

CHAPTER 2

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

DESPITE the objective problems of American schools in the immediate postwar years—the teacher shortage, the low salaries, the need for buildings, and the uncertainty of future funding—American educators took pride in the fact that they shared a common philosophy about the role and the purpose of the schools. They knew what they needed—more money—and they knew why—to educate all American youth. By the 1940s, the ideals and tenets of progressive education had become the dominant American pedagogy. If one were to judge by the publications of the U.S. Office of Education, the various state departments of education, city school boards, and professional education associations, as well as by the textbooks that were required reading in schools of education, progressive education was the conventional wisdom, the lingua franca of American educators. Whether progressive practices were equally commonplace is another issue, but there can be little doubt that the language and ideas of progressive education permeated public education.

The triumph of progressive education consisted largely in the fact that by the mid-1940s it was no longer referred to as progressive education but as “modern education,” the “new education,” or simply, “good educational practice.” The education profession’s view of itself, its history, and

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

its aspirations had been shaped during the 1920s and 1930s by progressive ideology. The teacher-in-training learned of the epochal struggle between the old-fashioned, subject-centered, rigid, authoritarian, traditional school and the modern, child-centered, flexible, democratic, progressive school. The regional accrediting agencies and state evaluators judged schools by progressive criteria: Were the classrooms teacher-dominated or was there joint pupil-teacher planning? Were pupils too involved in acquiring facts or were they actively solving problems? Was there undue stress on the distant past or were "learning situations" based on the present and future? Was the school relying too heavily on books or was it moving beyond the walls of the school to find learning experiences? Was the high school curriculum for all youth or only for those with academic ability?¹

While there was never a clear-cut definition of progressive education—other than to say that it was an attitude, a belief in experimentation, a commitment to the education of all children and to democracy in the school—what progressive education was not was abundantly clear by this time. Among the features of traditional schooling that progressive educators rejected were: the belief that the primary purpose of the school was to improve intellectual functioning; emphasis on the cultural heritage and on learning derived from books; the teaching of the traditional subjects (like history, English, science, and mathematics) as such; the teaching of content dictated by the internal logic of the material; adherence to a daily schedule with specific subject matter allotted specific periods of time; evaluation of the school program by tests of the mastery of subject matter; competition among students for grades and other extrinsic rewards; traditional policies of promotion and failure; reliance on textbooks; the use of rote memorization or drill as a teaching method; the domination of the classroom by the teacher, either as a source of planning or as a disciplinarian; corporal punishment.

While educators differed in their conception of its necessary features, "modern" education generally emphasized: active learning (experiences and projects) rather than passive learning (reading); cooperative planning of classroom activities by teachers and pupils; cooperation among pupils on group projects instead of competition for grades; the recognition of individual differences in students' abilities and interests; justifying the curriculum by its utility to the student or by the way it met identifiable needs and interests of students; the goal of "effective living" rather than acquisition of knowledge; the value of relating the program of the school to the life of the community around it; the merging of traditional subjects into core curricula or functional problem areas related to family life, community problems, or student interests; the use of books, facts, or tradi-

tional learning only when needed as part of students' activities and experiences. In the pedagogical literature, the new education was consistently described as democracy in action, because it substituted teacher-pupil cooperation for teacher authoritarianism, stressed socialization to the group instead of individualism, and championed an educational program that was for all children in the here-and-now rather than for the minority that was college-bound.

Both its admirers and detractors acknowledged that progressive ideas had transformed the American public school during the first half of the twentieth century. Progressive concepts proved to be particularly appropriate in easing the transition to mass secondary education. At the opening of the century, about half a million students (about 10 percent of the age-group) attended high schools, where the curriculum was strongly academic, though only a minority graduated or went on to college; by midcentury, high school enrollment was over five million (65 percent of the age-group), and the secondary curriculum was remarkably diverse. Progressive education offered a rationale to include vocational and other nonacademic studies, thus enabling the high schools to retain an ever larger proportion of youth and to fulfill what the education profession believed was its special role in a democratic society.

Armed with the conviction that their philosophy was a democratic faith and that history was on their side, educational leaders were taken by surprise when attacks on their ideas and programs mounted in intensity in the late 1940s. The critics, said the educators, were reactionaries who objected to the cost of good schools, enemies of public education, apostles of hatred linked to the anti-Communist crusade of Senator Joseph McCarthy, know-nothings who wanted to return American schools to the dark ages and the three Rs. Schools hired public relations specialists and engaged in community relations to rebut the critics, but the debate continued. It was not understood, initially, that what Dean Hollis Caswell of Teachers College called "the great reappraisal" of American public education was aimed not at a particular progressive administrator or program but at a generation of educational thought.²

In his classic history of the progressive education movement, *The Transformation of the School*, Lawrence A. Cremin describes progressive education as "the educational phase of American Progressivism writ large." As such, Cremin says, the movement was "always closely related to broader currents of social and political progressivism"; it "had its origin during the quarter-century before World War I in an effort to cast the school as a fundamental lever of social and political regeneration." While he notes

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

that it is impossible to write "any capsule definition of progressive education . . . for throughout its history [it] meant different things to different people," nonetheless he identifies progressivism in education with the following purposes:

First, it meant broadening the program and function of the school to include direct concern for health, vocation, and the quality of family and community life. Second, it meant applying in the classroom the pedagogical principles derived from new scientific research in psychology and the social sciences. Third, it meant tailoring instruction more and more to the different kinds and classes of children who were being brought within the purview of the school. . . . Finally, Progressivism implied the radical faith that culture could be democratized without being vulgarized, the faith that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.

As the educational arm of the larger progressive reform movement, progressive education was "a many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals." As Cremin demonstrates, progressive education in its formative years was enriched by the thought and work of a wide variety of pioneers in social work, psychology, politics, philosophy, and education; its forebears included Jacob Riis, Lincoln Steffens, Jane Addams, John Dewey, William James, and scores of others who participated in the larger progressive reform movement.³

But something happened to the larger progressive movement, as well as to progressive education, in the aftermath of World War I. The larger movement, which had played a robust part in American life since the 1890s, did not survive the war. The progressive education movement, however, took on a new life even as the larger movement subsided. As it separated from the social and political reform movement of which it had been a vital part, the progressive education movement was itself transformed. In its new phase, the progressive education movement became institutionalized and professionalized, and its major themes accordingly changed. Shorn of its roots in politics and society, pedagogical progressivism came to be identified with the child-centered school; with a pretentious scientism; with social efficiency and social utility rather than social reform; and with a vigorous suspicion of "bookish" learning. That the tendency of these trends veered away from the original meaning of the progressive education movement was not at once apparent, since the pre-war movement and the postwar movement shared, at least rhetorically, a reverence for John Dewey and a spirit of antiformalism. It was a long while before it was recognized, even by Dewey himself, that the form of progres-

sive education seized upon by the emerging profession was a bastard version, and in important ways, a betrayal, of the new education he had called for.

Dewey was a prolific author whose prose style was dense and difficult. His inaccessibility as a writer did not prevent him from attracting followers and disciples, however, for he understood better than anyone else of his generation that education was changing decisively, both in its pedagogy and in its social function. By philosophical conviction and by his own experience as director of an experimental school, Dewey rejected the rigid, lockstep practices that typified public schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the uniformity of curriculum, the stress on passivity, and the teachers' excessive reliance on rote memorization and drill tended to suppress the child's powers of interest and engagement. In his philosophy of education, the school took on many of the socializing functions that had once been performed by the family, the workplace, and the community. He believed that the school might become a fundamental lever of social progress by virtue of its capacity to improve the quality of life for individuals and for the community. In Dewey's conception, children should learn through experiences and activities that were carefully selected as starting points from which the teacher would direct them to higher levels of cultural, social, and intellectual meaning. Teachers in a progressive school had to be extraordinarily talented and well educated; they needed both a perceptive understanding of children and a wide knowledge of the disciplines in order to recognize when the child was ready to move through an experience to a new understanding, be it in history or science or mathematics or the arts. Because Dewey's ideas were complex, they were more easily misunderstood than understood, and his disciples proved better at discrediting traditional methods and curricula than at constructing a pedagogically superior replacement.

The publication of the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* in 1918 launched pedagogical progressivism into the mainstream of the organized education profession. This report, which represented the best thinking of the leaders of the profession, launched "a pedagogical revolution" and ushered in "a whole new age in American secondary education" by redefining the role of the high school. In terms of both its authors and its educational philosophy, the *Cardinal Principles* contrasted sharply with a document issued twenty-five years earlier by the NEA's "Committee of Ten," which recommended that all secondary students, regardless of whether they intended to go to college, should be liberally educated and should study English, foreign languages, mathematics, history, and science. The Committee of Ten included five college presidents (its chairman

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

was Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University) and the U. S. Commissioner of Education, William T. Harris. The *Cardinal Principles* pamphlet, which was circulated by the U.S. Bureau of Education and sold in the tens of thousands, was written by the NEA's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE). In contrast to the academically oriented Committee of Ten, the CRSE was chaired by Clarence D. Kingsley, State Supervisor of High Schools in Massachusetts, and consisted of professors of education, secondary principals, educational bureaucrats, and a college president who had been a professor of education.⁴

The cardinal principles of secondary education, by which educational offerings were to be judged, were: "1. Health. 2. Command of fundamental processes. 3. Worthy home-membership. 4. Vocation. 5. Citizenship. 6. Worthy use of leisure. 7. Ethical character." The objectives of secondary education should be determined, said the report, "by the needs of the society to be served, the character of the individuals to be educated, and the knowledge of educational theory and practice available." So little did the commission think of traditional, school-bound knowledge that the original draft of the report failed to include "command of the fundamental processes," its only reference to intellectual development, as a main objective of secondary education. The final document stressed that schools should derive their goals from the life activities of adults in society. That this was a tricky business was revealed, for instance, by the commission's statement that college-preparatory studies were "particularly incongruous with the actual needs and future responsibilities of girls," which led them to urge that homemaking be considered of equal value to any other school work. The social efficiency element of the *Cardinal Principles*, which inverted Dewey's notion of the-school-as-a-lever-of-social-reform into the-school-as-a-mechanism-to-adjust-the-individual-to-society, became the cornerstone of the new progressivism.⁵

The appeal to science and scientific method that characterized prewar progressivism was converted in the 1920s and 1930s into a polemical tool to be wielded on behalf of innovative methods and was often used to justify widescale use of testing in order to divide students into ability groups for administrative purposes. Progressives insisted that their reforms had been validated by science, not recognizing the tentative nature of scientific investigation, nor the difference between science and social science. One progressive leader, advising parents to heed the advice of experts, pointed to "conclusive proof" that reading must not be taught by attention to the alphabet, phonics, or any other kind of word-analysis, and that it was harmful for parents to read to children, since this "makes it easier to get information through the ear than through the eye." William

Heard Kilpatrick of Teachers College, in his lectures and books, spoke of "laws of learning" established by educational science, which supported his advocacy of projects and activities in place of subject matter as the method of education. In fact, few of the supposedly "scientific" findings of the period had any validity. William C. Bagley of Teachers College, a steadfast critic of progressive extremism, pointed out in 1934 that, "The study of the learning process by the experimental method has been on the whole disappointing. The 'laws' which seem at a given time to be well established have an irritating habit of collapsing as evidence accumulates."⁶

Probably the most egregious misuse of inconsistent experimental data was the misrepresentation of the mental discipline issue. Experiments at the turn of the century cast doubt on whether study of a given subject improves general mental functioning. Though there were scores of studies and their findings were ambivalent, advocates of progressive education repeatedly asserted that the "theory" of mental discipline had been decisively discredited and that all learning is specific (that is, the study of mathematics teaches mathematics, not precision and concentration). Since teachers of studies like Latin and advanced mathematics had defended their subjects on the ground that they taught students to think more clearly and logically, the experiments that purported to show that mental discipline could not be transferred contributed to the demise of requirements in these subjects. Other academic subjects were also challenged to defend their worth on utilitarian grounds, since "mental discipline" was supposedly refuted by scientific evidence. But the claims for the "scientific" investigations were inflated, and the issue was never conclusively settled. Ultimately, the question of whether the study of a given subject, like science or language or mathematics, makes one more logical or better organized may not even be subject to proof. Walter Kolesnik, who examined the issue exhaustively, concluded that "experimental psychology, in the last analysis, has shed but little light on the problem, and . . . may be incapable of shedding very much more." Richard Hofstadter has charged that the progressive educators' "misuse of experimental evidence . . . constitutes a major scandal in the history of educational thought." Nonetheless, the progressives' conviction that mental discipline had been utterly discredited was an essential element in attacking the teaching of traditional subjects and in asserting the importance of teaching specific how-to courses.⁷

To these educational currents was added the impact of a new branch of educational "science" called "curriculum making." The arrival of the curriculum expert was heralded by the appearance of Franklin Bobbitt's *The Curriculum* in 1918, the first book in the field. Bobbitt, a professor of

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

education at the University of Chicago, rejected the traditional notion that the school program consisted of the sum of the subjects taught. Human life, wrote Bobbitt, "consists in the performance of specific activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities." The curriculum is best determined by studying the activities of men and discovering what forms of knowledge men need to know: "These will be the objectives of the curriculum. They will be numerous, definite, and particularized." In *How To Make a Curriculum* (1924), Bobbitt identified 821 objectives for the curriculum maker; he made clear that the starting point in the shaping of a curriculum was an analysis of life activities, such as language activities, health activities, leisure activities, parental activities, vocational activities, and the like. The field of curriculum development, as it emerged, was firmly linked to this sort of social utilitarianism, which set the task of the school as the adjustment of the individual to the society.⁸

Another element of the new progressive education was a cluster of romantic views of the child, typified by Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker's book *The Child-Centered School*, published in 1925. The hallmarks of the new school were freedom, activity, and creative self-expression. The old school was described as "the listening regime," a place of "fears, restraints, and long, weary hours of suppression," whose philosophy was based on outmoded allegiance to discipline and subject matter. The new school was devoted to "self-expression and maximum child growth," a place where children were eager to go to school because "they dance; they sing . . . ; they model in clay and sand; they draw and paint, read and write, make up stories and dramatize them; they work in the garden; they churn, and weave, and cook"; its philosophy was "the concept of Self." Reflecting the influence of the avant-garde thinking of the 1920s, particularly the fascination with artistic self-expression and Freudianism, Rugg and Shumaker wrote that "education in the Century of the Child aims at nothing less than the production of individuality through the integration of experience. The whole child is to be educated. Hence the materials of education are as broad and interrelated as life itself. For experience is not only an intellectual matter; it is physical, rhythmic, emotional."⁹

The most influential proponent of the new education was William Heard Kilpatrick, a popular professor at Teachers College who is said to have taught thirty-five thousand students in his long career. Kilpatrick advocated "the project method" as the best way to educate children through their own experiences, rather than through what he derisively called "subject matter fixed-in-advance." He held that a good teacher brings in subject matter only when needed as part of a student's experi-

ences, that learning activities may be judged by their contribution to future growth (one of his graduate classes voted Greek, Latin, and mathematics the subjects offering the "least likely possibilities for educational growth," while selecting dancing, dramatics, and doll playing as holding the greatest possibilities), and that good education is "life itself, living now—the opposite of education as a mere preparation for future living." Not only did Kilpatrick combine in his work the romanticism of the child-centered school, the full-blown scientism of the authoritative pedagogue, and the anti-intellectualism of the social utilitarians, but he contributed to progressivism many of the phrases that became part of the arcane language of the education profession.¹⁰

The utilitarian message of the *Cardinal Principles*, the emphasis on experience and projects as the best method of learning, the emergence of the new field of curriculum development, the discovery and celebration of the child-centered school, the appeal to educational science to discredit the practices of traditional schools—these ingredients, despite some internal inconsistencies, suggested to progressive educators in the nation's professional education associations and schools of education the outlines of the philosophy and practice that should characterize a good school. Indeed, there was much in the progressive program that promised to improve education: the attention to the importance of motivating children through their interests and through use of contemporary issues, the concern for child health, the criticism of exclusive reliance on memorization and the textbook, and the efforts to diversify the school's offerings. But the positive contributions of progressive education were often at war with, and sometimes even submerged by, their own implicit distortions: the extremes of permissiveness in the child-centered movement, the hostility toward books and subject matter that grew out of the emphasis on "doing," the excessive vocationalism that emerged from social utility, and the notion that the school was uniquely qualified to meet all needs without establishing priorities among them.

Given the decentralized character of American elementary and secondary education, the dissemination of progressive philosophy and programs appeared to be a formidable task. Popularization of the new ideas proceeded through the activities of the Progressive Education Association (formed in 1919 to advance the cause), the NEA (which had sponsored the *Cardinal Principles* report), and schools of education (where progressive ideas had begun to take on the trappings of a religious faith, with a sainted leader, zealous disciples, and sacred writings).

Before long the ferment and excitement that stirred the educational leaders reached the schools themselves. One medium of influence was the

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

school survey, which was first used in 1910. Typically, a city school system invited an expert from a school of education to prepare a study of its performance and needs. In addition to examining the schools' physical and financial condition, the surveyor would evaluate the system's curriculum according to whether it incorporated the latest pedagogical thinking. Besides giving school officials ammunition with which to seek additional funds from local government, the survey served as a means of spreading the curriculum ideas shared by progressive educators. Many schools of education established special programs to conduct surveys; Teachers College alone surveyed nearly one hundred school districts.

The survey could make recommendations, but it could not implement them. For that purpose, the most important vehicle for translating the new ideas into practice was the curriculum revision movement. Beginning in the 1920s, school systems started to study and revise their curricula to make them "modern" and "dynamic," and to adjust the content to "functional values" and "child needs." Among the first cities to launch curriculum revision were Denver, St. Louis, and Houston. By the late 1920s, the Houston superintendent reported that "Almost every school system of any size or importance in the country is now revising its curriculum or planning to do so." In 1931, Herbert Bruner, the director of the Curriculum Laboratory at Teachers College, reported that more than thirty thousand revised courses had been prepared in the previous six years alone, and the number of students in the curriculum division of the university had jumped during the same period from 6 to 762. By the mid-1930s, 70 percent of cities with a population greater than 25,000 had set up curriculum-development programs, as had nearly half the communities with a population of 5,000 to 25,000. At least thirty-seven states initiated statewide curriculum revision programs. A 1937 survey of "curriculum thinking" found a remarkable similarity of belief among teachers in cities with curriculum development programs, converging around progressive principles.¹¹

Typically, a curriculum revision program was started by an administrator who had gone to a graduate school of education, where he encountered the overwhelming consensus around the new educational trends and learned that his own school's program, no matter how successful it might seem, was outmoded. He would return to his school to tell the teachers that they were going to work cooperatively to revise the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of the growing school population and to take account of the latest findings of educational science. First, the teachers were organized into study groups, where they were directed to read current pedagogical works, such as Kilpatrick's *Foundations of Method*, Ellsworth Collings's *An Experiment with a Project Curriculum* (a demonstration of Kilpatrick's methods,

written by one of his students), and Rugg and Shumaker's *The Child-Centered School*. Outside consultants were brought in from schools of education to direct the teachers' study, perhaps even to set up an extension course on trends in education. After the teachers had informed themselves, the administrator might then ask them to do a survey of the community and to think about whether the curriculum of the school was meeting the needs of the community. Study and survey complete, the teachers' committees would then set out to reorganize the curriculum, under the guidance of the school-of-education expert, whose contribution was invariably described as "an impartial point of view."¹²

Not surprisingly, the results of these deliberations, instead of reflecting variations from one group of teachers to the next, and from one community to the next, demonstrated a remarkable sameness. Whether the community was rural, suburban, or urban, whether the local economy was based on farming, mining, or trade, whether the children came from wealth or poverty, the curriculum revisions echoed the language of the progressive textbooks. Schools that revised their curriculum reported agreement that since the world is dynamic, the curriculum must be dynamic; that education consists of a continuous reconstruction of experience; that education must embrace the total life experience of the child; that the goal of education must be to achieve effective living for all; that curriculum objectives had to be stated in terms of useful activities; that the focus of instruction had to shift from subject matter to the experience of the child; that college-preparatory studies were narrow and aristocratic, and that the curriculum had to embrace the interests of all children, not just the college-bound; that textbooks had to be supplemented or replaced by newspapers, magazines, excursions, projects, audiovisual aids, and activities; that promotion and failure were anachronistic concepts when applied to the continuous growth of the child; that marks and other extrinsic rewards were undemocratic and inappropriate sources of motivation.

When curriculum revision first got underway, superintendents and principals tried working with representative committees of teachers but found that the teachers who did not participate in the study group failed to share the group consensus. So, it became a matter of principle that all teachers must participate in curriculum revision. In every such program, the leaders said over and over again that the process of building a new curriculum must be a democratic process, that all decisions arrived at were democratic group decisions, and that in the nature of a democracy, all members of the group must abide by decisions of the group. Progressive educators acknowledged that they used techniques of group dynamics to engineer consent for their philosophy and programs. There is no indication

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

that any progressive leader questioned the ethical implications of manipulating teachers, parents, and students. Hollis Caswell, dean of Teachers College and a leader in curriculum revision programs, suggested that teacher resistance to curriculum reform was best dealt with by "the setting of group goals": "A variety of studies, many in industry, have shown that when a group sets a goal the individuals who compose the group will exert greater effort to achieve the goal than when it is entirely an individual matter. In other words, an individual tends to work harder and with greater enthusiasm when he is cooperating with other people in an undertaking and when he knows that for him to fail will affect unfavorably those with whom he is working." It was a curious notion of the democratic process, since the goals of curriculum revision were never truly open for discussion; despite the rhetoric about participation and cooperation, the outcome of curriculum revision was fixed-in-advance by the experts.¹³

As part of the process of curriculum revision, there were usually efforts to achieve a consensus around a guiding philosophy, a shared set of goals and values, from which progressive practices would flow. Much was made of the importance of having a common viewpoint. Reports written by participants, often the supervising principal or superintendent, reveal that there were often teachers who refused to join the consensus, who resisted all efforts to change their philosophy or point of view. Teachers who impeded the "democratic" group process were fired; in one school, the principal fired half the faculty and replaced them with teachers who had been trained in progressive methods. In Philadelphia, the system's curriculum guide stated that the curriculum would be developed in accordance with "the democratic way of working together. That way is one in which the total personnel works together cooperatively and intelligently in the formulation and realization of common ends." However, said the guide, if teachers refused to behave "intelligently and cooperatively," then "protective measures" would be taken "in the interest of the common welfare." Since curriculum revision was always set in motion by school officials, who had the power to remove uncooperative teachers, those in charge never knew whether they had succeeded in winning the teachers over or in merely silencing the opposition to change.¹⁴

Because the schools of education were so strongly identified with progressive education, professionalization served as the medium for the promotion of progressive philosophy and practices. Whether in Kingsport, Tennessee, or Battle Creek, Michigan, the curriculum revision program aimed to transform the teacher through workshops, conferences, summer courses, visits to progressive schools, and enrollment in degree courses. The professional literature acknowledged that the goal of curriculum revi-

sion was not so much to change the curriculum as it was to change the attitudes, values, and perceptions of the teacher, so that the teacher would behave differently in the classroom. To be sure, even within schools of education there were articulate critics of the pretensions and tendencies of progressive education, like William C. Bagley and I. L. Kandel of Teachers College, but their attacks were brushed aside in the flush of success, and they were not among the phalanx of energetic professors who brought the news about curriculum development to America's school systems.¹⁵

Aside from altering the rhetoric of school documents, what effects did the curriculum revision movement have? The overall impression that emerges from a sampling of diverse districts is a pronounced shift in the stated goals of schooling, away from concern with intellectual development and mastery of subject matter to concern for social and emotional development and to the adoption of "functional" objectives related to areas such as vocation, health, and family life. Generally, the revised curriculum was not an effort to balance intellectual, social, and emotional needs, but a conscious attempt to denigrate the traditional notion of "knowledge for its own sake" as useless and possibly worthless. Many districts reported efforts to blur lines between subjects by creating something like a "core curriculum" course. The usual core course merged English and social studies, though some merged other subjects as well. The core course, with a title like "Basic Living" or "Common Learnings," concentrated on "personal and social development," and dealt with such problems as: how to earn a living, how to get along with other people, how to be a good consumer, how to behave on a date, and how to stay healthy.

There is little evidence that social reform entered the public schools as a consequence of the curriculum revision movement. Ten southern states engaged in statewide curriculum revision and dutifully recorded their desire to advance democratic living through the school, but not one of the state commissions noticed a conflict between democratic ideals and the practice of racial segregation. Nor did any of the city school systems which revised their curriculum offer any criticism of the social order. They saw their task to be one of fitting the children to the needs of the social order, in the social efficiency spirit of the *Cardinal Principles*. The leader of the program in Hackensack, New Jersey, observing that "many trades and occupations would not employ colored persons," concluded that "since 20 percent of the population of the school was of this race, the school was compelled to face realistically this issue and to provide an educational program in harmony with the needs of this race." This was "realism" unencumbered by any vision of the school as a source of social reform.¹⁶

An important, measurable, and intended outcome of curriculum revi-

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

sion was a decrease in the number of students enrolled in college preparatory courses. Since social utility was the guiding star of curriculum revision, the college preparatory subjects served no "function" for the large majority who were not going to college. The school official who started curriculum revision in Hackensack, New Jersey, reported with satisfaction that enrollment in the college preparatory course had been cut from 30 percent to 15 percent of the high school. Similarly, the school district of Battle Creek, Michigan, invited experts from the University of Chicago to survey its educational needs, hired a director of curriculum, revised its curriculum, and ended up with a new course focused on young people's personal problems called "Basic Living," and a reduction by one-half of those enrolled in the college preparatory curriculum. In Alameda County, California, curriculum revision resulted in a "functional" curriculum, which meant, for example, that a course in "World Problems," which "had degenerated into chronological history," was shunted aside "to make room for something 'more important,'" namely, safety and driver education. In Westwood, California, the revised curriculum offered everyone a "Basic Course," devoted to the functions of social living, and reserved courses like physics and chemistry for the college-bound.¹⁷

Many schools understood the spirit of curriculum revision as a mandate to expand vocational education, always at the expense of academic studies. One rural southern community, prodded by the regional accrediting agency to revise its traditional curriculum, stressed the practical arts: boys learned how to be farmers, printers, barbers, electricians, carpenters, and so forth, and girls learned bookkeeping, beauty culture, stenography, and home economics. In another school, which "moved from a narrow academic college preparatory program to one that is largely vocational," the principal lamented the fact that 30 percent of his students insisted on enrolling in academic courses, even though only 10 percent would actually go to college. In the new program, the only common courses were English, social studies, physical and health education. According to the principal, who "converted" the teachers to the new philosophy, "the backbone of the whole business is the vocational training. The pupils must leave us ready and willing to work, able to pay their own way and to earn their living. The day has passed when it suffices for the applicant for work to say, 'I have a high school diploma.' Any graduate can say that. We want ours to be able to say in addition, 'I can cook your meals.' 'I can type your letters.' 'I can repair your automobile.' 'I can paint your house.' 'I can tend your garden.'" The motto of the school was: "Call us when you need workers."¹⁸

The biggest obstacle faced by the leaders of the curriculum revision

movement was the resistance of teachers and parents. When a school decided to abolish grades and report cards, to institute automatic promotion, or to divert students away from the college preparatory curriculum, parents complained. Some parents failed to understand why the school's new enlarged social role required it to inquire into intimate details of the family's life. One school district in Granite, Utah, took responsibility for knowing "what every single child in the community between 6 and 18 is doing with his life in school, before school, and after school, and even during summer vacation," and sent a school nurse to "score" every home for evidence of thrift, neatness, cleanliness, income, health, harmony or discord, presence of reading matter, and make, type, and year of automobile.¹⁹

Of course, teachers who became "trouble makers" by criticizing the new approach were ousted, but even those who tried their best to cooperate were constantly in danger of backsliding. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, a progressive administration eliminated all textbooks, and let it be known that "teachers were free to do what they wanted in the classroom, but they were not free to use a textbook." Spelling, for example, was taught through games and projects, but eventually it became necessary to bring back a spelling book; when asked to evaluate the new texts, "each school was so happy to get a spelling book again that each school thought the one it was using was the best."²⁰

And then there was the persistent problem of what happened in the classroom after the new program was presumably implemented. Texas conducted a statewide curriculum revision in the mid-1930s. Like most other states, it devoted the first year to study; the second year to producing new courses; the third year to testing the new courses; and the fourth year to installing them in the schools. According to plan, the elementary school curriculum was to disregard subject matter and to be organized around five core areas: language arts; social relations; home and vocational arts; creative and recreative arts; nature, mathematics, and science. In 1943, the Texas State Department of Education asked teachers to submit descriptions of "A Typical Child's Day in My Class or School." More than a thousand entries were analyzed. Instead of finding the schools organized around the five core areas, the evaluators discovered that the typical elementary school day was organized into separate subjects taught by daily assignments. Long after the principles of progressivism had won general acceptance by professional leaders of city, state, and nation, educational authorities continued to complain that teachers were failing to "vitalize" or "humanize" or "socialize" the classroom and were clinging to outmoded academic traditions.²¹

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

Even as progressive education was on the ascendancy, the popular press began to reveal undercurrents of dissatisfaction. Mortimer Adler, an associate of Robert Hutchins at the University of Chicago, charged that progressives were trying to turn the school into "a grandiose 'Institute for Individual and Community Development' . . . which would be all things to all men, regulating everything from the pre-natal care of the child to his vocational preparation, and solving the social problems of the community on the side." He worried that the progressive ideal would corrupt the community by providing a "feeble palliative" which encouraged it to evade its problems and would corrupt the schools by diverting their energies "from the primary task of the basic intellectual disciplines." Others complained about poor discipline in progressive schools; about poor mastery of the fundamentals; about the abandonment of Western culture for practical studies; about the failure to teach respect for hard, sustained effort; about the absence of any common standards or values in the schools; about the tendency to adopt the latest fads from child study experts; about the use of children as guinea pigs; about children who were so well "socialized" that they lacked the ability to play alone; about the sacrifice of individuality to group-conformity; about the experts' contemptuous attitudes toward parents; about parents' dependency on expert opinion; about the introduction of psychological ratings and personality inventories in place of report cards and grades; about the education profession's impenetrable patois, which was unintelligible to laymen.²²

Not all the critics could be dismissed out of hand as uninformed reactionaries. William C. Bagley, Kilpatrick's leading adversary, warned of the dangers of the narrowly utilitarian version of progressive education that had become the dominant pedagogy; he complained in 1934 that substituting "activities" for "systematic and sequential learning would defeat the most important ends of education in a democracy," in particular, the goal of insuring "as high a level of common culture as possible." An official of the U.S. Office of Education noted in 1937 that the secondary curriculum was evolving away from formal classroom work to "successful adjustment and learning to live," and that "the problem is one of developing techniques and procedures for introducing these important adjustments into the educational program of the schools without succumbing to a system of soft pedagogy which makes no demands on anybody anywhere."²³

The most devastating criticism of the new progressive education came from an unexpected source: John Dewey. In 1938, in *Experience and Education*, Dewey rebuked those whose extremist zeal was corrupting progressive principles. He chided latter-day progressives for believing that organized

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

subject matter should be jettisoned, for proceeding "as if any form of direction and guidance by adults were an invasion of individual freedom," and for mistakenly thinking that education should concentrate on the present and future to the exclusion of the past. Dewey warned that "it is not too much to say that an educational philosophy which professes to be based on the idea of freedom may become as dogmatic as ever was the traditional education which is reacted against." To those who had insistently confused progressive education with the removal of external controls, Dewey cautioned that "the only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence," which is the result of "intelligent activity," not of activity which is based on whim and impulse.²⁴

Others might have been disheartened by criticism from the patriarch of the movement, as well as the complaints of parents and the backsliding of teachers, but progressive educators were not easily dismayed. The movement's success was undeniable: *Time* magazine ran a cover story in 1938 which declared that "No U.S. school has completely escaped its influence." Earlier the same year, when a group of professional educators, calling themselves "Essentialists," launched an attack on progressive education, Kilpatrick said scornfully, "The Essentialists represent the same sort of reactionary trend that always springs up when a doctrine is gaining headway in the country. The astonishing thing is not the fact of the reaction but that it is so small and on the whole comes from such inconspicuous people." Not only were progressive educators fortified by a sense of certainty, but they were able to explain whatever difficulties they encountered by invoking the concept of "cultural lag." According to Paul Mort, a professor of education at Teachers College, "Typically in the American school system fifty years elapse between the recognition of an unmet need and the first adaptation intended to take care of this need. Another fifty years are typically required to spread the new adaptations throughout all the schools of a state." With this kind of faith in the future, the most obdurate critics could be ignored.²⁵

Even as the volume of criticism began to rise, largely from people who were dismissed as uninformed laymen or angry medievalists wedded to dead subjects, the consensus around progressive ideas became stronger. The best evidence of this appeared in a series of publications issued in the last years of the 1930s by such prominent organizations as the NEA's Educational Policies Commission, the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, and the American Council on Education. With one exception, these reports reinforced the social utility role of education. The exception, *The Unique Function of Education in American Democracy*, was written primarily by the historian Charles Beard and appeared

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

in 1937. Beard's statement was striking because of its unambiguous commitment to the transmission of knowledge as the major goal of the school. He wrote that "The primary business of education, in effecting the promises of American democracy, is to guard, cherish, advance, and make available in the life of coming generations the funded and growing wisdom, knowledge, and aspirations of the race. This involves the dissemination of knowledge, the liberation of minds, the development of skills, the promotion of free inquiries, the encouragement of the creative or inventive spirit, and the establishment of wholesome attitudes toward order and change—all useful in the good life for each person. . . ." He added, perhaps with awareness of the aggressively utilitarian spirit that informed the curriculum revision movement, that "Education would cease to be education if it ruled out of consideration Plato's Republic, the Bible, or the writings of all such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, John Ruskin, or Ralph Waldo Emerson." Beard was a progressive in the old sense of the word, but subsequent publications proved that he was clearly out of step with the new spirit of progressive education, perhaps because as a historian, he was a "subject matter specialist."²⁶

In the same year, Harl R. Douglass's *Secondary Education for Youth in Modern America*, a report to the American Youth Commission of the American Council on Education, summarized the dominant themes of social utility and curricular differentiation that Beard had ignored. A professor of secondary education at the University of Minnesota, Douglass asserted that "the aim of education is to affect beneficially the activities of life for which youth is educated." By its nature, the public school exists to further certain social objectives, and it was developed "for the purpose of controlling human behavior." The objectives of education, he wrote, were preparation for citizenship; for home and family life; for vocational life; for physical health; for effective personality; for effective use of leisure time; and for development of information, interests, and skills. Like many other progressive educators, Douglass noted that high school enrollment had doubled every ten years since 1890, that the student population now included many of low intelligence, and that this required the high schools to diversify their offerings to "meet the needs of children of mediocre or inferior ability who lack interest in abstract and academic materials." With this new population, "It cannot be expected that the great mass of the populace will spend its leisure time with the classics, the arts, or higher mathematics. Leisure education must then be attuned to the primitive instincts for physical and practical activity, the more familiar pursuits of the masses—the home and its furnishings, nature, sports, games, the radio, and social activities." Furthermore, the curriculum "need not include sub-

jects, or aspects of them, merely because they have made significant contributions to civilization. It is impractical to confuse, as is so commonly done, such values with the utility of subject matter for the education of the masses of young people today, however essential it may be that a small number of experts be well trained in these matters."²⁷

The mainstream was promptly swelled by a new document from the Educational Policies Commission, *The Purposes of Education in American Democracy*, written primarily by William G. Carr, an NEA official. Carr asserted that education must be chiefly concerned with the objectives of "self-realization," "human relationships," "economic efficiency," and "civic responsibility." Too much emphasis, he held, was placed on the teaching of grammar and the classics in English: "Whatever may be the merits of such exercises as a preparation for a career as an author, the great majority of American boys and girls will profit more by a wide-ranging program of reading for enjoyment and fact-gathering." Relying on utility as the criterion for educational worth, Carr urged a reduction of the number studying advanced mathematics, advanced science, and foreign languages, and an emphasis instead on everyday applications of mathematics and science.²⁸

The following year, 1939, the National Association of Secondary-School Principals published B. L. Dodds's *That All May Learn*, which utterly jettisoned the humane tradition of liberal education that Beard had championed. Dodds, a professor of education at Purdue University, held that it was absurd for the high school to adhere to an academic curriculum unsuited to "the new fifty percent," the students of low intelligence who stayed in high school as a result of the steady rise in the compulsory school age and the lack of jobs for youth. She claimed to be concerned about the "educationally neglected," but in fact was equally contemptuous of those at both extremes of ability. The "educationally neglected," she said, were not "abnormal"; on the contrary, "the academic person who can happily devote a lifetime to the pursuit of work dealing largely in abstract symbols of experience as reported through writing could with far more justification be considered abnormal." The trouble with the academic curriculum, said Dodds, was that it had "fostered and definitely encouraged" unrealistic ambitions and made too many "unselected" youth aspire to enter managerial and professional jobs for which they were not fitted. Too much time, effort, and money was wasted trying to teach the conventional subjects to the "educationally neglected," Dodds complained. In her view, not many adults need specialized knowledge in mathematics and science, and only those who can profit by it should get it. Nor do they need a high level of reading comprehension, only enough to use as an "essential tool" for newspaper and magazine fare. There is no reason to teach them the classics,

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

and they do not need much in the way of writing skills for "the small amount of writing they will have to do." Their courses in social science should be devoted to the present, since "students of limited imagination" find no reality in the study of "heroes long dead" or other nations. Their curriculum, she recommended, should be based on their needs and interests and should be as lifelike as possible; what they want to know is how to dress attractively, how to make friends with the opposite sex, and how to get a job.²⁹

The reports from the professional associations continued to pour forth, reiterating the need for a fundamental reconstruction of the secondary school program based on the needs of youth and recognition that the high school was no longer a college-preparatory institution. Seldom was there recognition of the responsibility of the school to transmit knowledge or to stimulate appreciation for the great achievements of mankind or to improve the intellectual development of all youth, even those who were not college bound. Instead the "needs of youth" became a catechetical slogan, invoked as evidence of the proper progressive orientation. In 1942, one progressive educator took the slogan a step further; he noted that although educators agreed on the paramount importance of the "needs of youth," there was little agreement on just what those needs were and how they should affect the curriculum. To correct this deficiency, he queried 2,069 youths and found that their actual needs were: how to find a job, how to make friends, how to behave on a date, how to protect one's health, how to get the most for one's money, and how to make life worthwhile. Few of them wanted to know about the causes of the war then raging in Europe or to learn a foreign language, and less than 10 percent cared about "the contributions of European culture to American culture"; boys wanted to study science, girls did not. The author concluded that his findings suggested the necessity of "considerable shift in the character and content of the prevailing secondary curriculum," including differentiation of the curriculum for girls and boys.³⁰

The major report of the Educational Policies Commission, which summed up all that had gone before (except, of course, for Beard's idiosyncratic contribution), was *Education for All American Youth*, published in 1944. Again, the updated *Cardinal Principles* was set forth as the ideal education. Again, a distinguished panel of progressive educators described the ideal curriculum, restructured to meet "the imperative needs of youth," defined in terms of preparation for citizenship, vocation, consumption, family living, economic understanding, and so forth. While there was reference to stimulating intellectual curiosity, it was also proposed that in the school of the future, "There is no aristocracy of 'subjects'. . . . Mathematics and

mechanics, art and agriculture, history and homemaking are all peers." Again, there was almost nothing that needed to be done that could not be done by the schools.³¹

Across the country, schools experimented with new curricula and new methods, to stay abreast of the best progressive thinking. In one junior high school in Tulsa, all traditional subject matter was merged into a single core period, taught by one teacher; students spent the rest of the day in shop, playground, or laboratory; the core period, which included English, science, mathematics, and history, was called "social relations." In an Oakland, California, high school, students could take courses in "Leisure Activities" or "Personal Management" for credit. The high school in Altoona, Pennsylvania, reorganized its curriculum in terms of needs, so that science instruction concentrated on housing, fuel, and clothing; social studies on group and personal adjustment; English on free reading; mathematics on practical applications; and home economics on consumer practices. In Holton, Kansas, the English department prepared a core curriculum that was based on the study of students' homes; groups were formed to study metals, landscaping, woods and finishes, and masonry. The Goldsboro, North Carolina, high school stressed practical applications: in physics, shop work replaced laboratory and textbook study; trigonometry was studied through its use in surveying; and one group of girls received credit for equipping the girls' restroom (picking materials, taking measurements, making estimates, selecting colors, and so forth).³²

Innovative programs were reported in numerous other school systems. Their common features were: centering the curriculum around basic areas of human activity, instead of traditional subject matter; incorporating subject matter only insofar as it was useful in everyday situations; stressing functional values, such as behavior, attitudes, skills, and know-how, rather than "bookish" or abstract knowledge; reorienting studies to the immediate needs and interests of students; using community resources; introducing nontraditional materials (for example, audiovisual equipment or magazines) and nontraditional activities (for example, panel discussions, dramatizations, and work projects) in addition to or instead of direct instruction and textbooks.

In the face of the growing consensus, there was little criticism of the mainstream pedagogy within the profession. I. L. Kandel, professor at Teachers College and editor of *School and Society*, was a notable exception. In *The Cult of Uncertainty*, published in 1943, Kandel blasted progressive education as not only vapid and superficial but an approach so set against tradition, authority, and the past that it must inexorably produce "rootlessness." Despite the complaints of dissidents like Kandel, the consensus

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

among progressives remained unshaken. A summary of typical progressive thinking was contained in Paul R. Mort and William S. Vincent's *A Look at Our Schools: A Book for the Thinking Citizen* in 1946, which attempted to show why the "modern school" was better than the old-fashioned school. The purpose of the public school, they said, was "to mold a people and to contribute to individual effectiveness and happiness." The way to judge an educational system is to ask "To what desirable patterns of group behavior does it contribute?" That this put educators, rather than individuals or elected representatives, in control of defining the future of society did not seem to trouble the authors. The special strength of the "modern school" was that it recognized that whatever is taught must have real use. Therefore, only those who intend to be scholars study "bookish" subjects: "With any child the secret for success is being fitted. The materials which go into houses are not those which go into clothing or those which make locomotives. But houses, clothing, locomotives are all needed. It is vain and wasteful to take a girl who would make a fine homemaker and try to fit her into the patterns of training which make a lawyer, or to take a boy who would be successful in business and try to fit his training to that which produces doctors." This sort of statement, a commonplace when it was written, revealed some of the inherent flaws in the conventional wisdom: first, that it reflected prevailing practices uncritically; second, that it presumed to know the occupational destinies of its pupils; and third, that it disparaged intellectual values.³³

This grand consensus among professional educators did not go for nought. When World War II ended, events brought this school of thought to its logical conclusion and opened what became a great debate about American education. Its beginnings were inauspicious enough. On June 1, 1945, a group of vocational educators met in Washington, D.C., at the invitation of the U.S. Office of Education's Division of Vocational Education to discuss the problems of young people whose needs were not being met by either vocational or college preparatory programs. No one seemed to have any good ideas, and then the chairman of the meeting asked Charles A. Prosser, a veteran vocational educator, to summarize the conference. Prosser, in words that were soon described as "historic," offered the following resolution:

It is the belief of this conference that, with the aid of this report in final form, the vocational school of a community will be able better to prepare 20 percent of the youth of secondary school age for entrance upon desirable skilled occupations; and that the high school will continue to prepare another 20 percent for entrance to college. We do not believe that the remaining 60

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

percent of our youth of secondary school age will receive the life adjustment training they need and to which they are entitled as American citizens—unless and until the administrators of public education with the assistance of the vocational education leaders formulate a similar program for this group.

We therefore request the U.S. Commissioner of Education and the Assistant Commissioner for Vocational Education to call at some early date a conference or a series of regional conferences between an equal number of representatives of general and of vocational education—to consider this problem and to take such initial steps as may be found advisable for its solution.³⁴

The "Prosser Resolution," as it was immediately labeled, was adopted unanimously by an enthusiastic conference and forwarded to the commissioner of education. In 1946, regional conferences were convened in New York City, Chicago, Cheyenne, Sacramento, and Birmingham to consider "the meaning and implications of the resolution" and ways to implement it. The regional conferences agreed that there was urgent need for "life adjustment education" for "a major fraction" of high school youths and that a national conference should be convened to develop a plan of action. The Prosser Resolution was reworded to eliminate any reference to a specific percentage of youth with unmet needs, and a national conference was convened in Chicago in May, 1947. While there was still some uncertainty about just what the historic resolution meant, the educators at the conference understood that it represented a call to implement the profession's persistent demands for "functional" education. The conference described educationally neglected youths as coming from low-income homes with low cultural environments; as retarded in school; as making low scores on intelligence tests and achievement tests; as less emotionally mature than other students, with lower grades and less interest in school work. What these students needed was "life adjustment education," which consisted of guidance and education in citizenship, home and family life, use of leisure, health, tools of learning, work experience, and occupational adjustment. Participants in the conference agreed further that "life adjustment education" must not be restricted to the educationally neglected, for indeed it was the very education best suited to meet the imperative needs of *all* American youth.

Prosser, who had addressed each of the regional conferences, told the national conference: "Never in all the history of education has there been such a meeting as this one. . . . Never was there such a meeting where people were so sincere in their belief that this was the golden opportunity to do something that would give to all American youth their educational heritage so long denied. What you have planned is worth fighting for—

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

it is worth dying for. . . . I am proud to have lived long enough to see my fellow schoolmen design a plan which will aid in achieving for every youth an education truly adjusted to life." Prosser, who had begun his career as a lobbyist for vocational education in 1912, had spelled out his educational values in a 1939 lecture, in which he insisted that every subject taught in high school must be judged by its utility for everyday living. He claimed that "business arithmetic is superior to plane or solid geometry; learning ways of keeping physically fit, to the study of French; learning the technique of selecting an occupation, to the study of algebra; simple science of everyday life, to geology; simple business English, to Elizabethan classics." If school subjects were judged by utility, he believed, all mathematics and foreign languages would be dropped as required studies. He saw no point in "a system of education-for-more-education," other than to select out students for higher education and to keep certain faculty employed. "The biggest, most difficult, and most important job in the world," he held, "is the job of living." This was the rationale and the vision that progressive educators hailed as "life adjustment education."³⁵

The U.S. Office of Education threw its full support behind the campaign for life adjustment education. In 1947, John W. Studebaker, commissioner of education, appointed a National Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth, which included representatives from such major groups as the NEA, the American Association of School Administrators, the American Vocational Association, the National Association of High School Supervisors and Directors of Secondary Education, the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, the National Council of State School Officers, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference. This commission sponsored conferences and numerous publications, issued by the Government Printing Office, and spurred the creation of state commissions on life adjustment education. A second national commission was appointed in 1950, which continued the promotion of this concept, until the commission's term ended in 1954.

What was life adjustment education? In the eyes of its promoters, it was the direct descendant of every major progressive initiative, from the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* right down to the NEA's *Education for All American Youth*. Its arrival was warmly greeted as the opportunity to implement thirty years of progressive proclamations, but it was nonetheless difficult for its sponsors to explain without becoming remarkably prolix. The official definition was that life adjustment education "better equips all American youth to live democratically with satisfaction to themselves and profit to society as home members, workers, and citizens." What that meant required fourteen additional statements (for example, "It is

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

appropriate for all American youth and offers them learning experiences appropriate to their capacities. . . . It recognizes that many events of importance happened a long time ago, but holds that the real significance of these events is in their bearing upon life of today.") But even with all of this elaboration, its meaning was still unclear, though it surely meant a stress on "functional" objectives, like vocation and health, and a rejection of traditional academic studies.³⁶

Precisely how much impact the life adjustment movement had on American schools is difficult to measure, particularly since life adjustment was indistinguishable in everything but name from many other, already established versions of progressive education, such as core curriculum courses, activity programs, and "common learnings" courses. At one national life adjustment conference, reports on current practice were offered by teachers from Ann Arbor, Michigan; Forest Hills, New York; Spencer, New York; Washington, D.C.; Springfield, Missouri; Philadelphia; New Britain, Connecticut; Midland, Michigan; Rockville, Maryland; Ashland, Virginia; and Pittsburgh. In addition, federal education officials cited the following as districts where life adjustment programs had been started: Amarillo, Texas; Bloomfield, New Jersey; Coffeyville, Kansas; Denver, Colorado; Hornell, New York; Peoria, Illinois; Saint Paul, Minnesota; Springfield, Missouri; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Wilmington, Delaware.³⁷

In 1949, the U.S. Office of Education surveyed the nation's schools and found that 20 percent of the junior high schools with more than 500 pupils had a core curriculum, as did 11.3 percent of the high schools of similar size. Most core courses were in seven states: California, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, and Pennsylvania. Fourteen of the fifteen junior and senior high schools in Denver, Colorado, offered a core course (which included English, social studies, guidance, health, "democratic living, personal and social growth, intergroup education, human relationships," and "general living units"), as did most of the secondary schools in Wichita, Kansas; Springfield, Missouri; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Eugene, Oregon; Long Beach and Pasadena, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Grand Rapids and Detroit, Michigan. The schools of Garrett County, Maryland, organized the curriculum for grades seven through twelve entirely around adolescent "needs," with no reference to subject matter; the curriculum for grade twelve, for example, consisted of "family living; role of education; making a living; health and safety; consumer problems; and technology of living." The schools of Harford County, Maryland, had no curriculum selected in advance, since teachers "are free to select from or reject them in light of the needs of pupils as they discover them." These districts were cited by the U.S. Office of Education

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

as examples of advanced educational practice which were meeting "the imperative needs of every youth."³⁸

By whatever name it was called, modern education by the late 1940s was clearly identified with "functional" teaching, which used everyday situations as the medium of instruction, with the purpose of changing students' attitudes and behavior to conform to social norms. The ideal was the well-adjusted student, who was prepared to live effectively as a worker, a home member, and a citizen. High school students in Atlanta, Georgia, took a social studies course that integrated art, music, mathematics, science, and other subjects into a unit on "Housing and Home Building," which aimed to teach such functional values as how to build a healthful home and how to beautify the home and grounds. In Peekskill, New York, the shift to a core curriculum was understood by parents and teachers to mean that the school was emphasizing behavioral change rather than subject matter acquisition. In Springfield, Missouri, teachers were trained by a school of education team to engage in child study techniques in order to make teachers aware of their role in "the development of desirable social attitudes and values in children." In Denver, Colorado, high school students participated in a unit on "What is expected of a boy on a date?" which covered such problems as "Do girls want to 'pet'?" and "Should you go in with a girl after a date (to raid the ice box)?" In Des Moines, Iowa, students were taught "correct social usage" and appreciation of "the satisfactions to be derived from being an approved member of the group" as part of a course in "Developing an Effective Personality." Junior high school students in Tulsa, Oklahoma, learned what kind of clothing was appropriate, what shade of nail polish to wear, and how to improve one's appearance. The object of courses like these was to teach children what kind of behavior was socially acceptable and how to adjust to group expectations.³⁹

One likely casualty of the strain of progressivism that stretched from the *Cardinal Principles* to life adjustment education was foreign language enrollments in high school. According to Edward Krug, the high point in foreign language enrollment was 1910, when 83.3 percent of the nation's high school students studied a foreign language. By 1915, the proportion had slipped to 77 percent. The widespread abandonment of German instruction during World War I and the subsequent attack on foreign language requirements by progressive educators accelerated the decline to "catastrophic" proportions; by 1955, only 20.6 percent of high school students studied any foreign language. "Moreover," notes Krug, "46 percent of the public high schools in the middle 1950's offered no foreign

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

language study whatsoever, either ancient or modern, while 54.6 percent offered no modern foreign language."⁴⁰

While it is impossible to know with certainty the extent to which the purposeful de-emphasis of "mere knowledge" actually affected what was taught and learned in the nation's classrooms, and while it seems likely that many teachers ignored the strictures from the centers of pedagogical theory, a trend is suggested by changes in some major tests. The examination given by the College Entrance Examination Board, once firmly rooted in a common liberal arts curriculum, was replaced in 1947 by the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a standardized, multiple-choice test of verbal and mathematical skills, which was virtually curriculum-free; the switch had the effect of opening prestigious colleges to students whose schools did not follow the curricular practices of the elite preparatory schools, but it also relieved schools of the necessity of requiring a liberal arts curriculum. The individually graded "college-boards," which stressed essay questions, gave way to the machine-scored SAT because of the increase in college applicants. A clearer reflection of curricular change is found in the New York State Regents' examinations, given annually to all high school seniors in the state. In 1927, tests were offered for those who had studied either two, three, or four years of a foreign language; those who had studied four years of English were asked to write an essay on a subject like "science in modern life," "heroes and hero worship," or "personal tastes and critical standards"; on the history examination, students were tested on the social, economic, and political history of Greece, Rome, Europe, and the United States. Ten years later, the same examination tended more toward multiple-choice questions and contemporary essays (for example, "the sit-down strike as an instrument of labor" or "achievements of outstanding Negroes"), but its substance was not dramatically dissimilar from that of 1927. By 1948, however, there were no longer any fourth-year language examinations; knowledge of all history other than American had shrunk into a minor portion of a multiple-choice examination called "American History and World Backgrounds"; and the fourth-year English test, while emphasizing multiple-choice questions, asked for an essay on such life-adjusted topics as "three problems facing seniors," "drawbacks to being an honor student," or "advice to parents."⁴¹

Criticism of progressive education had been continuous since 1930, both from respected scholars like Robert M. Hutchins, William C. Bagley, and I. L. Kandel and from writers in the popular media. Hutchins and his supporters were ignored, or when taken note of, scorned as Thomists,

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

neoclassicists, elitists, and the like. Secure in their convictions, allied in their activities with federal, state, and city education agencies, nothing prepared the progressive educators for the deluge of attacks that began in 1949 and reached a peak in 1953. Both critics and defenders of the status quo referred to this period as "the great debate," and most felt that it would decisively influence the future of American education.

Critics of progressive education, whose charges previously had fallen on deaf ears because they could point only to isolated examples of foolishness, now found in life adjustment education a bloated target: it had the blessing of the U.S. Office of Education and almost every major education group; it was practiced in public school systems across the country; it contained an abundance of slogans, jargon, and vacuous anti-intellectualism; it carried the utilitarianism and group conformism of latter-day progressivism to its ultimate trivialization. This vast outpouring of criticism, coming as it did at the same time as the teacher shortage, the schools' appeal for federal aid, and the onset of the "baby boom," made it clear that the schools were in a crisis too fundamental to ignore.

The critics of the public schools were a diverse lot. Some were extremists who believed that progressive education was part of a Communist plot and who demanded the elimination of subversive teachers and controversial books. A few critics, like Bernard Iddings Bell, were concerned that the secularism of the public school prevented it from promoting any values other than relativism. Some, like Hutchins, criticized the schools on essentially philosophical grounds. Others, like Mortimer Smith, Albert Lynd, Arthur Bestor, and Paul Woodring, criticized the schools primarily for their curricular inadequacies. Since the target, progressive education, was the same, there was a certain amount of overlap among the critics, but the differences among them were as significant as the similarities. Smith, Lynd, Bestor, and Woodring shared many of Hutchins's concerns about the fundamental inadequacies of progressivism, but none of them agreed with Bell's complaint about the divorce between education and religion or with the coercive superpatriotism of the extremist groups. Yet defenders of public education responded to the critics by labeling them collectively as "enemies of the public schools."

The extremist organizations tapped a current of right-wing paranoia that roiled the country in the postwar decade. At least half a dozen organizations exploited fears that a vast and sinister conspiracy had subverted American education and had turned it against not only traditional education but traditional American ideals. These groups published books, pamphlets, and magazines, asserting, among other things, that public schools were failing to teach the fundamentals, failing to discipline children, wast-

ing money on fads and frills, and espousing progressive education, which promoted collectivism, godlessness, and juvenile delinquency. Their materials—which contained half-truths, scurrilous distortions, and outrageous charges—surfaced in many of the communities where progressive programs came under attack; in some of those communities, like Houston, Texas, and Pasadena, California, local groups subscribed to the conspiracy theory and believed that they were engaged in a patriotic crusade to cleanse the schools of subversive influences. However, even in Pasadena, the antiprogressive forces had educational grievances based on their perception that the progressive superintendent was more interested in shaping their children's attitudes and values than in developing their minds.⁴²

Nor were all the other attacks on progressive education at the local level inspired by militant anti-Communism. In Minneapolis, the school system's "common learnings" program became the focus of a community rebellion. "Common learnings" was a core program that met for a minimum of two hours each day, merging English and social studies, "during which youth study their personal and social problems so as to meet their common needs for present and future citizenship." It rejected traditional practices, such as the reading of classic literature, and adopted instead instruction in problems "meaningful to youth," with the goal of "the building of right attitudes," such as "understanding human behavior" or "developing into a good citizen." Initiated in 1945, "common learnings" was adopted systemwide by 1949/50. In 1950, a group called the Parents Council asked the board of education to make the program optional and to offer courses in subject matter for those who requested them. Though school officials claimed that children were learning more than ever, they failed to persuade the Parents Council, whose leaders were university professors. Some eight hundred people attended a mass meeting called by the Parents Council, where the poet and novelist Robert Penn Warren spoke caustically about "the minimum standards" of the "common learnings" program and the "patronizing attitude" of progressive educators, who exhibited "condescending democracy on the one hand and smug authoritarianism on the other hand." Bowing to pressure, the board of education agreed to make the program optional. Progressive educators analyzed this situation as typical of the efforts of a "militant minority" to disrupt a modern educational program; unable to understand how well-informed people could fail to agree with them, they lumped the critics of programs like "common learnings" together with other "enemies of the public schools."⁴³

While communities debated and sometimes battled, the publication of several critical books made it respectable to question progressive education.

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

First to appear was Mortimer Smith's *And Madly Teach* (1949). Smith, a former school board member in Connecticut, complained that progressive education had become "the official philosophy of American public education," that teachers, administrators, and schools of education "have a truly amazing uniformity of opinion regarding the aims, the content, and the methods of education," and that this philosophy was both anti-intellectual and undemocratic. When the public schools expanded to include all children, said Smith, educators turned to progressivism to rationalize their failure to educate all: "Here was a doctrine that released the teacher from his responsibility for handing on the traditional knowledge of the race, a doctrine that firmly implied that one need not adhere to any standards of knowledge but simply cater to individual interests. . . . With the acceptance of this doctrine American public school education took the easy way to meet its problems. . . ." The easy way was to embrace utilitarian how-to courses, while abandoning the effort to "reach every student, bookish and nonbookish, with the world's wisdom." The elimination of intellectual and moral standards, wrote Smith, meant that "no subject is intrinsically of any more value than any other subject . . . training in mechanical skills is put on a par with the development of mind and imagination . . . hairdressing and embalming are just as important, if not a little more so, than history and philosophy." Smith complained that the schools' effort to educate "the whole child" was not only ridiculous, "covering everything except a course in how to come in out of the rain," but was dangerous, because it enlarged the power of the social group and the state at the expense of the individual and his family. The emphasis on adjusting the individual to society, he warned, eroded individual freedom and fed the tendency in modern society to bureaucratic control by experts accountable to no one. Smith insisted that it was progressives who were authoritarian, since they compel the individual to adjust to the social values of the group, and it was progressives who were undemocratic, since they betrayed a "profound distrust of the ability of all youth to 'take' education."⁴⁴

For the next five years, the "crisis in education" filled the pages of the nation's magazines with arguments for and against contemporary practices. *Time* magazine described life adjustment education as "the latest gimmick among U.S. educators" and defined it contemptuously as "a school of thought which seemed to believe that the teacher's job was not so much to teach history or algebra, as to prepare students to live happily ever after." In the *Scientific Monthly*, the president of the University of Illinois chapter of Phi Beta Kappa ridiculed education professors; they had, he said, belittled "the pursuit of knowledge of literature, of languages, of philosophy, of the arts, of the sciences," and converted teachers into "wet

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

nurses, instructors in sex education, medical advisors, consultants to the lovelorn, umpires in the battle of the vertical versus the horizontal stroke in tooth-brushing, and professors of motor-vehicle operation."⁴⁵

Public educators were taken aback by the sudden deluge of critical commentaries, ridicule, and invective directed at them: in education journals alone, the number of articles attacking or defending current practice rose from seven in 1948 to forty-nine in 1952, and articles in *Life*, the *Readers Digest*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, *McCall's* and scores of other national publications doubled or trebled the volume of critiques. While it had been customary in the 1930s and early 1940s to ignore or belittle the critics of progressive education, this was no longer possible.⁴⁶

The response of progressive educators revealed their inability to be self-critical or to examine their own assumptions in the pragmatic spirit to which they paid homage. At best, the defenders of current practice argued that the programs under attack had been validated by evidence garnered from the social sciences and were designed to recognize the diversity of abilities among students; to go back to the mythical "good old days," when the curriculum was appropriate for the few, not the many, would be unscientific and undemocratic. Far more typically, however, defenders of the new education were simply defensive. The schools, they insisted, were better than ever. Studies were cited to demonstrate that school children were learning the fundamentals better than did their predecessors. This answered the extremists who condemned the schools for ignoring the Three Rs, but it sidestepped the serious charge that "how-to" courses and socio-personal adjustment had been substituted for history, science, mathematics, foreign languages, and literature. Some of the defenders insisted that progressive education could not be responsible for the failings of the schools because it had never been implemented, which raised the question of how progressive practices made the schools better than ever if they had not been used.

Another reaction was to assail the critics as reactionaries, bigots, zealots, and enemies of public education, who were part of a massive, well-organized, well-financed national organization that was scheming to destroy public education. The editor of *Progressive Education* noted that there were three elements in the usual organized attack on the schools: first, local malcontents and critics; second, a local self-constituted organization; and third, national organizations that supply "ammunition and strategy" to local groups. What kind of people joined in the attacks? Certainly not honest critics, for honest critics keep themselves well informed, "are willing to work with the schools, and generally favor the same lines of progress

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

as the educators." In short, an "honest critic" was not a critic at all, while anyone who did not agree with the schools' program was by definition a malcontent and a dishonest critic.⁴⁷

A writer in the *Saturday Review of Literature* defined the critics as: "(a) the 'chronic tax conservationists' who resist every addition to the public expense; (b) the 'congenital reactionaries' who are suspicious of everything that 'isn't like it used to be when I was in school'; (c) numerous tribes of 'witch hunters,' especially those to whom every political or social change since 1900 is 'red'; (d) numerous 'religious tongs' which whet their axes on many forms of prejudice." James B. Conant, the president of Harvard University, told a convention of school administrators that critics should reveal whether they were attacking the public schools in order to help private schools get tax money; at the same meeting, a Harvard educator pronounced that those who joined in trying to discredit the schools were "among the emotionally least stable members of the community." The Defense Commission of the NEA characterized the critics somewhat differently, as: "confirmed subversives who want to destroy free public education in order to undermine our democratic way of life; disgruntled teachers who have not kept abreast of the latest educational methods and attempt to justify their own shortcomings; unreasonable parents who try to blame all of their children's shortcomings on the schools; racketeers who capitalize on the nation's legitimate concern over the education of our children and milk unsuspecting citizens for their own gain." Another author succinctly defined the "enemy" as: "real-estate conservatives, super-patriots, dogma peddlers, and race haters." There was no doubt that such disreputable types of school critics existed, but there could also be no doubt that the counterattackers preferred to focus on the extremists and crackpots rather than confront the fact that there were also well-informed individuals who honestly disagreed with the schools' practices.⁴⁸

Despite the vigorous efforts by educators to discredit their enemies, the year 1953 was a banner year for slashing critiques of progressive education. The publication of books by authors who were in no way connected either with reactionary fringe groups or with religious organizations made it apparent that progressivism was in deep trouble.

In *The Conflict in Education in a Democratic Society*, Robert M. Hutchins asserted that modern pragmatic education was philosophically bankrupt. Progressive education, he said, consisted of four principles; first was "the doctrine of adjustment," which "leads to a curriculum of miscellaneous dead facts"—that is, information rather than knowledge—and to vocational training. Such a doctrine, he cautioned, was inadequate because it prizes conformity and devalues independent thought: "Our mission here

on earth is to change our environment, not to adjust ourselves to it." Second was "the doctrine of immediate needs," which promotes the disintegration of the school's program since there are so many needs, and which fails to equip the young with "that intellectual power which will enable them to meet new situations and solve new problems as they arise." Third was "the doctrine of social reform," which he rejected because public schools would not advocate anything that was not already accepted by society; the way that schools reform society, he insisted, was by making men more intelligent, not by becoming propaganda machines for current political fashions. Fourth was "the doctrine of no doctrine at all," which he attributed to educators who refuse to ask the aims and purposes of education and who pride themselves on having no curriculum: "Perhaps the greatest idea that America has given the world is the idea of education for all. The world is entitled to know whether this idea means that everybody can be educated, or only that everybody must go to school."⁴⁹

In *Quackery in the Public Schools*, Albert Lynd, a businessman and school board member, ridiculed the "educationist" monopoly of the public schools. Lynd charged that the pedagogues had wrested control of the schools from the people and had arrogated to themselves sole competence to decide not only the technical questions of method but also the social aims of education. Educationists, he complained, had contrived "one of the neatest bureaucratic machines ever created by any professional group in any country anywhere," since no one was permitted to teach in a public school without studying under an educationist and future salary increases were tied to further "vassalage to these superprofessionals." Instead of studying history, literature, science, and the arts, Lynd charged, children were learning "trivia" such as "How can my home be made democratic?" and "How can I make my room more attractive?" Despite his tendency to exaggerate for the sake of dramatic effect, Lynd raised important issues: To whom do public schools belong? Who has the right to select the social aims of education? The community or the educators? These were questions that progressive educators had not considered for more than thirty years.⁵⁰

The challenge to the new education was joined by Arthur Bestor, whose credentials were impressive: Bestor was a well regarded historian at the University of Illinois who had taught at Teachers College and had himself attended the Lincoln School, the best-known progressive school in the nation. His articles and books, most notably *Educational Wastelands* (1953), have been called "the most serious, searching, and influential criticisms of progressive education to appear during the fifties." Not all critics of contemporary education, said Bestor, were reactionaries or classicists; they included liberals as well as scientists, mathematicians, and others

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

"directly connected with the problems of a modern technological world." The educationists were profoundly wrong, wrote Bestor, because they denied that the purpose of schools is to teach "the power to think." This is not the only responsibility of schools and colleges, but if *they* do not emphasize "rigorous intellectual training, there will be none." The very essence of democracy is that all citizens are entitled to receive the liberal education that was once reserved for the privileged few; because they rejected this basic premise, because they believed that many or most high school students lack the capacity to benefit from intellectual training, the pedagogues had betrayed the ideal of democratic education. The degradation of education was caused not by "progressive education," which at Lincoln School was used to improve the teaching of subject matter, but by "regressive education," which was hostile to intellect, derisive of subject matter, and isolated from the world of science and scholarship. Bestor scorned the substitution of "life needs" for the basic disciplines: "It is a curiously ostrichlike way of meeting life needs to de-emphasize foreign languages during a period of world war and postwar global tension, and to de-emphasize mathematics at precisely the time when the nation's security has come to depend on Einstein's equation. . . ." Liberal education, he claimed, produces self-reliance, but instruction in the problems of daily life assumes that the student cannot deal with a matter unless he has taken a course in it. "The West was not settled by men and women who had taken courses in 'How to be a pioneer,'" he asserted; ". . . I for one do not believe that the American people have lost all common sense and native wit so that now they have to be taught in school to blow their noses and button their pants." He believed that the notion that the school must meet every need was "a preposterous delusion that in the end can wreck the educational system without in any sense contributing to the salvation of society." Bestor called for reforms to break the power of the "interlocking directorate" that controlled schools of education, state and federal agencies of education, and public school administration, in particular by requiring prospective teachers to take more academic training and by placing teacher training institutions under the stewardship of those in the arts and sciences.⁵¹

In *Let's Talk Sense About Our Schools*, Paul Woodring, a professor at the Western Washington College of Education, brought to the discussion a perspective free of hostility and sarcasm yet fundamentally critical of progressive education. The more that educators failed to meet the complaints of the critics honestly, he wrote, the more the criticism grew. Much of the present discontent stemmed from the view that professional educators had "preempted the responsibility for policy making to such an extent

that interested citizens, even members of elected boards of education, feel that they no longer have an adequate part in the establishment of basic educational policies." Furthermore, he believed that most Americans would not accept the pragmatic philosophy of modern education if they understood it. The dilemma, as he saw it, was inherent in the rapid expansion of universal education: the school of the past did not know what to do with the slow learner, other than to flunk him, and the new school used social promotion to advance him with his age group but without teaching him how to read. In neither case was the problem solved. Woodring thought that it was time for the education profession to admit that it did not have answers to all the problems, to tolerate differences of opinion within the ranks, and to "get away from the prevailing notion that anyone who raises questions about basic principles is antisocial, unprofessional, or reactionary." The time had come, he held, to abandon attacks on the critics and to acknowledge that "American education in 1953 is evolving not *toward* progressive education, but *past* it."⁵²

Woodring admitted that neither he nor any other educator had the answer to what I. L. Kandel had earlier called "the democratic dilemma." Does universal education imply differentiation of courses and curricula, according to students' ability? The progressive educators said yes and called it democratic to set up curricula which took account of students' diverse interests and aptitudes; the critics said no and said that it would be democratic to teach all children the same basic materials, even if at varying rates. What was to be done about the students who were bored in school by the traditional subjects as they were traditionally taught? The progressives' answer to the question was to identify whatever students were interested in, no matter how limited or limiting, and to turn it into a course or a unit; the critics failed to confront the question at all.

Despite the tidal wave of criticism, progressives continued to advocate the same programs that were now the subject of intense attack. Even as the onslaught gained full force, progressive pedagogical textbooks confidently described the steady advance of progressive reforms in school systems throughout the nation, and curriculum bulletins reflecting the progressive point of view continued to issue forth regularly from state and city education agencies. Yet the progressives' frustration at the slow pace of change occasionally showed. Harold Alberty, a prominent progressive at Ohio State University, acknowledged in his teacher-training textbook, *Reorganizing the High-School Curriculum*, that the creative curriculum reorganizer faced an uphill struggle against the opposition of teachers, parents, and students. Alberty noted glumly that "the time-honored, well-established academic fields representing accepted logical organizations of knowledge

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

are still a very powerful influence in the curriculum and consume a large part of the student's time." He bemoaned the fact that the majority of teachers had neither interest in nor understanding of the need for change; in Bloomington, Illinois, for example, when high school teachers were asked for ideas to improve the school, only 5 percent suggested improving the curriculum. Furthermore, high school students "show a surprising lack of desire to pursue new curriculums and methods of work. . . . One needs only to ask college freshmen to express their opinions of their high schools to discover that most of them have been completely satisfied with their program." Worse, "Laymen's opinion polls all seem to indicate that the public is fairly well satisfied with the schools and the products which they are turning out." And, even though colleges no longer required Latin, many parents still wanted their children to study it because of an antiquated respect for "the time-honored tradition of culture and scholarship." Even in the face of all this apathy and resistance, Alberty heedlessly insisted that curriculum planning must be based on adolescent needs, including such problems as: being underweight, being overweight, poor teeth, poor complexion, foot trouble or "ill-fitting shoes."⁵³

At the height of the controversy, the progressive education movement—what was left of it—crumbled. In 1955, the Progressive Education Association went out of business, and two years later the magazine *Progressive Education* quietly folded; it was not the critics that ended their lives but the fact that neither the organization nor the magazine had much of a following. If either had represented a vital, significant perspective, the controversy would have brought them new members and subscribers. In 1919, as Patricia A. Graham has observed, "progressive education meant all that was good in education; thirty-five years later nearly all the ills in American education were blamed on it," and the phrase itself "shifted from a term of praise to one of opprobrium." Educators who once prided themselves on their identification with progressivism as a symbol of modern thought now shunned the label.⁵⁴

Who or what killed progressive education? It died for several reasons, but largely of old age. With all their talk of being forward-looking and future-oriented, in reality the spokesmen for the movement had become keepers of the sacred texts, defending ideas and practices of the past, ignorant of the emerging issues in American life and education. For all the talk of linking school to society, progressives failed to assert leadership on the already explosive racial issue and remained blind to the social implications of their separation of children into academic, general, and vocational curricula. As society and global conditions changed, they did not: the need for international understanding might have been reason

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

to stress the teaching of foreign languages; the mobility and rootlessness of postwar society might have been reason to stress the teaching of history; the persistence of international tension might have been reason to stress the teaching of the history and literature of other cultures; the rapidity of technological change might have been reason to emphasize science and mathematics; the widespread concern about the plight of the individual in mass society might have been reason to elevate the teaching of literature; instead, they continued to talk on about the needs of youth in a way that reflected their insulation from events and their habitual, unthinking dependency on their own tradition and authority. Well before 1955, progressivism had become synonymous with professionalism, to the detriment of both; the ideas that once bound together individuals from a variety of diverse fields became increasingly remote from reality as they became ossified in the textbooks of the schools of education. The call for democracy, originally intended to invigorate the school and to improve society, by midcentury had come to mean the use of techniques of group dynamics to encourage consensus decision making and to convince others to accept predetermined outcomes. As the movement pursued utilitarianism in headlong fashion, the "radical faith" of the early progressives that "culture could be democratized without being vulgarized" was forgotten, and in some well-known progressive programs it seemed that culture could be democratized *only* by being vulgarized.⁵⁵

The "great debate" about American education continued to rage until the fall of 1957, when the Russians orbited Sputnik, the first space satellite. Post-Sputnik shockwaves led to demands for federal funds for mathematics and science, greater emphasis on language instruction, and higher academic standards. In one sense, the Russians settled the great debate, but in another sense, it was already moot when Sputnik orbited. Progressive education had long before lost the ability to be self-critical or to adapt to new conditions. The variant of progressive education that had become established within the profession by the activities of the NEA, other professional groups, the schools of education, and the public education agencies had strayed far from the humane, pragmatic, open-minded approach advocated by John Dewey; it had deteriorated into a cult whose principles were taught as dogma and whose critics were treated as dangerous heretics. Life-adjustment education, which offered so fertile a field for satirists of contemporary education, was not an accidental excrescence but rather the logical outgrowth of tendencies that were already fullblown by 1940.

Neither the Russians nor the critics killed progressive education. It died because it was, ironically, no longer relevant to the times; it did not

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

meet the pragmatic test of "working" in public schools except as curricular innovations for below-average students, which was far from its stated intentions. In a nation suddenly conscious of the need for skills and intelligence, progressive education seemed out of joint with the needs of the present and the future. When at last it disappeared in the mid-1950s, there was scarcely a trace of what it originally meant to be, though surely the influence of its pioneers was present wherever projects, activities, and pupil experiences had been intelligently integrated into subject-matter teaching, wherever concern for health and vocation had gained a permanent place in the school program, and wherever awareness of individual differences among children had replaced lockstep instruction and rote memorization.