts as work in the vocational sense of the term. In many ways, using his own typology, he was more a producer than a utilizer, and his hard work for the social efficiency cause paid off.[10]

But even if he had the right idea at the right time, occupied the ideal leverage point, and worked hard to deploy these advantages in service to his cause, we still have to deal with his strangeness and his growing estrangement from his own movement. He was a self-styled scientist who never did anything that remotely resembled scientific study, an educational sociologist[11] who drew on the clichés of the field – social Darwinism and social control – without ever making an original contribution. In his written work, he never used data, and he never cited sources, which made sense, since he rarely drew on sources anyway. His books and journal articles took the form of proclamations, scientific pronouncements without the science; they all read like speeches, and that was likely the source of most of them.

In this sense, he was more a propagandist than a theorist or thinker, someone who borrowed ideas without understanding them and then promoted them relentlessly. The ideas sounded authoritative and gave the impression that they were building into arguments, but they were largely a collection of numbered lists and bullet points. He was a man who would have warmly embraced PowerPoint. In his work, portentousness abounded; it was all about riding the wave of the future and avoiding the undertow of the past. He was an educational leader whose effectiveness arose from being temperamentally a member of the rank and file. He relentlessly promoted vocational education for the socially efficient society of the future by proposing curricula that routinely prepared students for the tasks that characterized the jobs of the past (railway telegrapher, streetcar motorman). He was so eager to be relevant that he gradually made himself irrelevant even within the administrative progressive movement that he helped lead.

In essence, he was a man obsessed with an idea, which happened to resonate with his audience, at least for a time.[12] In Isaiah Berlin's typology, Snedden was a hedgehog, pushing one big idea, and Dewey was a fox, pursuing many ideas (Berlin, 2000). When a hedgehog's idea suits its era, he can be enormously effective, but since adaptability is not the hedgehog's strength, the resonance with the times can quickly diminish. That was certainly the case with Snedden. In his debate with Snedden before the NEA in 1914, Bagley put his finger on it precisely when he called Snedden a doctrinaire. "The field of education," he said, "has always been peculiarly open to this type of exploitation at the hands of doctrinaires" (Bagley, 1914, p. 164).

But one of the lessons of social change in general and educational reform in particular is that every doctrine needs its doctrinaire. Nuance is dysfunctional for the cause of educational reform, especially early in the process, when the main task is to clear the field of the accumulated institutional underbrush and make the case for a radical new order. Every reformer needs to slash and burn the remnants of the old way of doing things, portraying the past as all weeds and decay, and clearing space for the new institutions to take root. This is something that a literal minded, hyperkinetic, and monomaniacal figure like Snedden could do superbly. As Diane Ravitch (2000) noted, "Snedden's caricature of the traditional school became a staple of progressive attacks for years to come: it was 'repressive,' 'monarchical,' 'barren and repellent,' founded entirely on classics and completely out of touch with American democracy" (p. 82).

Being extreme at this stage of reform is quite useful, whereas the kind of nuanced approach that Dewey took, with its abhorrence of the very dualisms that Snedden loved, was not conducive to launching an effective movement of educational reform. Therefore, the administrative progressive movement was able to become firmly established and positioned for growth because of Snedden's flame throwing. Put another way, a useful idiot, who says things that resonate with the emerging ideas of his era and helps clear the ideological way for the rhetorical reframing of a major institution, can have vastly more influence than a great thinker, who makes a nuanced and prescient argument that is out of tune with his times and too complex to fit on a battle standard.

In part because Snedden was an extremist, the tendency in American education leaned strongly his direction and away from Dewey. What we ended up with was a school system that reflected the main elements of the social efficiency agenda: a differentiated curriculum, de facto tracking by social class, and a school system whose purpose is viewed through a vocational lens (education for human capital development), even if vocational courses never gained more than a relatively marginal part of the curriculum.

But, although Snedden was useful in preparing the way, he quickly became dispensable and even embarrassing once the social efficiency movement got established. The turning point was in 1918. When the federal vocational education bill passed and the *Cardinal Principles* report emerged to great acclaim, Snedden's work had been done and his doctrinaire views started to get in the way of practical gains in school systems and classrooms. With his promotional skills and his ability to stay on message, he made it possible for administrative progressives to vocationalize American education, but his actual plan for a series of separate vocational schools with radically differentiated curricula for hundreds of different occupational roles was completely unrealistic. It was too expensive, too complicated, and too alien to a democratic culture; and it not only barred social opportunity but also undermined social efficiency, by preventing workers from adapting to economic change (Dewey's point) and becoming useful in the real society of the future (as opposed to his imagined province of Zond).

Other administrative progressives, like his one-time protégé Kingsley, had a better sense of what would sell and what was possible in the realm of educational policy. They were willing to make the compromises with democratic ideology and union power that were needed in order to turn Snedden's dream into a reality in the nation's school systems. They understood that it was impolitic to talk about education for the rank and file. Better to frame the social efficiency agenda as an expression of democratic ideals; to dilute the vision of vocationalism as a mechanism for reproducing social inequality by bringing it within the confines of the comprehensive high school. It was possible to vocationalize the aims of American education without constructing a series of separate vocational training schools. It was possible to implement a social efficiency agenda of sorting and selecting students by means of a high school that drew in everyone in the community but then tracked them according to ability and future trajectory.

The system the administrative progressives erected in the United States in the early twentieth century was effective in part because it had stronger political cover

than Snedden's extreme version. It introduced a vocational orientation toward education – education for social efficiency, for human capital production, for economic growth, for modernism – while preserving the traditional liberal academic curriculum in a diluted form. It tracked people by class de facto but not de jure; it could be presented as democratic education, the way the *Cardinal Principles* report did, whereas Snedden's was explicitly socially reproductive, deliberately designing a separate education for the rank and file. Snedden played bad cop to Kingsley's good cop, getting out in front, catching the flack, then being pushed gradually from the scene, to be supplanted and largely forgotten by the winning version of social efficiency education.[13]

In the end, Snedden's narrowness was his strength in advancing the cause of social efficiency in American education while also being the source of his ultimate obscurity in American thought. Dewey suffered the inverse fate, as a man whose breadth of vision about school and society weakened his impact in his own time and place but won him long-term influence in the international realm of ideas.

Consider two implications of this analysis. First, coarseness is an advantage in the contest of competing ideas for school reform. The pedagogically progressive vision of education – child-centered, inquiry based, and personally engaging – is a *hothouse flower* trying to survive in the stony environment of public education. It won't thrive unless conditions are ideal, since, among other things, it requires committed, creative, energetic, and highly educated teachers, who are willing and able to construct education to order for students in the classroom; and it requires broad public and fiscal support for education as an investment in students rather than an investment in economic productivity.

But the administrative progressive vision of education – as a prudent investment in a socially efficient future – is a weed. It will grow almost anywhere. Erratic funding, poorly prepared teachers, high turnover, dated textbooks – all of these may impede the socially efficient outcomes of education, but they do not prevent reformers from putting in place the central structure of social efficiency in the school system: a differentiated curriculum organized around a conception of education for work. The weed of social efficiency grows under difficult conditions, because its primary goal is to be useful in the narrowest sense of the term: It aims for survival rather than beauty. But Dewey's vision of education defines success in the richness of learning that is experienced by the child, and this is not possible without the proper cultivation.

A second implication is this: Winning ideas for social reform disappear from view and their authors are forgotten, whereas losing ideas and their authors remain visible. One winning idea in school reform is the age-graded self-contained classroom, which was a radical innovation of the common school movement in the United States but which quickly disappeared into the grammar of schooling to the point where it now seems to us utterly natural. How else could school be organized? Since it is part of the way things are, this reform's originators and their vision are now forgotten. The same is true with education for social efficiency. This has become part of the common sense understanding of what education is all about, so it is now detached from its original proponents, people like Snedden and Kingsley and Prosser. We do not identify them as authors of this vision of

education any more than we identify authors of any other natural laws. Who invented gravity? Meanwhile, however, losing ideas and their proponents both remain visible.

Pedagogical progressivism is still standing outside the gates to the schoolyard, trying to break in, so it continues to define itself in opposition to the way things are in schools, and it continues to call on Dewey's name for support. In some ways, then, Dewey's undiminished prominence in the realm of educational ideas is a sign of his failure in changing American schools, and Snedden's anonymity is a sign of his success.

NOTES

1. This weekly magazine, founded in 1914 by Herbert Croly and Walter Lipmann, quickly became the leading journal of progressive thought in the United States. Dewey's first response to Snedden was published in the latter part of the magazine's inaugural year.
2. Dewey more fully developed this argument about his own vision of social efficiency in education in *Democracy and Education* (1916), especially in chapter nine, "Natural Development and Social Efficiency as Aims."
3. In *Left Back*, Diane Ravitch (2000, p. 81) makes the same point while also identifying how Snedden fit in with other administrative progressives: "If Edward L. Thorndike was the foremost practitioner of educational psychology, and G. Stanley Hall dominated the field of child study, David Snedden was the leading representative of the social efficiency movement."
4. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson (1974) argue that the consequences of this effort to vocationalize American education were profound: In sum, vocational education served two concrete purposes – to fasten the ideal of education for vocational goals onto the educational system, and to restructure the high school. It served to break down the common school ideology and the practice of a common education system for all pupils; after vocational education had differentiated pupils according to future occupations, other forms of differentiation – ability grouping being the most widespread – were introduced into the schools. Testing and vocational guidance were developed in order to administer the increasingly differentiated system. The high school of 1890 was fundamentally different from that of 1920 (Grubb & Lazerson, 1974, p. 39).
5. I borrowed this line from David Brooks, who used it to describe Richard Posner. See Brooks (2002).
6. I am grateful to Diane Ravitch for digging up this quote (Ravitch, 2000, p. 85).
7. Snedden (1923), p. 107.
8. I am grateful to Phillipp Gonon for directing my attention to this late work by Snedden.
9. I also explored the issue in my book about education schools (Labaree, 2004, chapter 7).
10. His memoir continued the pattern of strangeness in his work, since he chose to write it in the third person. (e.g., "Then came one of the turning points in David's history" (p. 5).) Two years before he died, the author of twenty-five books had to resort of self publication to get his memoir into print.
11. In 1959, eight years after Snedden's death, the American Sociological Society (ASS) changed its name to the American Sociological Association (ASA). The timing was appropriate.
12. Kliebard puts it this way: "Relentlessly, Snedden pursued to their most far-reaching conclusions the doctrine of social efficiency and the extension of principles of vocational education to the curriculum as a whole. The question of his actual influence is moot; what his work illustrates is his ability not to transform or transcend the direction the curriculum was taking in his time but to articulate and epitomize it" (Kliebard, 1999, p. 122).
13. Snedden's other major protégé in the social efficiency movement, Charles Prosser, remained as extreme as his mentor. The vocational school he founded and ran for many years, the Dunwoody Institute, was a nutty reflection of the most doctrinaire positions he acquired from Snedden:"At the Dunwoody Institute, units were programmed in great detail to lead students step by step though the skill development cycle. Students punched in on time-clocks and instructors behaved like shop

foremen rather than public school teachers. A no-nonsense attitude prevailed. If students were not punctual, orderly, and efficient, they were asked to leave" (Wirth, 1972, p. 369). At the end of his career, Prosser lent his name to the notorious resolution at the a federally sponsored conference on vocational education in 1945. The Prosser Resolution ushered in the last gasp of progressivism before it imploded in self caricature, the Life Adjustment Movement.

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