

# Self-renewal in Jesuit high schools

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## SELF-RENEWAL IN JESUIT HIGH SCHOOLS

*Jesuits may remain unaware  
or indifferent to the challenge*

ROBERT R. NEWTON, S.J.

THERE ARE FEW YOUNG JESUITS WHO WOULD NOT AGREE that the high school of their regency was an improvement on the Jesuit high school they attended before entering the Society of Jesus. Yet frequently these same men, and many with longer experience in Jesuit secondary education, will evidence a feeling of unrest and a conviction, especially in areas where educational competition is keen, that the reputation of Jesuit high schools has somehow slipped. A combination of these observations suggests, perhaps, that though the progress accomplished over the past decade had been significant, it has in some way failed to keep pace with the general advances in the best of public and private school education. Evidence can be gathered to support this suggestion.

### **Renewal in American education**

In the late 1950's American education entered a phase which placed sharp emphasis on factors which had previously smouldered quietly beneath the surface. The Russians had launched a satellite and the attention of the public was focused on the question: how good is American education? Public concern gained momentum, accelerated by the realities of the population increase, the rapid expansion of factual data (currently doubling every decade), and

the growing awareness that the pressure of international competition would not permit us to squander what many regard as the nation's number one resource.

A variety of other elements could be enumerated but the fact is that the nation as a whole had taken up a lively interest in education and the public was aroused in its insistence on the "pursuit of excellence." The events of the spring and summer of 1956—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Second White House Conference on Education, the naming of Carnegie Corporation President John W. Gardner as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare—all gave clear indication that American education was entering an era that knew no parallel in our national history. The battle of quantity had been won; the new frontier was quality.

### Signs in Jesuit education

Jesuit schools do not exist in a vacuum. They interact and are influenced by current movements on the national educational scene. It seems reasonable, therefore, to ask how our schools have reacted to this challenge and what adjustments and innovations face Jesuit schools in this new era of American education.

When the administrators of Jesuit high schools met at Santa Clara in the summer of 1964, one of their aims was to review current developments in the field of secondary education with a view of evaluating and adapting these ideas to Jesuit high schools. Topics such as flexible scheduling, team teaching, ETV, programmed instruction, advanced placement, as well as the developments in the various subject fields, were presented and discussed. In the great majority of cases it seemed as though these innovations had at that time made little impression on Jesuit high schools.

Yet many of these new ideas had been common property in educational circles and literature for a fairly lengthy period. In 1961, for example, Robert H. Anderson reported that there were about 100 communities throughout the United States engaged in one form or another of team teaching and hundreds of other communities actively planning toward it.<sup>1</sup> In the "Reports on Experimental Programs" included in the Santa Clara *Proceedings*, only seven Jesuit schools indicated experimentation in this area, some in a very

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<sup>1</sup> "Team Teaching," *NEA Journal*, L (1961), 52.

modified form.<sup>2</sup> The Jesuit committee report on team teaching drew all of its examples of successful experimental programs, with one notable exception, from non-Jesuit schools.

Programed instruction had made its appearance in 1959, and in 1960 and 1961 a large number of articles and reviews were available on this technique;<sup>3</sup> instructional television had been compared with classroom teaching in approximately 400 quantitative studies by 1962.<sup>4</sup> The *Proceedings* of the Santa Clara Institute, however, indicated that by the summer of 1964 only two of our forty-nine Jesuit high schools had experimented with programed instruction and only two schools reported the use of closed circuit instructional TV.

Perhaps the one area where this analysis would seem to break down is advanced placement. At the time of the Santa Clara meeting there were twenty-three Jesuit high schools offering AP courses and several more planning to initiate advanced placement. The College Entrance Examination Board report on schools sending candidates for the May 1965 advanced placement examinations included thirty-four Jesuit schools.<sup>5</sup>

A more careful look at the statistics published on the May 1965 examinations, however, gives reason to question how much has been accomplished even in this area. First, in spite of the fact that the advanced placement program has given every indication of being a permanent element in the American educational scene,<sup>6</sup> there are still fourteen Jesuit schools that do not prepare students to take any AP examination. In the schools that do have AP courses

<sup>2</sup> Jesuit Educational Association, *Proceedings: 1964 High School Administrators' Institute*, (New York, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> Harry F. Silberman, "Self-Teaching Devices and Programmed Materials," *Review of Educational Research*, XXXII (1962), 179.

<sup>4</sup> Wilbur Schramm, "Learning from Instructional Television," *Review of Educational Research*, XXXII (1962), 156.

<sup>5</sup> Information on the Advanced Placement Program is drawn from the following CEEB reports: "List of Schools Sending Candidates," "Rosters of Schools Sending Most Candidates in a Subject Area," "Complete List of Readers of the 1965 AP Examinations."

<sup>6</sup> The CEEB publication "A Guide to the Advanced Placement Program 1965-66" indicates that the number of colleges accepting advanced placement candidates had grown from 130 in 1955-56 to 994 in 1964-65. The number of examinations taken has grown from 2,119 in 1955-56 to 45,110 in 1964-65.

it is important to know how many courses are available to what percentage of our usually highly selected student body. One CEEB report on the 1965 examinations lists the schools sending the *most* candidates in particular subject areas. In biology, for example, all schools sending more than fifteen candidates are named. In the lists covering each of the twelve examinations, only nine Jesuit schools are mentioned in any subject area, and the only really significant clusterings of Jesuit schools are in the Latin 4 and Latin 5 examinations (eight and seven respectively). In four subject areas Jesuit schools were not represented, while in four others only one Jesuit school was mentioned.

Using the same non-Jesuit schools that were selected for a statistical comparison of curricula with Jesuit high schools in the March 1965 issue of the *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, we can estimate our position in advanced placement relative to these schools.<sup>7</sup> The following summary indicates the number of these schools which were listed on the CEEB roster of schools sending the most candidates in particular subject areas. The thirty non-Jesuit schools are compared with the thirty-four Jesuit schools which had AP candidates in the May 1965 examinations:

	<i>non-Jesuit schools</i>	<i>Jesuit schools</i>
American History	7	1
Biology	7	0
Chemistry	5	1
English	10	2
European History	3	0
French	6	0
German	8	3
Latin 4	2	8
Latin 5	3	7
Mathematics	12	0
Physics	7	1
Spanish	6	0

<sup>7</sup> Richard H. Twohig, S.J., "A Statistical Comparison of the Curricula of Jesuit and non-Jesuit High Schools." *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, XXVII (1964-65). The non-Jesuit schools used in this comparison are listed on pp. 254-55 of this article. The basis for choice of these schools is indicated on p. 245.

Admittedly this comparison omits a number of factors which might be considered, but it does give some indication of our progress in advanced placement in relation to schools with whom we would like to compare ourselves. Such a comparison is favorable to Jesuit schools only in the area of Latin.

More significant perhaps are the memberships of the various committees that control the AP program. Given the almost exclusively college preparatory nature of most of our schools, advanced placement seems to be the type of program in which the Jesuit high school system should be able to exert substantial influence and leadership. Yet, though one Jesuit college representative serves on the Committee on Advanced Placement, no one connected with a Jesuit college or high school is currently a member of the important Advanced Placement Committee of Examiners in any of the eleven subject areas. No Jesuit school or college teacher acts as chief reader in any of the subjects, and only five Jesuit high school personnel (three laymen, two Jesuits), representing four of the forty-nine high schools and two of the eleven provinces, are listed as readers of the 1965 examinations.

What is being suggested here is that in advanced placement, as well as in other areas mentioned, acceptance of innovation and response to it has been far from dynamic. The Santa Clara meeting involved a school system whose self-image was one of leadership. One might have expected such an institute to have dealt primarily with the impact of these innovations on its schools, rather than with relatively introductory presentations and cautious suggestions about the possibility of implementation.

Fr. John R. Vigneau's observations on the Santa Clara Institute, voiced eight months later at the high school meeting of the JEA Convention, pointed to our failure to exert influence or leadership in recent developments within the various subject fields: "Examine closely the changes we accepted last summer. Numberless proposals were made and projects were evaluated, and we did not even consider the social sciences, art, and music. But with the sole exception of the Novak Religion Text these were all programs conceived and written by others. As one of the largest groups of independent schools we had made but a ripple in educational thought. We came docilely to Santa Clara to learn and learn we did—at the

feet of other masters.”<sup>8</sup> Add to this Fr. Vigneau’s conviction that at the adjournment of the last Santa Clara session Jesuit schools, far from being abreast of the most recent developments, were already two years behind the latest movements.<sup>9</sup> And we must also consider how much of what was learned has filtered down to teachers in Jesuit high schools who were not present at the institute or who did not study through the weighty volume of *Proceedings*.

Given these indications of substantial problems in current Jesuit secondary education, it seems worthwhile to delve briefly into the factors which might have led to the current situation, and to ask whether we have the right to expect that these same factors will suddenly or gradually become inoperative in the future.

#### Professional interest in education

I am sure that it would strike an observer as unusual that the members of any profession would generally be indifferent to new developments in their field. Failing to keep abreast of new developments and assuming that nothing can be added to old and tried methods is as unreasonable in education as it is in medicine, and as unfair to the student as to the patient. Yet who would dispute the fact that this is the attitude of many in Jesuit schools?

Although there is often increased interest in the special academic field to which one is assigned, there remains a general distrust and apathy toward the study of the various aspects of education. This prejudice is due in part to the lack or weakness of the formal education courses individual Jesuits have encountered. It is also the result of an environment where the discussion or study of the professional aspects of education rarely has a part. For many, a blind confidence in the Jesuit system dispels second thoughts on the need for a more professional knowledge of education. Consequently, attention is seldom paid to the periodical literature and few Jesuits besides administrators participate in either local or national educational organizations.

We must face the fact that the present situation holds challenges that did not face Jesuit high schools of former decades. The educational research of the past had lagged far behind research in other

<sup>8</sup> John R. Vigneau, S.J., “Jesuit Secondary School Curriculum,” *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, XXVIII (1965-66), 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

fields. If one were to plot a graph of educational research in the twentieth century, the line would begin at practically zero, gradually and haltingly rise until mid-century, and then rise sharply during the 1950's.<sup>10</sup> The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1956 with its allocation of \$100,000,000 for educational research and training over the next five years, gives evidence that the present trend will continue. I submit that it will become increasingly less possible for Jesuit teachers to aim at operating first-rate schools and at the same time neglect the results of professional research and investigation. And I do not think that I mistake the feeling of many Jesuits that the Society should be in the midst or at the forefront of such experimentation rather than merely passively adopting the work of others.

**An environment for renewal**

Given an awareness of the need for adaptation to the rapidly changing situation in American education, a further question might be raised: do we have an environment in individual Jesuit schools which not only allows but actively encourages personal experimentation and innovation?

I have heard the theory advanced that the authority structure in Jesuit secondary education is based on the premise that the inadequacies of the individual teacher will be compensated by giving fuller authority to the principal, and likewise the inadequacies of the individual principal will be balanced by close control by the province prefect of studies. In my opinion this is not an accurate or fair description of the situation, but it does point out that frequently little real decision-making power is given to the individual teacher or principal. In a certain sense, the teacher in the Jesuit school has his thinking done for him, and once the syllabus has been published, little more remains other than how to divide the matter required for the province examination. How often, as a result, has the province syllabus become the limit of the ambitions of both teacher and student, though the talents of both might have promised more? The province examinations which make the syllabus effective not only

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<sup>10</sup> Ten years ago, for example, Harvard's Graduate School of Education received \$35,000 in federal money. This year, according to Dean Theodore R.Sizer, the Graduate School of Education will receive substantially over \$2.5 million from the federal government.



designate what is to be taught but also subtly dictate the way it is to be taught because of the type of question that is anticipated in the examination. Such a detailed structure of authority and testing doubtless has the advantage of implementing a uniform standard of performance, but does it do so by creating a basically passive attitude on the part of the teacher and at the expense of fostering individual initiative?

Some provinces, it is true, have eliminated or de-emphasized province examinations and syllabi; others have retained them and sought a solution in increased stress on departments within schools and province-wide curriculum committees. The success of these and other plans, however, should be measured by the degree to which they revitalize and re-establish the individual teacher as the source and key to self-renewal. Province examinations and syllabi have been used here merely as an example; the real focus is an attitude which can result when the system becomes an end in itself rather than remaining one of the means to more significant goals.

The various elements of secondary education have become exceedingly complex and will become even more complex. One of the effects of this increased complexity should be the realization that the Jesuit administrator will be less and less able to have specialized knowledge in areas that come under his supervision. This will mean heavier reliance on the members of the teaching staff for initiative in investigating, planning, experimenting, and evaluating the latest trends and programs.

The school that would adapt to the needs of the present must abandon an attitude which looks to the administrator as the source of all direction, and must aim at creating an environment which encourages the talents and initiative of individual Jesuits and lay teachers. It is hard to imagine that progress and vitality can mark any organization which does not both make maximum use of the individual resources of its members and cultivate an enthusiasm which comes only from cooperative involvement in planning and decision-making.

These ideas should not be construed as opposition to efficient organizational structures. But they do oppose a system of organization which fails to provide for and foster continual self-renewal. In any organization age brings a tendency toward rigidity and loss

of vitality. John W. Gardner has described the obstacles which face every well established society: "As it (the organization) matures, it develops settled ways of doing things and becomes more orderly, more efficient, more systematic. But it also becomes less flexible, less innovative, less willing to look freshly at each day's experience."<sup>11</sup> Gardner argues that a society whose maturity consists of merely acquiring more firmly entrenched methods of operation is headed for the graveyard. "*In the ever-renewing society what matures is a system or framework within which continuous innovation, renewal and rebirth can occur.*"<sup>12</sup>

The concern for "how things are done" can be one of the diseases of which societies die. The goal that was originally the focus gives way to the subtle dominance of preoccupation with method and procedure. "Men become prisoners of their procedures, and organizations that were designed to achieve some goal become obstacles in the path to that goal."<sup>13</sup>

The rapidly changing face of American education dictates that the fundamental question we must ask is not whether we have an efficient organization but whether we have devised an organizational pattern which keeps goals clearly in focus and places priority on the growth and self-renewal of the system as well as the individual.

It would be incorrect and unfair to take these remarks as criticisms of administrators in Jesuit high schools. In the past they have been the primary source of initiative and as a result have perhaps borne more than their share of the responsibility. But the suggestion is offered that the nature and pressure of the current educational situation demand a shift in the concept of the role of the administrator and the administrative framework he must supply.

#### Education for self-renewal

This leads to one final area which seems important if renewal in Jesuit high schools is to be seriously considered. Although assuring an environment which encourages initiative is of obvious importance, this will be of little effect unless the individual Jesuit has a capacity and drive for continuous and creative personal growth.

<sup>11</sup> John W. Gardner, *Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. (Author's emphasis.)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

There are probably few who have not encountered Jesuits in our schools who seem to be unaware or for some reason unwilling to take advantage of the full range of their abilities. Gardner maintains that one reason the individual can rarely think clearly about the renewal of an institution to which he belongs is that it never occurs to him that he may be part of what needs renewing. He argues that often the real obstacles to self-renewal is "the individual's own intricately designed, self-constructed prison, or to put it another way, the individual's incapacity for self-renewal."<sup>14</sup>

This consideration seems even more important when we consider the pressures that will face the alumni of Jesuit high schools in the modern era. It may be useful in some other context to argue what Jesuit education is or should be in the light of Society documents, but it seems to me true to say that what Jesuit education is for the student of today is what today's Jesuits are. The times both within the Church and within American society are marked by a spirit of rapid change. Unless our students are educated for continual and creative self-renewal by men dedicated and actively pursuing the same ideal, then their preparation will soon leave them static and obsolescent in the changing world that surrounds them.

In *Escape From Freedom* Erich Fromm argues that the totalitarian movements were successful in Europe because men sought a release from the burdens and responsibilities that necessarily accompanied freedom. They were content to surrender their autonomy to authoritarian regimes in order to effect a release from the anxiety of personal responsibility. No one can be expected to make a decision in everything that concerns him, but there does exist the temptation to follow the line of least resistance and rid ourselves of the inconveniences inherent in decisions that should involve us. Meetings of faculty and curriculum committees rarely hold much excitement, and the investigation or summer study involved in keeping up with new ideas and programs is difficult to characterize as anything but hard work.

The willingness to endure the annoyances of cooperative effort and the endless struggle to stay informed involve an attitude which views our own education as a continuous and creative process of self-renewal. Such an outlook, although a natural development of our

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

native curiosity, is something that must be nurtured by our own training and education. If this attitude has not been developed during our course of studies, it is unreasonable to expect it suddenly to appear when one is assigned to a Jesuit high school or college.

In a real sense the type of education we offer to others reflects the education we ourselves have received.<sup>15</sup> This seems true not only with regard to what we teach but also the way we teach it and the attitudes we communicate in the educational process. I wonder if Gardner's observation on American education in general might not bear parallel application to aspects of our own training as well as the training we offer to others: "All too often we are giving our young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants. We are stuffing their heads with the products of earlier innovation rather than teaching them to innovate. We think of the mind as a storehouse to be filled when we should be thinking of it as an instrument to be used. . . ."<sup>16</sup>

Jerome S. Bruner reflects the same idea: "The teacher is not only a communicator but a model. Somebody who does not see anything beautiful or powerful about mathematics is not likely to ignite others with a sense of the intrinsic excitement of the subject. A teacher who will not or cannot give play to his own intuitiveness is not likely to be effective in encouraging intuition in his students."<sup>17</sup> Men whose own development has come to a standstill and whose talents lie for the most part dormant cannot be expected to produce students who will view education in a radically different light. Nor can a system composed of such men expect to be in the midst or at the forefront of the latest educational trends and developments.

### Conclusion

These remarks have intended to draw attention to what seem to be current and vital challenges to our Jesuit high school system. The spirit of the times both within the Church and the Society is

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<sup>15</sup> Fr. Gustave A. Weigel, S.J. developed in concrete terms the relationship between our course of studies and our effectiveness as teachers in an address to the 1957 JEA Convention. Cf. "The Heart of Jesuit Education—The Teacher," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, XX (1957), 7-16.

<sup>16</sup> Gardner, 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 90.

one of renewal and of demand that the work of Christ be reinterpreted for the modern era. This demand is nowhere more vital and pressing than it is in the American Jesuit high school apostolate. Secondary education in the United States has embarked on a new era, an era that will place increasing emphasis on quality and rapid improvement. There are indications that Jesuit schools have relinquished leadership and have even fallen behind, basically because our progress has not kept pace with the rapid updating in the best of private and public education. There exists a real danger that many will remain unaware or indifferent to the magnitude of the challenge that faces Jesuit schools.

There is no simple solution to these difficulties. Three areas have been suggested as possible causes of our current situation: our failure to remain abreast of the developments within professional education, the need to provide a school environment which places fundamental importance on continuous growth, and the necessity of giving priority to education for self-renewal both in our own course of studies and in the schools we operate.

The summer of 1966 will see representatives of our high schools gather on the West coast for the Workshop on the Christian Formation of the High School Student. Such a workshop is a recognition of our need and bears great possibilities for reevaluation and redirection. But the ideas and conclusions of this workshop will be of little significance if the soil on which they fall is not fertile, if the great masses of Jesuits in secondary education are not aware of the crucial tests that modern times pose for our high schools. The present situation offers a unique opportunity for leadership to a national system of fifty outstanding schools. But it also holds the dangerous alternative of mediocrity for schools that remain indifferent to the need for renewal. The security and pre-eminence we enjoy because of the reputation of our Jesuit system is the rich endowment of Jesuits of the past and a matter which deserves our gratitude; how Jesuit secondary education reacts to the pressures of modern times is the challenge of the future and a matter which demands our decision.