

# CONFÉRENCIER INVITÉ

## DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER

### TOWARDS 2000: POVERTY AND PROGRESS IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION\*

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Twenty years ago, in the fall of 1970, I discovered the history of education. I found it in Canada, in Toronto, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto in 1970 and over the following five years, with Michael B. Katz, and an astonishing group of fellow students. A twenty-one-year-old first-year graduate student in history, I had *not* come in search of it.<sup>1</sup> In this address, I *shall* seek it, hoping to open a critical conversation whose importance, perhaps, is more than historiographical.

Inviting me to speak at the biennial meeting of the Canadian History of Education Association, Chad Gaffield wrote: "The focus of your presentation might involve reflections on the 'OISE era' within the larger context of the evolution of historical debate on mass schooling. As a sign of the times, I am now often asked about the 'ancient' years of the early 1970s, and your perspective (which would reflect experience as both a student and a professor at that time) would undoubtedly add a great deal to current discussion."<sup>2</sup> While assigning me this task, the programme committee also enunciated conference themes—"conflict and contradiction"—that reflect my own work. That, too, I will incorporate into my charge.

This challenge explicitly recognizes the power of the personal, and its conscious exploitation in reflecting not only personal experience (collective and individual) but also in reconstructing the history of education and its sometimes tortuous journeys since that time.<sup>3</sup> That is one of several tensions I confront in this presentation.

The extent to which that era is seen as "ancient," in the sense Gaffield intends, reflects on historians' and the historiographic memory—and not in a complimentary manner, in terms of the health of our enterprise. Lessening of the power of memory is a sign to be heeded. Disconnection with our own past compromises and limits our efforts, unless of course we deem ourselves post-modern! Though

others do not, I look back affirmatively at that formative period in my own development and in that of modern historiography of education. It was a part of my own growing up as well as the development of my literacy!<sup>4</sup> Proximity to that year of the century, 1968, is inescapable. What I offer is as much interpretation as it is recollection; as always with reminiscences, there is ground for dissent. That I wish to encourage.

If I doubted Gaffield's sense of a persisting if unclear presence of those "ancient" years—one that commands our attention—a document appeared in timely fashion to erase my doubts. In her review of Susan Houston and Alison Prentice's *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, Nancy M. Sheehan evokes the power of that past. Linking the authors to Michael Katz and OISE in the early 1970s, Sheehan expresses ambivalence about the new volume directly in relation to its revisionist origins and associations. Helping to establish our setting, she writes that

Katz and his students led the way in revising Canadian educational history. This "new" history, in Canada and elsewhere, began to focus on children, women, and social, cultural, and religious groups in relation to education. Not only were changes in schooling examined, but also the processes of change—demography, geography, economics, politics, and technology. A wide range of sources became acceptable—textbooks, photographs, diaries, school architecture, and local school records, to name a few. Interpretation, reasoning, and analysis are now expected. Revisionism broadened the field and helped educational history become a rich field of critical inquiry. Excitement, controversy, and self-analysis described the process of reinterpreting history as networks of educational historians developed around competing ideologies: radical vs. moderate; social control vs. social contract; or Marxist vs. nationalist.<sup>5</sup>

While reflecting a sense of "disappointment," even "a bit of a letdown," more positively Sheehan avers a "feeling of déjà vu": "reading this material is equivalent to returning to a well-read, well-loved, well-thumbed book of childhood. It brings back memories of those years when educational scholarship was in the forefront of Canadian history and in some ways was leading the revisionist historical forces"; "The excitement, the controversy, the competing ideologies are mute."<sup>6</sup> Neither my memories nor my critical categories are the same as Sheehan's. Nonetheless, I can feel the ambivalence, indeed the contradiction, that lies at the core of her response. She misses, and is willing to say it, the "sharpened edges."

Those days were exciting! Historians of education were disciplinary leaders—in history, in education, in related areas of the social sciences—for a critical moment, a role we rarely have played, and do not play now. How clear is our vision of that time? What import has it in 1990, as we turn "towards 2000"?

Is there, however maligned, however poorly understood, a “usable past” for excavation? Edges, of course, especially sharp ones, can cut deeply in more ways than one. Not all among us, to be sure, miss those edges.

I arrived in Toronto twenty years ago. Jarringly, I departed for the new University of Texas at Dallas, fifteen years ago, in 1975, freshly certified and initiated into the academic tribe. To the extent that it existed, the “OISE era” was waning by that time. As an “era” in linear chronology, it was not lengthy—less than a decade, from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s.<sup>7</sup> We know better than to equate temporal duration with significance, of course. Those years were a vital and formative time.

In the multiple strands that weave into our perceptions of time, this has become a great and growing distance, greater than the usual reference to “two decades” in historiographic time suggests. To reach back to 1970—and the forces that shaped it—is a long reach with many obstructions. The intellectual, disciplinary, institutional, and ideological spheres of that day thus sit at a considerable remove from the 1990s. Apropos my title, “Towards 2000,” that widening chasm needs to be narrowed.

Bob Dylan sang “the times they are a-changing.” The times, trumpeted as radical and positively political, were inseparable from the choice of scholarly questions and problems, and from interpretive stances. New “discoveries” of “social problems” surrounded us. Public schools, in particular, prompted severe criticism and indictment. In Western liberal democracies, mass public school systems, as symbol and as fact, proved themselves lightning rods for dissent and reform goals. Closely related concerns with children, women and gender, families, race, class, and ethnicity, often with respect to issues of equality and justice, were inseparable. They all played roles in historiographical transformations.

The lack of hegemonic if symbolic “syntheses” of national histories was then, unlike today, cause for celebration. Gaining new audiences, constructing histories for and within them, rather than retaining traditional readers, was then the cry. To save the past, in part by expanding its dimensions and participants, in part by retaking it from non-historians, was the spirit. Specialization and technical virtuosity were promoted and seized as broadening, as interdisciplinarily fostering new network formation and communication. Professional canons of objective scholarship in search of “truths” gave way to new historicisms and problem-oriented inquiries in which the problems were often those of the present. Hypotheses and theories, methods and techniques from a wide range of disciplines (not always borrowed wisely or used to advantage) provided the means. As seldom before or after, history was taken very seriously by historians as well as others. The era, within its professional limits, was one of “let a thousand histories bloom,” with all the contradictions of such movements and their banners.<sup>8</sup> Of these, most prominent—but never so dominant as its critics later

charged—were the then “new” social histories, quasi-legitimate parents to the new revisionist histories of education.

September, 1970 was a heady time to enter graduate studies in history. Path-breaking works rained upon us: Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963, Thernstrom’s *Poverty and Progress* in 1962, Moore’s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* in 1966, Laslett’s *The World We Have Lost* in 1965. Ariès’ *Centuries of Childhood* was translated in 1962. Natalie Zemon Davis, then at the University of Toronto, published landmark *Past and Present* essays in the 1960s. Charles Tilly, at Toronto in the 1960s, published *The Vendée* in 1964 and continued his historical sociology. For historians of education, split between or across history departments and schools of education, there was Bailyn’s 1960 *Education in the Forming of American Society* as well as Cremin’s books. Astoundingly, North American and other English-speaking historians began to read in the literatures of social theories and social sciences, and also in French—the journal and the books of the *Annalistes*.

In 1970, almost simultaneously came Greven’s *Four Generations*, Demos’ *The Little Commonwealth*, and Lockridge’s *A New England Town*, as well as Macfarlane’s *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin*. Thomas’ *Religion and the Decline of Magic* and Stedman Jones’ *Outcast London* appeared the next year; Anderson’s *Family Structure* in 1972. Landes and Tilly’s proclamation, *History as Social Science*, and the two landmark *Daedalus* issues came in 1970-71. The basic journals were new: *Journal of Social History* (1967), *Historical Methods* (1967), *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1970), and in Canada, *Histoire sociale/Social History* (1968). Historians and history students were prominent among the founders, contributors, and readers of such vital organs as *Studies on the Left*, *Radical America*, *Radical History Review*, *New Reasoner*, *New University*, *New Society*, *New Left Review*. In Canada, this included *Canadian Dimensions* and *This Magazine*.

To some of these emerging currents I was introduced as an undergraduate. I knew, if unclearly and incompletely, of their presence at the University of Toronto. In 1970, I did not find them in my intended field of British history, nor in Canadian studies at Toronto. For me, at least, discovering a lesser presence and interest in these emphases in the Toronto history department was one of several factors that propelled my move to OISE, an odd new high-rise on the University of Toronto’s northern boundary just beyond Varsity Stadium.<sup>9</sup> There I found not only the history of education and its revision, but also “new” social and quantitative histories, among a number of other persons and other things.

The “new” history of education, especially at OISE/University of Toronto, arose in this broad context. The crucible of change took its shape from intellectual and scholarly, political and ideological, and cultural forces of an international order. OISE provided one special container, due to its own peculiar history. There were others elsewhere, too, at the Universities of British Columbia and Western Ontario. Chance played a substantial role; more generally, so did Canadian institutional and politico-intellectual conditions.

The enterprise that took shape at OISE attracted defensive condemnations—on self-proclaimed grounds of nationalism (importation of inappropriate American ideas and methods); humanism (opposition to quantification and other social scientific elements); ideology (opposition to what was perceived as excessive emphasis on social control, social class, inequality, even ordinary persons in the past—this was “history from the bottom up,” of the “inarticulate,” the “anonymous”); and sometimes on grounds of mode of expression and elements of style. These charges obscure far more than they facilitate understanding. Little was especially American; English and French influences combined, as the principal sources of influence were multi- or cross-national as well as cross- or inter-disciplinary.<sup>10</sup> That lines blurred between influences and between, say, histories of society and those of education, was no accident; among many instances of heuristic blurring, that marked the field. The delineations of English social historians Gillian Sutherland and Lawrence Stone of “new” histories of education were more often cited than the essay in *Daedalus* by an American historian of France, John Talbott, and almost as often as the softer dictas of Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, a new readership for Bailyn’s 1960 *Education in the Forming of American Society*, from multiple stimuli, far exceeded the audience at first publication. Bailyn’s book was a symbol; for good reason, it was far more often cited than followed. In the milieu of the early 1970s, we read and discussed the work of the Simons—Joan and Brian—and Stone at least as often as that of Cremin, Bailyn, or other U.S. historians. Much new work came to us in draft. With my developing interest in literacy, I closely followed research in France, Sweden, and England, and the U.S. Katz’s *The Irony of Early School Reform*, appearing in 1968, had a dramatic impact on us (and others elsewhere, too). For those in Toronto, there was also his personal impact.

By 1970 too, the rejuvenated *History of Education Quarterly*, newly under the editorial direction of Paul Mattingly, became for a decade the journal of record for the field in North America and a major site for revisionist scholarship and its best criticism. The *HEQ* sought greater representation from outside American borders, including Canada. Its 1972 special Canadian issue, reprinted in book form, publicized internationally the “new” Canadian history of education, not all of it revisionist, regardless of the definitions employed. That issue, we know, became an icon—for better and for worse—over which rhetorical, and other, battles were fought. Too close an identification of it with either an “OISE era” or revisionism is inaccurate.<sup>12</sup> Journals from England and Australia/New Zealand developed later, but also sought Canadian contributions.

What became clear to reviewers writing fifteen years later was just taking form in 1970. Retrospectively, we see the roots of what Gaffield summarized in 1986:

Research on education has been a central part of the new historiography of the past two decades....In Canada research on education has reflected

the general historiographical developments as modified by the particular features of the Canadian context....A great deal of the most exciting research on education has been inspired by basically non-educational questions. Many scholars since 1970 have studied the history of education primarily for what it can reveal about subjects such as family, class, ethnicity, and gender. In Ontario, scholars of social structure, of family and social class, were primarily responsible for the energy and excitement of the early to mid-1970s....The history of education has become in some ways a field of social history which is both more than and less than other fields such as the history of the family. Educational history attracts researchers from a wide variety of social history fields who examine schooling as a dimension of those other fields.<sup>13</sup>

This concise statement does not address the institutional and intellectual locations of the beginnings by 1970, in Toronto, and elsewhere. How the “new” history of education came to be conceptualized, taught, disseminated, and popularized comprises one set of typically missing links. Ironically, as historians our sense of outcomes is clearer than that of historical process!

Entering the field as it transformed itself, I did not experience the “prehistory” that Sheehan, for example, in contrast to what she retrospectively identifies as the positive qualities of revisionist histories, frames so negatively: narrow, unexciting, uncritical, uncontroversial, with children, women, rank and file teachers absent. (Entering the field from history, rather than education, may have made other important differences. I did not suffer from a legacy of scholarly inferiority that others did.) Donald Wilson, a critic of revisionists, follows Laurence Veysey’s writing about the U.S. in deeming the great transformation of the field no less than “true liberation,” emanating from “the influence of the ‘new’ social history and its concern with theory and method.”<sup>14</sup> No writing about the period captures well the inchoate and emergent qualities of Canadian educational—and social—history on the point of change.

What is noteworthy for Canada c. 1970, in comparison with the U.S., is the strong presence of scholars, including graduate students, from elsewhere who relocated to Canada and who newly researched and wrote Canadian history. Along with younger Canadian scholars, such persons, especially those from schools and departments of education compared to those from history departments (excluding cross-appointments), evinced stronger interest and participation in the new history. Young and migrant, they were less bounded by traditions of scholarship and more open to new influences. They were more affected by the contradictory, powerful forces of the 1960s. Marginality felt by some in

education schools likely cut both ways. For those in the “new” history of education, no such feelings, or structural relations, seemed to obstruct.

As a problem in the history of our profession—and the sociology of knowledge more broadly—these issues merit serious attention, which might then replace ageing, myth-making, but erroneous charges of “Americanizing” and “radicalizing” Canadian history. The latter do not speak well for the profession. Ironic are those criticisms that condemned new or revisionist history while simultaneously declaring that Canadian history itself was boring, lacking in great events and persons! Such proclamations, so sorry in their own right, failed to grasp the “new” histories’ promise for inclusion of “ordinary” persons. That hints at the “dark side” of what otherwise may be viewed as an open and often receptive context.

Such distorted views do considerable disservice to the original players and to those who followed. They distract attention from more important and subtle intellectual developments. Without clear sense of context, the threads of Donald Wilson’s account, for example, are unconnected. To Wilson, in addition to Katz’s “brilliant leadership,” primary factors include the “new” social history (with its “systematic use of concepts and the application of intellectual constructs”); influence of “Marxism and the New Left”; “feeling of being *engagé* with the bitter social protests of the mid and late-1960s”; and a “conviction that history could serve reform ‘by emancipating it from dependency upon an idealized past’ [that] led [revisionists] to conclude that schools as institutions grew over the years ‘more and more exploitative, more and more repressive, more and more an impediment to change’.” This he terms “radical” as opposed to “moderate” revisionism.

On the one hand, this view reduces the “new” revisionism to little more than an emphasis on social control, class, race, and bureaucracy. On the other hand, Wilson finds only “a sense of the inevitability of decay and a worsening of conditions over time,” as opposed to “traditional” history’s “sense of progress.” To Wilson, this represented a great danger: “past ideas and actions may be combined with the moral and social prejudices of the historian to produce a work that distorts the past in an attempt to castigate the past and to lecture the present”.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, for Wilson, Katz’s charismatic leadership held sway over impressionable graduate students and others. “Canadian graduate students, especially those working under Katz at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, were not unaffected by the excitement of ideological commitment and an accompanying sense that history had its part to play in the current debate on public policy and in particular educational policy.” The consequences of such commitment, in Wilson’s view, were not those apparently sought. Nor were they positive ones for the profession:

Camps began to form and name-calling ensued....Although the controversy over revisionism never became as deeply politicized as in the United States, there was certainly an awareness of ideological differen-

ces among the various writers as well as differences in research strategy....In the process [of writing revisionist histories of education] the persistent language and religious issues, so fundamental to Canadian educational history, were almost completely overlooked. [Revisionists'] bitterness about past injustices combined with their pessimism about the likelihood of effecting any real changes in the school system led the radical revisionists to quite different conclusions from the moderate revisionists.

Not surprisingly, such further difference did not help matters: "This element had the decided effect of heating up the debate, and a period of vital critical self-analysis within the sub-field was launched."<sup>16</sup>

When and where that period of "vital critical self-analysis" took place, or what its products and its consequences were, I do not know. I no better recognize it than I can locate myself and my peers as participants in the revision of the history of education as told by Wilson. Little more can I find in print and accessible to students the conduct of the "debates." One lesson, an enormously important one, I think, is that for all the heat and deep, sometimes bitter divides over the terms and terrain of the history of education and its historiography, and over the politics of scholarship, remarkably little light was shed. Few real debates took place. Indeed, part of my moral is that self-analysis, whether individual or collective, though definitely needed, never generally took place across the field. Its absence is one reason for our blurred, indistinct vision of our own formative past, our relative drift of recent years, and our lack of an agenda for the 1990s and toward 2000.

Revisionists, whether radical or moderate, were never so homogeneous as cast. Divisions and distinctions—approach, method, interpretation, ideology—as the reviews and conference papers of those years indicate, score each so-called "camp."<sup>17</sup> Nor were "radical" revisionists ever so influential or numerous as to be held responsible for the negative impacts on schools, policies, or historiography sometimes attributed to them. Their threat, perceived or otherwise, lay elsewhere.

On either side of the border, more is lost by gross "splitting and lumping" (though long among historians' trusty tools), false homogenization, and educational apologetics. As my example—and I am not alone—shows, Katz's OISE and Toronto students were not solely Canadians; Australian, British, New Zealand, Caribbean, and American students studied beside the Canadian-born in a rich international mix which constituted something of an independent variable in creating the "OISE era." Among such a group, the newly developing revisionist history of education plied its attractions complexly and differentially. No single strand of ideology, political commitment, historical method, or social theory united us, nor were we as one concerning social-class analysis, social-control arguments, quantification or theoretical inclination, or in our own admixtures of pessimism or optimism. It is increasingly my belief that the imposition of such



categories fundamentally defeats the effort to grasp the phenomenon. With tremendous irony in retrospect, the common terms of discussion, and condemnation, may be little more than the importation of American commentaries and their imposition on the Canadian scene!

Towards 2000, with hopes for the history of education and its agendas, I begin an outline "toward a (re)new(ed) past." My conviction, perhaps unlike others today, *reemphasizes* the power of the past. Whereas I do believe in alternative pasts and indeterminate historiographies, I also regard getting the history "right" as an inescapable need. As I construct this schematic, I struggle to mediate what my "mind's eye" captures moving between the first half of the 1970s and 1990.

Avoiding over-abstractation, I emphasize the intersections of three domains as especially important: 1) the intellectual and ideological context of the moment—considered above; 2) the place—with narrowing focus, Toronto, the University of Toronto, OISE, the Department of History and Philosophy (DHPE); 3) the players—faculty, students, and staff in residence, those who passed through, and some whose impact came at a distance. Among the many critical forms and relationships that these interactions took were formal seminars and reading courses; thesis supervision; the Hamilton Project, later called the Canadian Social History Project, with its seminar, research, visitors, and publications; myriad kinds of less formal student and student-faculty interaction, not the least of which were those around a table-tennis table!

Open to us beyond the high walls of OISE were the city, and the University of Toronto and its facilities. There was the library, and on a more selective basis, there were also the Toronto historians, some of whom were very receptive to and supportive of history of education students. Some were not. Also largely beyond OISE's walls were the means of financial support, typically the Canada Council (as it was then known) and CMHC Urban Affairs Fellowships. OISE's legendary financial munificence is largely legend. (The building's comforts, however, were not.)

So hard to convey at this remove is the essential human context in which this took place: a truly exceptional atmosphere of humanity, creativity, camaraderie, collaboration, criticism, and collegial support. Communalism (for lack of a better term) bound students in particular, but also faculty and staff. Like the nineteenth-century cities some (but not all) of us studied, it withstood—or perhaps depended upon—the comings and goings of students. Its connections crossed differences of personality, nationality, age, sex, educational and other background, and goals, scholarly and other. Bridges between history and philosophy and some of their subfields, between school people and others, sometimes linked us. Our numbers were small, on either side of the desk. That contributed to intensive "small group dynamics" among students, faculty, and research and support staff, and among

students themselves. I make no effort to recapture the rich personalities. Classrooms had only a small part in the reciprocal learning that linked us. I believe the extent, depth, and dynamism of these relations was distinctive to the time and place. The intersection of the intellectual and political elements of the historical moment with the self-selectivity of the heterogeneous cast studying educational history at OISE made for that difference.

Equally intense were the strivings to question and learn, and the deeply shared sense of the significance, the relevance, and currency of our enterprise. We believed that learning and research, and their communication, mattered. We believed that the history of education was a central field for a vast arena of historical—and contemporary—questions, not a sideshow. That was a sign of the times, hardly revisionist alone, and of the OISE era. To label it as political or ideological only partly conveys its force. I have not since encountered the intellectual or personal equivalent of this conjunction of people and animating factors. Given the many elements that under-girded its delicate balance and defined its context, it was as singular as it was temporally limited. Along with the subjects we studied, it was the outcome of a set of specific historical transformations that usually and inadequately are deemed “the Sixties.”

“Unique” is a much abused word that I use very sparingly. I have no better way to encapsulate the human environment that developed around the Department of History and Philosophy in the early 1970s. First, there is OISE itself. Opening in 1965, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education stood as tribute to late-blooming Progressivism in Ontario and a deep faith in educational experts’ abilities to transform learning and its concomitants. Perhaps only in the Ontario of the 1960s could such a public institution, chartered both as an autonomous research institute and as the University of Toronto’s Graduate Department of Educational Theory, be erected. Internationally, it stood among countless products of that great age of higher educational expansion.

Vis-à-vis the university establishment, at least in Ontario, OISE stuck out. Often criticized, not always fairly, it appeared to stand in “opposition” to the University of Toronto. The usual academic jealousies and competitions in their usual petty forms grew more exaggerated in confronting the new prominence of “education” as discipline and institution. OISE’s spanking new, stylish highrise provided a symbolic—and all too concrete—lightning rod for professors and administrators who felt that each dollar for the Institute somehow meant one less for their programmes. A superficial fear of disciplinary duplication added fuel to the fires. OISE, of course, with its own departmental structure, *looked* like more than one university department. Awkwardly, it stood between the potential of interdisciplinary innovations and great fragmentation. With opposition from entrenched school interests and sometimes from government bureaucracy and legislature, OISE on occasion was quite embattled. From these and other sources, OISE took on certain aspects of an “oppositional culture,” among its many conflicts and contradictions.

Within OISE, second, is the Department of History and Philosophy, another hybrid form. Student service on the department's governing assembly (along with staff) and on many committees, parts of the "OISE era," provided shared experiences and stood as one of several bases of a "community." OISE's stated mission, of course, was practical and applied. To this charge, DHPE fit uncomfortably, unevenly at best. Within OISE, it took on elements of an "oppositional culture." Unlike other disciplines like sociology accorded their own departmental status, history and philosophy, of the traditional "foundations" fields, remained joined at the hip, although students typically concentrated on one side or the other. Nevertheless, the presence of both enriched the environment. Students so influenced deepened interests, and exercises, in the epistemological and theoretical dimensions of historical research design, explanation, criticism, and interpretation: another characteristic of the era. In this case, as others, seeds planted originally continue to flower in revisions of revisionism, in Canada, Australia, the U.S.

The history faculty, small in number, offered expertise and instruction across a wide canvas, geographically and topically. Course work and supervision encompassed not only the U.S. and Canada, the British Isles and the European continent, but also Africa, the Caribbean, Australia, and on occasion Russia-Soviet Union, China, and special subjects. Most students acquired substantial historical background and comparative perspective. This allowed me, for example, to continue the interest in British and European studies that prompted my graduate work while I began to study anew the U.S. and Canada.<sup>18</sup> Such a programme was simply ill-conceived, virtually impossible, without ready access to University of Toronto courses and professors. All DHPE students did substantial work in relevant Toronto departments and included those professors on thesis committees. Combined with the cross-national stimuli and examples of the "new" histories, this kind of breadth, disciplinary and interdisciplinary, empirical and theoretical, marked the revisionist histories of the OISE era.

DHPE faculty regularly offered formal seminars in subjects of their specialization or current research interests, as well as in areas more typical to the history of education. Across the department, representing histories "new" as well as older, this included working-class history, immigration history, political and economic development, women's history, and for Katz's students of the early 1970s, what was then termed "the historical analysis of social structure," in which schooling and literacy were ingredients. These seminars were not only central intellectual events in our programmes, but proved to be formative early encounters with social history topics, questions, theories, and methods. Required papers employed quantitative data, usually drawn from the expanding banks of the Hamilton Project and primitively analysed by sorting IBM punched cards. The roots of dissertations on literacy and school attendance, to take two examples, and of greater technical and theoretical sophistication haltingly lay here.

As I peruse, for the first time in many years, the syllabus for this seminar and that in "Education and Social Change: the American Experience," I am struck

by several qualities. Not least of them is the breadth *and* depth of our twelve-to-thirteen-week seminar journeys. I recall the simultaneous sensations of intellectual excitement and new discoveries, from readings, class discussion, and research papers; the burden of the sheer quantity—and the quality—of work demanded of us in those “ancient days”; and the graduate student anxieties. In the social structure seminars, we read from the histories of England, Ireland, France, the U.S., and Canada; from the disciplines of sociology, geography, anthropology, demography, education, economics, and history. Weekly topics ranged from social class in theory and history to social ecology, workers, families, sexuality, schooling, life cycles, and violence. In the educational history seminar, where documents public and private joined *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, no special provenance privileged revisionists, who were just beginning to be categorized as a group. These courses, a virtual core, functioned as two parts of a larger whole, with unmistakable implications for historical practice. Taking these seminars also bound students to one another.

In either class, we wrote weekly briefs, reported orally, and conducted primary research for seminar papers. We read the newest work—sometimes still in draft form—as well as the classics. In departmental and social history project meetings, occasionally at seminars at Toronto or York, we met a number of the authors. We were pushed to question and conceptualize widely and innovatively, while mastering defined fields and learning to criticize fairly. We engaged in this rigorous process collectively as members of an “educational cohort” defined by historical moment and common location—intellectually and physically, a privileged cohort, we later realized. We were taught well, criticized sharply and directly, and encouraged humanely. The peer group mediated professorial or institutional excesses or failings. At least as important, we advanced with a clear sense that we were part of a larger number across the continent and the oceans, a loose grouping not yet labelled, who collectively remade the history of education and important areas of social and cultural history. That was central to the era and the OISE experience.

For Katz and his students, the study of social structure, principally—but not exclusively—urban social structure, in course work but far more intensively in the form of the Hamilton and then Canadian Social History Project, was central. A leading development of the new histories, the “project” was home to a core group of students, staff, and faculty, from funded graduate research assistantships to regular informal seminars at which Katz, one of us or a regular from Toronto or York, or one of the many visitors might present work in progress or air research problems. Drafts of *The People of Hamilton* and *Education and Social Change* received critical, sometimes fierce response, as did our dissertation work and much more, in what was one of the best continuing seminars any of us encountered. Along with project-related publications, courses, and pioneering work with high school students in social and demographic history, incessant interchange with fellow toilers, some of them quite eminent, was incalculably stimulating, shaping, and nurturing. Reflecting the then-innovative conception

of a "new" educational history within a "new" social history, and the resulting conceptual and methodological imperatives, the project experience reinforced other key elements.

Whereas the impetus unabashedly fell on new, socially critical approaches in historical research, it was never faddish, uncritical, or forced on students. An impressive, likely necessary, range of opinion met all notions or formulations; in seminars in particular, dissent often appeared. Squarely in terms of its own charge to advance always from stated assumptions, tutelage in the emerging revisionist history of education equally was direct and unbiased. Historical research was problem-oriented, question-driven. Interpretation and ideology were explicit, necessary objects for analysis. Engaged interpretation, seeking to etch the lines of historical development that connected past with present—for the better understanding of both—was the goal, the impetus for raising new questions and seeking new modes of answering them. Long before the recent rage of critical theory, which poses challenges for history as usually practised, the "new" or "revisionist" history of education was critical in conception and execution, in origin and in consequence. "New" historians viewed historical and historiographic work critically, cast critical eyes on the lines found to join past and present, and deemed historical interpretation one neglected but extraordinarily important form of social criticism. That emphasis at once underlay some of our oversimplifications and excesses perhaps (social control, for example), but also the new emphasis on theory, method, explanation, and interpretation that had such momentous consequences for our craft.<sup>19</sup> It also underlay our conceptions of our task as scholars, teachers, members of communities, citizens—as intellectuals. Is it surprising that it sometimes led to overenthusiasms and excesses? Could it have been otherwise? More seriously, can "progress" within intellectual communities and paradigms otherwise develop?

What came universally to be termed "revisionism," sometimes "radical revisionism," within the "new history of education," was in the first years of the 1970s very much in formation, still plastic, not set in stone by its adherents' practice (or some of its practitioners' pronouncements) or its critics' (mis)constructions.<sup>20</sup> Its formativeness and dynamism, its sense of possibility and openness, its sense of necessity within contemporary historical circumstances, its experiments with historical approach, its collective quests for *large* answers to what seemed to be *the* questions of an age characterize what might be fairly deemed an "OISE era" perhaps as well as any other elements.

Of course, there never was an "OISE era" in any exclusive or autonomous sense. Nor did OISE monopolize developments. No more did innovation cease with the "end" of this "era." Those engaged together stood only as one part, albeit an exceptional one, of a larger, transcontinental and trans-Atlantic enterprise. At the key juncture, that moment, however, was inclusive. On the one hand, in an historiographic effort open to all serious contributions, the very sense of progress toward new research and interpretation was itself energizing and compelling. On the other hand, the emerging conceptualization of "new" social

histories and educational histories mutually transformed both fields. That is one absolutely critical lesson of the OISE experience. Among the larger intellectual strides were those derived from the direct study of societies in which education, broadly defined, represented one of the many important elements examined, rather than the study of education by itself or only implicitly or loosely set in historical context. In that respect, DHPE's relatively small number of courses along with its size, location, cast of characters, and research projects that located "education" differently—"decentred" and reconfigured traditional educational research—together speak clearly and articulately. Such was the "OISE era," short-lived and perhaps a necessary historical fiction but no less significant for that.

To conclude, I look "towards 2000." Very briefly I raise questions about the direction and vitality of the history of education from approximately the mid to late-1970s to the present, and about its future agenda. In both cases, I am especially interested in the fate of the "new" or revisionist histories, and their legacies and meanings for today and tomorrow. I shall sweep speculatively and widely, not only for reasons of space, seeking to be contentious.

In his 1982 assessment of American educational history, Veysey offered a mixed review of the revisionist and immediate post-revisionist eras. On one hand, "The study of the history of education has not achieved the degree of coherence or of burgeoning support (beyond the initial impetus) to allow it to generate its own clearcut intellectual focus." This included a lack of comparative research, despite its promise, as well as writing on areas other than the history of public school systems. On the other hand, Veysey admitted, "Only in this area is there the richness of accumulated scholarship that leads to significant schools of thought and the excitement of sustained debates."<sup>21</sup> Writing in 1986 about Canadian scholarship, Gaffield concurred. "The talk is now of synthesis, of integration, of coherence. In the 1970s, the development of new fields of social history represented an expanding historical consciousness....The 1980s has become a decade of nostalgia, of longing for a time when writing about the past seemed a lot simpler and the results more fun to read." He proposed to "focus on the history of education *as education* and to analyze the changing ways in which this aspect of the historical process has interacted with related elements of social change." This he deemed going "back to school."<sup>22</sup> Not unrelatedly, a year later, Ian Davey wrote,

One of the more interesting aspects of the writing of the history of education in the past decade has been the retreat from grand theory. In contrast to the decade before, we historians of education have become much more circumspect about our generalizations. In part, this reflects our uneasiness about sociological theories of causation and our penchant

for the particular and the narrative form. In part, it reflects our increasing theoretical sophistication and disenchantment with the explanatory power of the various social theories employed to explain educational change. This disenchantment is especially apparent in recent discussions about the origins of nineteenth-century school systems....A decade later, we are much less sanguine about the efficacy of theories of social control and class domination....If we attempt to generalize at all our theories are more tentative and our explanations are more pluralist.

Davey was wary. Although "current modesty more accurately reflects our state of knowledge," he also feared "that we will retreat too far," in the face of the interpretive problems that persist.<sup>23</sup> Davey proposed more sophisticated approaches to the intersecting histories of capitalism, state-formation, and patriarchal—gender and generational—relations as a new heuristic. He also agreed with Michael Katz that no serious or persuasive challenge to revisionist interpretation has appeared from its critics.<sup>24</sup>

Furthering these assessments, I conclude in 1990 that the history of education thus far has failed to achieve the promise of the "new" or revisionist histories (plural). Failure to assimilate its own critical tradition, recent history, and their legacies explains much of this circumstance, regardless of the attribution of responsibility, whether to revisionists or their critics, fragmentation, or lack of coherence, etc. To be sure, I do not claim that important new work has stopped—it has not—and that no progress is made empirically or interpretively. The histories of women, working and middle classes, literacy, children and youth, families, among others contradict such a claim. Rather, I point specifically to the past decade's decided diminution of intellectual energies and attractions, whether expended in seeking new research areas, developing new methodologies, making new connections, asserting new interpretations, gaining new practitioners. The programmes of conferences, pages of the major journals, books published, and faces among our crowd—notably the lack of new adherents—all testify to a period of declension.<sup>25</sup> The excitement, the spirit of engagement in a collective and important enterprise, are decidedly diminished. The lack of a shared problematic or agenda, reduction in innovative approaches or methods, decline in quality of published work, rise in overly descriptive and even naive studies—sometimes justified by false claims of "return to narrative" or search for that elusive "synthesis"—stand among many signs. Major debates are rare and rarely instructive. Creative, richly constructive criticism, which once propelled vigorous new research and thinking, has also declined. An institutionalized critical tradition failed to develop. To take another tune from the "ancient" days, "the thrill is gone." This is one legacy of the negative response to the "new" histories.

"Towards 2000," the history of education demands new visions. Some recent work evidences new vitality, for example, that of Katznelson and Weir, Davey and Miller, Curtis, Hogan.<sup>26</sup> What I find especially striking about this

work is that it stands more or less directly as legacies of the new, revisionist histories of education of the 1960s and 1970s. Turning to new venues, responding to new influences, it also renews and may reinvigorate that critical tradition and advance it. It has the potential to reduce imputed fragmentation and build synthetically.<sup>27</sup>

New approaches to gender, generation, family; ethnicity, race, class, culture; the state, politics, hierarchy, order, authority; ideology, discourse, rhetoric; institutions, teachers, learners; specific sites and relations of "schooling," in places non-urban as well as urban—in precisely specified temporal and material contexts—while not completely neglected in earlier new histories, offer unfulfilled or untapped possibilities, for a compelling *revised* agenda. In sophisticated formulations and intricate relationships, they join the rosters of capitalist development, systematization and bureaucratization of schools, class, race, and structural inequalities. Recognition and appreciation of complexities and multiplicities of factors does not reduce imperatives for interpretation and demands for explanation. For me, for example, emphasis on conflict, contradiction, continuity too, makes for a richer and still "useful" past for literacy, and now for growing up.

Equally importantly, as this new work also shows, historians of education have much to learn from major intellectual developments in other historical fields and elsewhere in the human and social sciences. Not since the early to mid-1970s has the history of education been a leading sector in historical or educational scholarship. In today's clouded atmosphere of crises of literacy and schooling, "back to basics" and "excellence in education," and their ever-narrowing, rigidifying, unequal consequences for the young around the world, the need for a renewed, engaged, but ever-wiser history of education is as acute as ever before. Dare we fail to seize the time?<sup>28</sup>

## NOTES

- \* The reference of course is to Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Verso, 1983). My appropriation is but one measure of my appreciation and gratitude to Williams and the scholarly tradition he fostered. The appropriation of the remainder of the title perhaps less obviously stems from Henry George and Stephan Thernstrom, also fittingly, I think. This is the text on which my Invited Plenary Address to the Biennial Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association, Ottawa, 12 October 1990, was based. I thank the CHEA, especially Chad Gaffield, for the honour of the invitation, and the Editorial Board of *Historical Studies in Education* for their editorial advice. I also thank Gaffield, Alison Prentice, Ian Davey, and Michael Katz for comments. All sins of commission and omission are of course my own. I do ask readers to judge the paper in specific reference to my assigned topic and approach to it.
1. Graduating from Northwestern University in 1970, I came to the University of Toronto to study modern British and comparative Western European and American history, on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. As an undergraduate I had concentrated on non-North American history and in sociology. I chose to pursue graduate work



in history and at Toronto for a variety of reasons, intellectual, personal, and political. I had not then heard of either Katz or OISE, and knew little about the history of education. As one who grew up in the 1960s, I was intensely interested in contemporary education and its travails. As a "child of the 1960s," I encountered revisionist history of education with an immediate sense of its importance and substantial correctness! I learned about and encountered directly both OISE and Katz that fall. That led to my shifting my scholarly base from the Toronto history department to OISE's department of history and philosophy of education, a strange hybrid of the times. In retrospect, the scholarly distance I was to travel was far less clear at that time than the geographic; the intellectual distance far exceeded the physical, and that first intuitive reaction. The U.S.-Canadian border was but one of the many I crossed.

2. Letter from Gaffield to Graff, 10 September 1989.
3. Review essays provide one revealing indicator here. The so-called Diane Ravitch "debate" in the U.S.—which unfortunately never led to the kind of debate that might have contributed positively to the field—spurred by her 1978 *The Revisionists Revised* (New York: Basic) and its earlier circulation by the National Academy of Education—stand as an especially notorious example of the politics of scholarship and of common efforts at their denial. See in general Michael B. Katz, "The Politics of Educational History," chap. 5 in his *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). More generally, see Laurence Veysey, "The History of Education," *Reviews in American History* 10 (1982): 281-91. For Canadian comparisons, see J. Donald Wilson and David Charles Jones, "The 'New' History of Canadian Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 16 (1976): 367-76; Wilson, "Historiographical Perspectives on Canadian Educational History," *Journal of Educational Thought* 11 (1977): 49-63; Wilson, "Some Observations on Recent Trends in Canadian Educational History," in *An Imperfect Past: Education and Society in Canadian History*, ed. Wilson (Vancouver: CSCI, 1984), 7-29. For different tone and approaches, see Chad Gaffield, "Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education," *Acadiensis* 15 (1986): 169-290; Ian Davey, "Rethinking the Origins of British Colonial School Systems," *Historical Studies in Education* 1 (1989): 149-59. An exceptionally revealing statement was made by Nancy M. Sheehan at the moment I began to draft this presentation; see her review of Houston and Prentice, "Schooling and Scholars," in *History of Education Quarterly* 30 (1990): 94-96.
4. My decade-and-one-half long involvement with the history of literacy began in my first seminar, on "Urban Social Structure: Modes of Historical Analysis," with Katz at OISE; that paper led to my M.A. thesis. My current project on the history of growing up has its origins in a course taken the next semester, Fall 1971, "Education and Social Change: The American Experience." Both course papers led to early articles, one hallmark of the training at OISE.
5. Sheehan, review, 94. Houston's and Prentice's book was published by the University of Toronto Press in 1988.
6. Sheehan, review, 94, 96.
7. In the sense of a bounded, if artificial chronology, any such "era" likely dated from c. 1968 to c. 1975. Having arrived in 1966 directly from graduate studies, Katz left OISE for York University in 1974; he left York for the University of Pennsylvania in 1978. My departure came in 1975; Ian Davey returned to Australia later that year. An "internationalization" took place. With Alison Prentice taking her post at OISE at about the same time, a new era was forming with feminist approaches to

educational and women's history at its centre. Since this was not strictly part of the "OISE era" I was instructed to discuss, I do not attempt to do it justice. Having asked Prentice to write her first paper on women teachers for a conference session I chaired in 1974 (as she kindly reminds me from time to time) and also having collaborated with her on "Children and Schools in Nineteenth-Century Canada" for the National Museum of Man's Canada's Visual Past series, I more or less straddled that transition. Ian Davey and Wendy Bryans also presented papers at that panel in Ottawa; Prentice's and Davey's were published in *Histoire sociale*. I accept Alison Prentice's and others' criticisms for my lack of explicit attention to this key area. As Davey's work underscores, working-class or labour history also claims recognition. Limits of space alas preclude additional discussion.

8. For an interesting recent view and responses, see "A Round Table: What Has Changed and Not Changed in American Historical Practice?" *Journal of American History* 76 (1989): 393-478, a discussion of Jonathan Wiener's "Radical Historians and the Crisis in American History." See also the debates on the "Synthesis" question; for the U.S., see especially *Journal of American History*; for England, see *Past and Present*.
9. New work was represented in the Toronto department by Natalie Davis in early modern European and women's history, Edward Shorter in European social and quantitative history, and Jill Conway in American cultural and women's history. They were all on leave in 1970! I subsequently studied with them.
10. See note 4, above. An early interest in comparative history was one of a number of promises of "new" histories that have never developed broadly. In my studies of literacy, I have attempted to retain this thrust; Ian Davey's current interests do too. It is worth mentioning here that much of the "new" social history in the U.S. also was stimulated by French and English research. See, for example, Davey, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and the Origins of Mass Schooling," *History of Education Review* 16 (1987): 1-12, and "Rethinking the Origins of British Colonial School Systems," 149-59.
11. Sutherland, "The Study of the History of Education," *History* 54 (1969): 49-59; Stone, "Literacy and Education in England, 1640-1900," *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 67-139; Talbot, "The History of Education," *Daedalus* 100 (1971): 133-50.
12. Consult, for example, Wilson and Jones, "The 'New' History"; Wilson, "Historiographical Perspectives" and "Some Observations," and note the shifting emphasis over time.
13. Gaffield, "Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education," *Acadiensis* 15 (1986): 169, 179, 171. See also Wilson's review essays cited above.
14. Wilson, "Some Observations," 7-8. See also Gaffield, "Back to School." Note more generally Wilson's adaptation of Veysey's "The History of Education."
15. Wilson "Some Observations," 9-10. Wilson quoted Sol Cohen on Katz; Cohen's statement originally appeared in "New Perspectives in the History of American Education, 1960-1970," *History of Education* 2 (1973): 89. Wilson also quotes from Katz's preface to *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools* (New York: Prager, 1971), xxvi: "by emancipating...change." After praising revisionist achievement, Wilson followed Veysey in declaring revisionism "over" by the late 1970s (a "couple of years" later than in the U.S., overwhelmed by an "onslaught of new findings and interpretations in related sub-fields of social history, such as urban, working class, ethnic, women, and family history"): "Some Observations," 12-13.

16. Wilson, "Some Observations," 9-10. See also his other review essays, cited above. Marvin Lazerson was, to the best of my knowledge, the first to distinguish in print between "radical" and "moderate" revisionists; see his "Revisionism and American Educational History," *Harvard Educational Review* 43 (1973): 269-83.
17. Katz makes the same point in his response to Ravitch; see his *Reconstructing*, chap. 5.
18. In this way, among others, for example, I see the roots of *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) and the comparative parts of my current work on the history of growing up in my Toronto years.
19. When I look over the writings of the late 1960s and 1970s, it seems to me that critics' claims about revisionists' excesses and simplifications not always but often are exaggerated or distorted. This issue bears re-examination historiographically, I think, at least rhetorically or discursively. Discussions of "social control" provide one good example.
20. Useful here is Katz, *Reconstructing*. Compare with Wilson, "Some Observations"; but also with Gaffield, "Back to School"; Davey, "Rethinking" and "Capitalism." See, too, Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (New York: Basic, 1985). The classic review essays of Marvin Lazerson and Carl Kaestle grappled seriously and sincerely with this issue. Overview or "perspectives" pieces that followed typically did not, as *misconstrual* and distortion came to dominate the practice that passed as "criticism." Ravitch's *Revisionists Revised* stands as the culmination of one line.
21. Veysey, "History of Education," 282-83.
22. Gaffield, "Back to School," 169, 190.
23. Davey, "Capitalism," 1, *passim*. He reiterated his point a year later at the 1988 CHEA meeting; see his "Rethinking the Origins."
24. Davey, "Capitalism," 5 et *passim*; Katz, *Reconstructing*, 136-37, *passim*. Davey construes patriarchy in terms of gender and generational subordination, a usage that I for one question. A particularly exciting recent U.S. work is Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All*. See more recently, Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ont.: The Althouse Press, and Basingstoke: Falmer, 1988); David Hogan, "The Market Revolution and Disciplinary Power: Joseph Lancaster and the Psychology of the Early Classroom System," *History of Education Quarterly* 29 (1989): 381-418. The latter two works reflect historians of education's recent if tardy "discovery" of major intellectual trends of the last quarter-century. See also the first two issues of *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, 1, 1-2 (Spring and Fall, 1989), which suggest a richer mix in terms of approach and geography than either the U.S. *History of Education Quarterly* or the *English History of Education*.
25. Admittedly, the signs I read in making these sweeping statements are more diffuse, complicated, and amenable to multiple and opposing readings than my statements reflect. I offer no empirical support in this essay. For purposes of discussion, I explicitly take the risks incurred and am prepared to accept qualifications. Obviously, the issues demand careful study in depth.
26. For citations, see notes above. These examples are illustrative, hardly exhaustive or definitive. For feminist scholarship, they do not do justice. For the history of literacy for example, see my "Whither the History of Literacy? The Future of the Past?" *Communication* 11 (1988): 5-22; for "growing up," see my "The History of

Childhood and Youth: Beyond Infancy?" *History of Education Quarterly* 26 (1986): 95-109.

27. These few paragraphs make no pretense as programme or outline of an agenda for new research and questions or as elements of synthesis. Among the influences, clearly, are those of feminism, state and reproduction theory, cultural and class studies, and recent work in legal and political studies. Current literary and philosophical emphases begin to influence this work, too. Historians of education face great intellectual challenges, especially when we confront the implications of post-structuralist and post-modern theories.
28. See, for example, Katz, "The New Educational Panic," in *America in Theory*, ed. Leslie Berlowitz, Denis Donoghue, and Louis Menard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 178-94. This is hardly a problem only in the U.S.