

# The School of Education: 1934-84

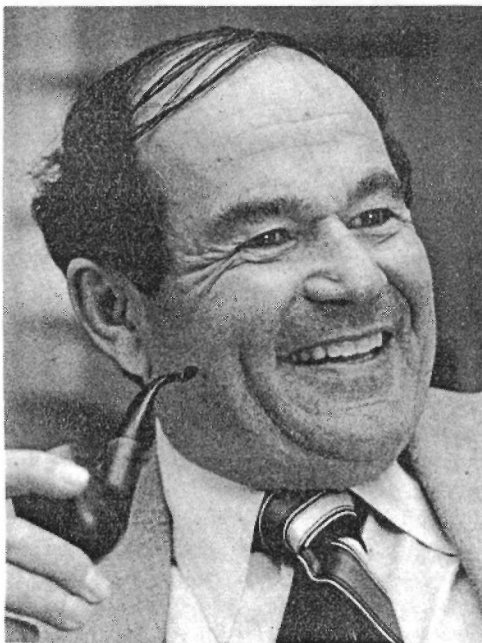
## Its Recent History By Dean Burton Blatt

*Editor's note:* The Graduate School of Education at Syracuse University was established in 1934, though its roots precede the turn of the century. As the school anticipates its jubilee celebration in 1984, it is starting to review the past five decades.

The School of Education wants its readers, especially alumni, to send updates on what they have been doing since their days at Syracuse University. Also welcome are reminiscences about professors and classes, and anecdotes about life on the Hill. Some of the material will be used to construct a history of the school in time for the golden anniversary programs. Some of it may find its way into future issues of *Education Exchange* as well.

Though the past decade is still recent history, we asked Dean Burton Blatt to get the historical ball rolling by reflecting on the School of Education in the 1970s.

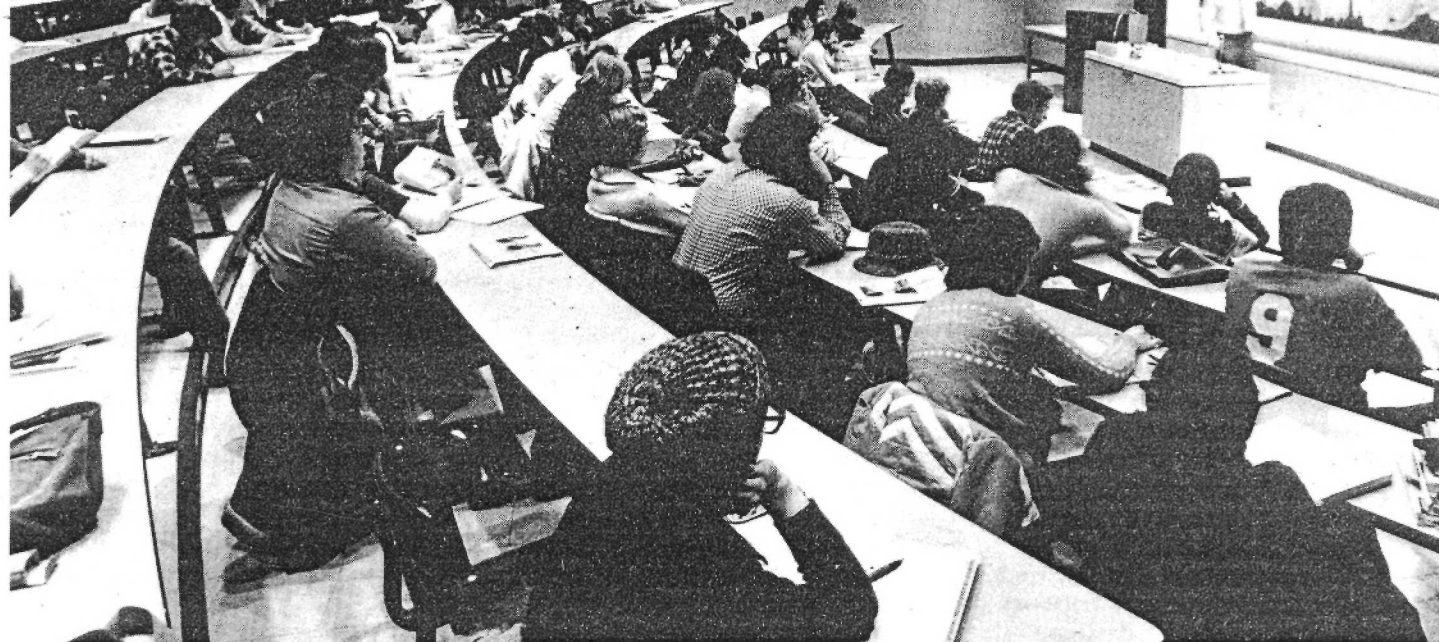
And then it's your turn. Send your stories to Marie R. Sarno, director of student and alumni services, School of Education, 144 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, N.Y. 13210.



A decade barely finished can hardly be interpreted as *history*; it is virtually part of our present. Its relation is not yet with our past but rather with our *future*. What we have learned and experienced over the past decade is the stuff of which we must build our next decade. Nevertheless, I share with you this reminiscence of this School of Education, hoping that it will convey more truth than contrivance.

I came to Syracuse University in 1969 to succeed William Cruickshank as director of the Division of Special Education and Rehabilitation. As always seems to be the case in the eyes of the newcomer, there was a lot of rebuilding needed in Special Education and Rehabilitation when I appeared on the scene. Not only had Cruickshank, one of the pioneers of our field, left to direct a Research and Training Center at his alma mater, but several other distinguished professors in the Division had either retired or resigned to pursue opportunities elsewhere. You may remember that the 1960s were a time when universities were growing faster than the capabilities of graduate schools to produce new professors and, consequently, if any decade could be labeled meaningfully, *that* period might have been characterized as the era of the "Academic Gypsy." With a lot of good luck, and possibly a small amount of wisdom, within a few years we had recruited several outstanding professors and, furthermore, created in Special Education a Psycho-Education Clinic, an institute to train advocates, and the Center on Human Policy, a facility now nationally known for its work in organizing consumer groups and shaping policy on behalf of the handicapped.

During that same period, under the leadership of Dean David Krathwohl, the School of Education established one of the first and most effective teaching center programs in the United States, programs which, I'm pleased to report, continue to thrive. Also during the early 1970s, our program in Instructional Technology



achieved its "emanipation" from the traditional concept of "audio visual aids" and developed a much broader and scholarly graduate program in what we today call Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation.

I was invited to become dean of this School in 1976 and, while I can't speak for those I serve in this position, I never for a moment regret having accepted the opportunity which was handed me. Here again, the newcomer concluded that a great deal needed to be accomplished if this school was to survive the severe enrollment and budgetary problems which virtually every major graduate school of education in America has been suffering since the halcyon days of the 1960s. Of course, one of the things I felt was needed immediately was a reorganization of the school and the development of a clear statement of the school's mission. (Doesn't every new dean feel the need to

reorganize the environment and clarify its goals?)

Well, we accomplished those tasks, and in the process we also were able to decentralize the school's operating budget, thus giving program directors greater responsibility in assigning and accounting for the scarce dollars available. Possibly because of the decentralization, which surely highlighted the direct link between resources and expenditures, but even more because of the cooperativeness and capabilities of our faculty, we made it our business to find external resources to keep our faculty up to full strength at a time when most schools of education were terminating significant numbers of their faculty, and when more than a few schools of education were terminating all but their tenured faculty. With the support of our central administration, and our success in quadrupling external funds for research and training, we have virtually as

many faculty members in this School of Education as we had 10 and 15 years ago.

Has it all made a difference? How does judge the excellence of a college? There are indicators: the quality of its students, publications of its faculty members, the skills of its teachers, the school's attractiveness to external funding agencies, the size and quality of its research library, its reputation among similar schools. Today, our School of Education enjoys an excellent international reputation. 100 faculty members have prepared themselves at the leading research universities here and abroad. Its 1,500 students come from virtually every state and most foreign nations. And many of its 9,000 graduate alumni and 5,000 undergraduate alumni are distinguished leaders in education and related fields. National surveys rank us among the outstanding Graduate Schools of Education in the United States. And reputational studies reveal that

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least a half dozen of our programs are regarded nationally as truly distinguished, and several others are ranked as among the better ones in the country.

In surveying the past 10 years, there are only three things that seem clear, and what's revealed isn't without its unpleasant side: We survived (the challenges); we prospered (by adapting); we will have to change again (through some synthesis).

We did survive, and that in itself is quite an achievement since some other schools of education didn't survive. And what we survived was two waves of challenges. The first, spilling over from the 1960s, was a challenge to the way we viewed our world. From our serene, academic detachment, we were suddenly in the thick of social action. We had to learn, and learn quickly, how to work in the "real world," to have our priorities defined for us rather than by us, to confront teacher failures where we once saw

pupil failures, to meet the charge of "irrelevance" by becoming involved in every aspect of our society.

The second challenge came a little later—the "market" dried up and our enrollments decreased. From a period when the only limit on our enrollment was our willingness to expand, we found ourselves unable to prevent a significant and steady attrition rate. Of course, as academic people, we like to think our attention should be on loftier things than money. But it became clear that unless we thought very seriously about the resources available to us, the lofty purposes would soon be thwarted.

Most of us are aware of the seriousness of this later challenge to the vitality of the School of Education—especially because of the still darkening clouds in Washington. However, we should also appreciate, in a historical view, that the challenge of the 1960s too was dangerous in its way. We tend to identify that period of

social involvement as one of affluence, since we got plenty of tuition-bearing students, and government at all levels was as generous as it was eager for our help. The problems which we had to address were serious and the risks in attempting solutions were far from purely "academic." But, we survived. And we survived both challenges in similar ways, by somehow making the right moves. To the social challenge, we not only adapted but took a lead in responsive educational innovation. The Teacher Centers, Center on Human Policy, clinics, and practica were, especially in retrospect, the right answers at the time. Today, those responses seem almost "obvious," inevitable. But they weren't obvious, and our ability to hit upon them was evidence of a school with a thoughtful, scholarly faculty. And this same excellence came to bear on the problem of enrollment declines. The faculty that had created the programs became one

which could draw "soft money" to study those and other problems when money elsewhere was all but unobtainable. We adapted by becoming a much more predominantly graduate and research-oriented institution.

It should be clear that the story of this decade hasn't ended. We've stopped the sort of imaginative and risky innovation with which we began to build our current reputation a decade ago. And we can't very well go on forever studying the processes and machinery of education without once again stepping out to test our conclusions in the real world. I don't know how well we have learned it, but surely the central lesson of this decade has been to expect change. What changes we will make, though, remains a question. "Will we make changes?" is even a question. I think we will—we always have—but...