Journal of Curriculum Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tcus20

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Published online: 05 May 2009.

To cite this article: Michael Knoll (2009) From Kidd to Dewey: the origin and meaning of 'social efficiency', Journal of Curriculum Studies, 41:3, 361-391, DOI: 10.1080/00220270801927362

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220270801927362

J. CURRICULUM STUDIES, 2009, VOL. 41, NO. 3, 361–391

From Kidd to Dewey: the origin and meaning of 'social efficiency'

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Contemporary historians of education associate the term 'social efficiency' with a group of US educators who, in the 1910s and 1920s, aimed at creating a technocratic school and a conservative society of social stability and harmony. However, an investigation of the origin of the term indicates that 'social efficiency' began its career in 1894 in the UK with the writing of Benjamin Kidd. From the outset, Kidd's social Darwinist position was disputed by sociologists and philosophers who interpreted the term from a humanitarian point of view. It was the broad, liberal approach inspired by John Hobson, Lester Ward, and John Dewey—and not the narrow, utilitarian approach propagated by David Snedden—that educators took up when they employed the term 'social efficiency' to define the main aim of education.

Keywords: comparative education; educational goals; history of education; philosophy of education; sociology of education

On the eve of the 20th century, British politics and social philosophy were fascinated by the idea of 'efficiency'. 'At the present time, and perhaps it is the most notable social fact of this age', wrote the London *Spectator* in 1902:

> there is a universal outcry for efficiency in all the departments of society, in all aspects of life. We hear the outcry on all hands and from the most unexpected of persons. From the pulpit, the newspaper, the hustings, in the drawing-room, the smoking-room, the street, the same cry is heard: Give us Efficiency, or we die. (quoted in Searle 1971: 1)

Indeed, efficiency was the watchword of a generation engrossed by the belief in science and technology, in social progress and social education, in the superiority of business values, and the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was a conviction cutting across the conventional distinctions between 'rich' and 'poor', 'left' and 'right', 'conservative' and 'progressive'. And it did not end at the UK border. Like their British colleagues, US politicians, businessmen, and scientists embraced the 'gospel of efficiency'. Like them, they discussed untiringly how they could improve the 'national', 'industrial', and 'scientific efficiency' of their country, company, or college.[1]

Educators were no exception to the rule. Teachers, principals, and superintendents declared 'efficiency', or 'social efficiency', the primary aim of education. In fact, social efficiency was a term so pervasive in US educational

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Journal of Curriculum Studies ISSN 0022–0272 print/ISSN 1366–5839 online ©2009 Taylor & Francis
http://www.informaworld.com
DOI: 10.1080/00220270801927362

thought during the first decades of the 20th century that Edward A. Krug (1964), in *The Shaping of the American High School*, saw fit to speak of what he called the 'social efficiency movement'. The social efficiency movement got under way, Krug argued, when the problems of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration became overpowering and demanded a far-reaching educational reform (pp. 249–283). The proponents of the reform—a diverse group of sociologists, philosophers, and educators—wanted the school to give up its preoccupation with academic contents and individualistic notions and to take up a social mission by making useful knowledge and life experiences the centre of the curriculum. Krug claimed that 'social mission' could mean two things. It could mean 'social service', i.e. the self-expressive tendencies of the child were to be reconciled with the demands of society. This was John Dewey's (1859–1952) broad, humanitarian approach. And it could mean 'social control', i.e. the interests of society were to supersede the needs of the child. This was Edward A. Ross's (1866–1951) narrow, utilitarian approach. Integrating both positions, Krug contended that the promotion of social efficiency became a movement which brought together 'conservatives' like David S. Snedden (1868–1951), Charles A. Prosser (1871–1952) and Charles A. Ellwood (1873–1946), and 'progressives' like Samuel T. Dutton (1849–1919), Colin A. Scott (1861–1925), and Nathaniel Butler (1853–1927). In trying to locate the origin of the term 'social efficiency', Krug pointed out that Michael V. O'Shea (1866–1932) from the University of Wisconsin considered publishing a book on 'social efficiency' in 1904.[2] But Krug added that William C. Bagley (1874–1946), afterwards to become the leader of the essentialist movement, was the first to write one—a year later—with his *The Educative Process* (Bagley 1905). His perceptive chapter on the subject in that book was to almost single-handedly establish 'social efficiency' as the main aim of education.

Since Krug's compelling research, two trends have been noteworthy. First, influenced by Walter Drost's (1967) biography of David S. Snedden, the meaning of social efficiency has been narrowed to a conservative, fundamentally illiberal approach to curriculum construction, emphasizing the training of useful skills and the preparation of pupils for specific occupations and predetermined social roles.[3] Secondly, inspired by the studies of Raymond E. Callahan (1962) and Samuel Haber (1964) on the 'efficiency craze' in school administration and progressive politics during the 1910s, the meaning of the term has been broadened to include Frederick W. Taylor's (1856–1915) scientific management schemes for the realization of financial profits and social harmony—and, occasionally, Edward L. Thorndike's (1874–1949) psychological measurement techniques for the mechanical improvement of teaching and learning—as predecessors of the movement.[4] Thus, Herbert M. Kliebard (1986) would claim in his *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* that the 'social efficiency interest group' emerged as a result of contemporary scientific, technological, and business ideals and aimed at the creation of 'a coolly efficient, smoothly running society' (p. 28). What David Snedden, W. W. Charters (1875–1952), and Franklin Bobbitt (1876–1952) had in common, Kliebard argued, was their interest in a curriculum designed to make 'social utility' the supreme criterion for the selection of subject matter and school subjects.

By and large, the picture has remained unchanged. For more than 40 years, historians of education have accepted Krug's findings concerning the origin of social efficiency, and they have agreed to Drost's narrow, utilitarian usage of the term and his contention that there exists an antagonism between efficiency, social stratification, and vocationalism on the one hand and democracy, equal opportunity, and liberal education on the other—thereby, contrary to Krug, dissociating Dewey from the notion of social efficiency and actually making him the foremost opponent of the social efficiency movement.[5] In this paper, I move the argument in a different direction; I show that social efficiency as an integral, self-contained concept began its career not in the US but in the UK, not with William Bagley in 1905 but with Benjamin Kidd in 1894, and that it was imbued with democratic values and humanitarian ideals even before it became part of the US educational discourse. In addition, I point out that no one else—including the members of Kliebard's 'social efficiency interest group'—wrote more distinctly about the topic and incorporated the phrase more conspicuously into his pedagogy than the author of *Democracy and Education* (1980a), John Dewey.

Benjamin Kidd and the origin of social efficiency

In February 1894, Macmillan published a book which became a bestseller and propelled its author, Benjamin Kidd (1858–1916), from a role as a UK government clerk to a celebrated writer of international standing.[6] During the first year, the book, *Social Evolution*, sold 7500 copies in England and 19,000 in the USA. As D. P. Crook (1984: 69), Kidd's biographer, explained its success, *Social Evolution* resumed Charles Darwin's popular theory of natural selection and:

> offered something for almost everybody: a defence of competition and Malthusian population pressure for laissez-fairists; moderate reformism for 'new liberals'; a vision splendid of triumphant democracy for apostles of human progress; anti-socialism for conservatives; a spicing of socialism for the left; a biological rationale for Anglo-Saxon imperialists.

What Kidd presented was a new variation of the social Darwinist 'struggle for existence' and 'survival of the fittest'. However, more to the point, it was in *Social Evolution* that he introduced the concept of 'social efficiency'.

For Benjamin Kidd, as for Herbert Spencer (1820–1893) and other social Darwinists, competition was biologically based and indispensable in ensuring human progress. From time immemorial, they said, peoples with less competitive characteristics had disappeared in the face of stronger and more 'efficient' rivals. Contrary to Spencer, however, Kidd (1894) claimed that progress arose from conditions which contradicted reason. 'It is not intellectual capacity that natural selection appears to be developing in the first instance, but other qualities contributing more directly to social efficiency' (pp. 282–283). The individual, Kidd argued, had rational preferences for his or her present well-being over the future welfare of the race, though this reason was checked by irrational factors, particularly religious beliefs, that subordinated individual interests to social needs. In fact, religious beliefs

rather than intellectual capabilities played the dominant role in evolution and served as the force to move societies continuously to higher levels of civilization. Christianity, said Kidd, fostered the sense of altruism and universal brotherhood to such an extent that the ruling classes complied with the masses' demand for democracy. In the words of Crook (1984: 65), Kidd favoured a form of 'socialized liberal capitalism'. While opposing socialism as a rationalist concept which denied the necessity of conflict and religion, Kidd welcomed programmes of social and political reform that would improve the 'efficiency of society'. Democracy, he held, was not simply a form of government but the highest stage in human evolution because it brought formerly excluded people into freedom and competition. Kidd pleaded for civil rights and 'equality of opportunity' with fervour (p. 232). Equality of opportunity—a term possibly introduced into the political discourse 2 years earlier by the evolutionist and social reformer, Alfred R. Wallace (1823–1913) (1907: 3)—was a crucial element in his concept of democracy, liberty, and social efficiency. It included, among other features, provisions for free public education, an extended electoral franchise, equal access to the market, and sharply increased taxation for the rich. Society profited best, Kidd contended, when all children had a chance to develop their potential to the utmost and—starting from the same point—compete successfully with their fellow citizens. By equalizing the basic conditions of life and helping people to 'stand on their own feet', democracy—combined with huge space for contest, competition, and differentiation—provided, in Kidd's opinion, the most efficient system for recruiting skilled specialists, competent experts, and able elites, i.e. those individuals who should run the companies, direct the colleges, and rule the country.

The idea of efficiency figured prominently in *Social Evolution*. Indeed, 'social efficiency' was the key and central term of the book, being in particular adopted to indicate the aim of education, the cause of progress, and the means of measuring the welfare and development of an individual or nation. As Kidd (1894) put it:

> In the silent and strenuous rivalry in which every section of the race is of necessity continually engaged, permanent success appears to be invariably associated with the ethical and moral conditions favourable to the maintenance of a high standard of social efficiency, and with those conditions only. (pp. viii–ix)
>
> Throughout history the centre of power has moved gradually but surely to the north into those stern regions where men have been trained for the rivalry of life in the strenuous conflict with nature in which they have acquired energy, courage, integrity, and those characteristic qualities which contribute to raise them to a high state of social efficiency. (p. 57)
>
> [T]he marvellous accomplishments of modern civilization are primarily the measure of the social stability and social efficiency, and not of the intellectual pre-eminence, of the peoples who have produced them. They do not necessarily imply any extraordinary intellectual development in ourselves at all. They are not the colossal products of individual minds amongst us; they are all the results of small accumulations of knowledge slowly and painfully made and added to by many minds through an indefinite number of generations in the past. (p. 266)

> [I]n the vast process of change in progress it is always the conditions of social efficiency, and not those which individuals or classes may desire for themselves, that the unseen evolutionary forces at work amongst us are engaged in developing. It is by the standard of social efficiency that we as individuals are ever being tested. It is in this quality of social efficiency that nations and peoples are being continually, and for the most part unconsciously, pitted against each other in the complex rivalry of life. (p. 327)

The status of a nation, Kidd argued, depended less upon colour, descent, or intellectual capacities than upon religious beliefs and moral qualities socially inherited from past generations and successively transmitted by families, schools, and other agencies of education. These qualities, i.e. 'strength and energy of character, humanity, probity and integrity, and simple-minded devotion to conceptions of duty' (p. 325), distinguished the members of the Anglo-Saxon race. And it was the high ethical standard of social efficiency that justified the UK's benevolent rule over India and Egypt and the US's imperialistic aspirations in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

Although Kidd did not elaborate on the idea, it is obvious that, in his concept, education had to play a major role. Without firm guidance and thorough schooling, the socially efficient individual or nation was not feasible:

> Other things being equal the most vigorous social systems are those in which are combined the most effective subordination of the individual to the interests of the social organism with the highest development of his own personality. (p. 65)

For the attainment of common values and personal growth, distinct objectives had to be observed: the execution of social control, the implementation of equal opportunity, the construction of functional curricula, and the training of social responsibility. Consequently, the school seemed to Kidd to be a place where teachers could apply all means to enforce decent and virtuous behaviour; where they were expected to offer a variety of special programmes to compensate for individual and social deficiencies; where they were supposed to select subject matter according to its value and usefulness in life; where they taught proper ethical principles and lived up to high moral standards; and where their students learned above all to be tough, competitive, dutiful, and self-reliant. Education for social efficiency, Kidd could have said, is less the development of the intellect but primarily the training of character, strength, and discipline.

Kidd was, of course, not the first to use the term efficiency and transfer it from the field of manufacture, industry, and business to the sphere of philosophy, sociology, and ethics. In fact, the path was well prepared by an earlier generation of evolutionists and social Darwinists. Whereas Spencer (1882: 260, 335), the initiator of the movement and chief agent of laisser-faire and human 'happiness', employed the phrase in the sociological sense and regarded the 'principle of efficiency' as an expression for 'organization' and 'social change', William K. Clifford (1845–1879), for example, the UK mathematician, philosopher, and critic of Spencer's individualism, wrote 'On the scientific basis of morals' and noticed as early as 1875:

> Your happiness is of no use to the community, except in so far as it tends to make you a more efficient citizen—that is to say, happiness is not to be desired for its own sake, but for the sake of something else. If any end is pointed to, it

> is the end of increased efficiency in each man's special work, as well as in the social functions which are common to all. (Clifford 1875: 660)

Clifford's interpretation was reinforced by his friend and colleague John T. Punnett (1881: 362, 354) who contended that from 'the struggle for existence point of view' the 'principle of Efficiency', not the principle of 'happiness', must be the 'practical standard of reference for proximate ends' in morals. And in his pioneering book on *The Science of Ethics*, Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), member of the clergy, father of Virginia Woolf, and man of letters keenly interested in the study of moral principles, also disagreed with Spencer's hedonism and Bentham's utilitarianism, declaring the 'maximum of efficiency'—as regards 'health' and 'welfare' of the social organism—the objective end of social life and good government. Occasionally, Stephen (1882: 315) even spoke of 'social efficiency' when he referred to civic or military virtues like 'courage', 'truthfulness', 'mutual confidence', and 'the restraint of antisocial passions' in order to point to the moral qualities people and societies needed for their survival. 'The military virtues become less prominent', he added, 'as war occupies a smaller part of the total activities and is a less essential part of social efficiency' (p. 170).

All the same, it was Benjamin Kidd who, in *Social Evolution*, was the first to deal intensively with the vital role 'social efficiency' played in human affairs. And it was in *Social Evolution* that he asserted 'equality of opportunity' to be a necessary condition for progress, democracy, and social growth. As Michael Freeden (1978: 82), the UK historian of the 'new liberalism', pointed out, 'Here was the ultimate ideology of social efficiency—the pseudo-scientific term then embarking upon a fashionable career to last until World War I'. In fact, Kidd claimed, and his contemporaries believed, that he had coined the term social efficiency as well as the term equality of opportunity (Hughes 1916, Crook 1984: 62, 401n29). Even if he was not the inventor but only the prime interpreter and chief propagator of both striking phrases, as seems to be the case, Benjamin Kidd belongs undoubtedly to the group of men unjustly forgotten by historians of education.[7]

John Hobson, Lester Ward, and the humanitarian alternative

From the outset, *Social Evolution* was a most controversial book. The reviews and comments it received were as divergent as 'an epoch-making book' (Henry Drummond), 'a piece of monumental clap-trap' (W. H. Mallock), and 'the most ignorant book of modern times' (H. M. Cecil) (Crook 1984: 85, 71, 75). John Dewey, the philosopher and educator then at the University of Chicago, appraising the latest publications of Benjamin Kidd and Lester Ward in the *Psychological Review*, expressed a more balanced opinion, arguing that *Social Evolution* was original in assuming a non-rational basis for progress, but that it was certainly mistaken in asserting an insurmountable antagonism between individual and society. 'If the individual', Dewey (1971: 212) asked gently, 'is *continually* sacrificed to the conditions of progress, where is the progress?'; 'The antithesis which Mr. Kidd makes between what constitutes the happiness of the individual and the conditions of progress appears to be

overdrawn and out of perspective'. According to Crook (1984: 70), the general public held *Social Evolution* in high esteem while most scholars could not ignore its 'loose speculation' and 'slanted account of history'.

Whether they praised or condemned the book, US politicians, ministers, and social scientists were attracted by the term social efficiency. 'Mr Kidd', wrote President-to-be Theodore Roosevelt (1895: 109), after criticizing him harshly in his review of *Social Evolution*, 'has our cordial sympathy when he lays stress on the fact that … the prime factor in the preservation of a race is its power to attain a high degree of social efficiency'.[8] Henry C. Lodge (1850–1924), the Republican Senator from Massachusetts, shared Kidd's political outlook and declared in 1896 during the Congressional debate about a new immigration bill that:

> there is a limit to the capacity of any race for assimilating and elevating an inferior race, and when you begin to pour in unlimited numbers of people of alien or lower races, of less social efficiency and less moral force, you are running the most frightful risk that any people can run. (Lodge 1909: 265)

Josiah Strong (1847–1916), too, the influential secretary of the Evangelical Society of the US, could not refrain from expressing his missionary 'theology of progress' in Kidd's words. In his *Expansion Under New World-Conditions*, Strong (1900: 238–239) proclaimed, that competition:

> will weed out the unfit nations and will discipline and develop not the strongest, but rather the fittest; for survival will depend more on social efficiency than on mere strength.

And Edward Ross, the young social scientist from Stanford University, used Kidd's expression in a detached sociological way. 'The efficiency of the social system, into which the individual thus endowed is born', Ross (1896: 520) wrote in his first paper on 'Social control', 'is tested by its power to shape him'. It was this short, inconspicuous sentence that led Krug's student Drost (1967: 29)—erroneously—to believe he had discovered the spark that ignited the social efficiency movement.

Yet the author who, in 1895, was the first not to just pick up but vigorously discuss and dispute the phrase was John A. Hobson (1858–1940), the liberal journalist and political economist of the University of London. Reviewing *Social Evolution* in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Hobson criticized Kidd harshly for defining human progress and social efficiency quantitatively. Kidd's 'progress', Hobson (1895: 309) declared, 'is measured in square miles of territory, bales of cotton goods and millions of low class English lives which are engaged in cut-throat competition of military or commercial rivalry'. Instead, Hobson argued, progress had to be measured by the increase in the 'quality of life' and the spread of 'higher individualism' 'producing a race distinguished for high and varied mental and moral caliber' (p. 310). 'Social efficiency', therefore, was not possible without reducing the energy devoted to the 'baser struggles of war and industry' and not attainable without ending the rivalry over peoples, territories and 'lower material products'. For Hobson (in opposition to Kidd), social efficiency depended upon the limitation of competition, contest, and conflict and upon the realization of participation, co-operation, and unconditional solidarity. A society,

Hobson claimed, could only become 'socially efficient' when 'the bonds of common interest between individual and individual [are] numerous and strong' (p. 310). Co-operation, like socialism, was not an expression of joint failure and collective inferiority but, on the contrary, a manifestation of the reason and dignity of man.

In his books, *The Social Problem* (Hobson 1901) and, particularly, *Imperialism: A Study* (Hobson 1902), which made him a well-known figure among socialists, Marxists, and social reformers, Hobson resumed his critique of Kidd's definition of social efficiency and his belief in the superiority of western civilization. He concluded:

> Now, thus closely stated, … [Kidd's] meaning of the term 'socially efficient' becomes evident. It is simply the antithesis of 'weak', and is equivalent to 'strong in the struggle of life'. Taken at the first blush it suggests admitted moral and intellectual virtues of some broad general kind, and is afterwards taken to imply such qualities. But applied in the present [Kidd's] 'natural history' sense, it signifies nothing more or less than capacity to beat other races, who, from their failure, are spoken of as 'lower'. It is merely a repetition of the phrase 'survival of the fittest'. (Hobson 1902: 156)

> [Yet] [s]ocial efficiency, for progress, really means the desire of individuals to merge or subordinate their separate ends of individuality, and to act on the supposition that a common social end realized by the individual consciousness, is in itself desirable. Or, adopting another formula which has its uses, it implies a conformity to the 'general will' seeking by rational conscious progress the welfare of society regarded as an organized whole. (Hobson 1901: 263)

Hobson's interpretation followed what he called the 'general', 'broad' usage of the term. As one of the leading 'new liberals' in the UK, he condemned Kidd's justification of imperialism, expansion, and exploitation; it diminished the democratic participation of the people, hampered the economic growth of the country, and stalled the social reconstruction of the nation. Like Dewey, Hobson disapproved of Kidd's conviction that there exists an insurmountable antagonism between individual and society. The subordination of the 'particular will' to the 'general will' was in his opinion avoidable, and on the whole unnecessary. The individual, he claimed, possessed enough intelligence, decency, and self-control to realize the import of social structures and rules and to attend faithfully to his or her duties as citizen and taxpayer because he or she would, if necessary, benefit from mutual aid and public support. In the end, Hobson accepted social efficiency as a legitimate aim of a civilized society, passionately contending, however, that it had nothing to do with struggle, survival, and the 'quantity of goods' but with peace, justice, and the 'quality of life'. What Hobson—and also his US counterpart Lester F. Ward (1841–1913)—advanced long before social efficiency became a topic of the educational discourse was a humanitarian alternative to Kidd's often illiberal and basically racist conception.

Indeed, when Lester Ward, the eminent social scientist from Washington, DC, read *Social Evolution* in 1896 and discovered the attractive new phrase, he argued in a similar vein as Hobson had done.[9] Contrary to his UK colleague, however, Ward gave social efficiency an essentially positive appearance and incorporated it sympathetically into his own sociological theory. Although an

ardent opponent to Kidd's notions of conflict, war, and competition, Ward (1967b: 246) observed that 'The new ethics, which is social science, seeks the utmost individual liberty. But, like every science, it aims at results. Its true object, to use the forcible expression of Mr. Benjamin Kidd, is *social efficiency*'. '[A] term', he added graciously in *Pure Sociology* (Ward 1903: 27–28), 'that I gladly adopt and shall freely use'. From that time on, Ward employed the term frequently and, like Hobson, gave social efficiency a meaning that contrasted sharply with Kidd's imperialist and anti-rational approach. He wrote:

> [A]ll the nations of which history tells us anything have undergone much more still than two social assimilations. Most of them have undergone many, and represent highly complex structures. With every fresh assimilation they rise in the scale of civilization. What they acquire is greater and greater social efficiency, and the principal differences between races, peoples, and nations are differences in the degree of social efficiency. (Ward 1967c: 336)
>
> [C]onsider the achievements of England. Contemplate the wonderful social efficiency of that many times amalgamated people. The sociologist cannot shut his eyes to the fact that the social efficiency is mainly due to the repeated amalgamations and to the intensity of the resultant social struggles, developing, moulding, and strengthening social structures. (Ward 1967c: 338)
>
> Successively higher and higher social structures are thus created by a process of natural synthesis, and society evolves from stage to stage. The struggling groups fuse into each other the most vigorous qualities of each, cross all the hereditary strains, double their social efficiency at each cross, and place each new product on a higher plane of existence. It is the cross-fertilization of cultures. (Ward 1967d: 374)

On the one hand, Ward, like Kidd and Hobson, was an advocate of democracy, education, and social evolution. He believed in equality of opportunity and was convinced that social efficiency as a concept and a continuous product of the life-struggle could conclusively explain why diverse races, peoples, or nations—during the thousands of years of their existence—had achieved a lower or a higher level of civilization. On the other hand, Ward (1967d: 374) insisted that human progress was not a biological but a sociological fact, and that the evolutionary process did not proceed by 'hereditary selection of successful elements' but by social assimilation of 'opposing elements'. Competition, especially when unrestrained as in Kidd's case, involved 'enormous waste' and prevented 'maximum development' because it followed aimlessly the 'iron law of nature' and not, with firm purpose and clear reason, the steady 'law of mind' (Ward 1967a: 156–157). According to Ward, the various agencies of education should be less concerned with character training and the teaching of obedience, devotion, and selflessness; rather, they should provide for scientific thinking and the cultivation of knowledge, method, and mental power. Intelligent assimilation, not meaningless competition, Ward maintained, was the chief force of individual growth and social advancement. Social efficiency, evoked by 'social energy' and 'social germ plasm', was actually generated and improved through repeated crossing of the highest strains and through permanent assimilation of the existing social structures to the ever-changing environment (Ward 1903: 32, 214). As a true social liberal and the foremost 'philosopher of the

modern welfare state' (Commager 1967: xxii), Ward developed a civilized version of Kidd's social Darwinist approach—trying to balance individual freedom and social responsibility by furnishing the individual, through general education, with valuable knowledge and experiences and equipping the people, through popular participation, with useful structures and institutions. For Ward—as for Hobson and, later, for Dewey—social efficiency was an important and indispensable concept to promote the social ideal in a democratic, co-operative, and enlightened society.

Social efficiency as the main aim of education before 1905

When Kidd sailed to the US in 1898 and lectured across the continent, *Social Evolution*, with 250,000 copies, had outsold any other work on social philosophy. The trip demonstrated Kidd's appeal and popularity (Crook 1984: 125–141). The daily papers in San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, and New York reported extensively on his talks and lectures. *Echo* and *Outlook* ran lengthy interviews while the *Atlantic Monthly* printed a long essay by him on America's destiny and historical mission. His new book, *The Control of the Tropics* (Kidd 1898), once again justifying imperialism, competition, and expansion by social efficiency, was a timely commentary on the then on-going war with Spain over Cuba and the Philippines. 'Kidd's name', Crook (1984: 98) observed, 'became almost a household word in America'.

To be sure, some educators, like philosophers and sociologists, had employed the term efficiency for many years and for various reasons. They had applied the word not only to indicate the intelligent use of time, energy, and material[10] but also, and more importantly, to express their pedagogic goals and educational ambitions. William N. Hailmann (1836–1920), for instance, the translator of Froebel's (1887) *The Education of Man* and prominent leader of the new education and kindergarten movement, wrote as early as 1872, 'Education must aim at the development of human beings in whom efficiency for usefulness and happiness is developed to the highest degree' (Hailmann 1872: 144).[11] And Stanton Coit (1857–1944), a leading figure in the US settlement house movement, expressed the same thought with a slightly different emphasis. In *Neighbourhood Guilds: An Instrument of Social Reform*, Coit (1891: 11) pronounced:

> The supreme aim which it [the teaching in the settlement house class] constantly keeps in view is the completest efficiency of each individual, as a worker for the community, in morals, manners, workmanship, civic virtues and intellectual power, and the fullest possible attainment of social and industrial advantages.

However, now, accelerated by Kidd's visit to the US, numerous educators, preachers, and social workers began to appreciate the value of 'efficiency', and in particular 'social efficiency'—because the term offered a powerful formula to mark the shift away from individuality and self-centredness. Moreover, it was the perfect slogan to promote the new social ideal and to integrate all the social movements under way—the social gospel movement preaching 'the social law of service', the settlement house movement

introducing 'the social function to democracy', and the Americanization movement favouring 'the new standards for patriotic citizenship' (O'Neill 1975, Cremin 1988, McGerr 2003).[12] Predictably, social efficiency became the rallying cry for those progressive educators who at the beginning of the 20th century tried to transform the school from an old-fashioned agency dispensing information and knowledge to an active and effective 'social centre'.

From its founding in 1892, the National Herbart Society was a forum in which all the current ideas and issues in education and schooling were discussed and disseminated. In an age when individualism, egotism, and cut-throat capitalism were vehemently criticized, the matter of social and moral education was firmly on its agenda. At the third annual meeting in 1897, John Dewey (1972a: 59) delivered a paper on 'Ethical principles underlying education' defined the 'good citizen' as 'efficient and serviceable', while Charles DeGarmo (1897: 55) in 'Social aspects of moral education' called for the creation of the 'synthetic man' whose intellectual power and capacity was matched by his 'practical efficiency'. Yet it was in 1898, at the height of Kidd's popularity in the US, that the term social efficiency appeared for the first time. James Seth of Cornell University, speaking on 'The relation of knowledge to will and conduct', attached the phrase to the kind of knowledge that had 'practical value' and 'significance' for character and life. 'The social estimate of education', Seth (1898: 7) said, 'is based upon the contribution which it makes to the social efficiency of the individual'. It took another year, however, before a young educational sociologist from the University of Chicago, Ira W. Howerth (1860–1938) elaborated the new concept at the Society's national meeting in Los Angeles in 1899.

Indeed, what the former student of Albion W. Small (1854–1926), Thorstein B. Veblen (1857–1929), and George E. Vincent (1864–1941) delivered in his paper 'The social aim in education' was a compassionate and far-reaching plea for 'social efficiency'. Referring especially to Kidd, Ward, and Dewey, Howerth (1899: 69) disagreed with the emphasis the educational philosophy of the 19th century had placed upon autonomy and freedom of the individual, and with fervour he endorsed 'modern education' as the proper effort to 'socialize' the child and to accomplish 'in addition to the maximum development of the physical and mental powers, the highest possible development of social good will, social intelligence and social habits'. Howerth wrote:

> Education has always been the attempt on the part of an external authority to develop individual personalities in the direction of a preconceived and variable good which always finds its explanation in terms of the educating power. Successful education therefore depends upon the clearness and correctness with which this good is perceived, and the availability and successful application of means for realizing it through the efficiency of the individual.—The social aim in education is the constant increase of social efficiency at such a rate as will produce the maximum development possible to the school period. (p. 69)

> Taking now up the question of relationship, it is hardly possible that anyone would seriously contend that the individual and the social aim in education are independent of each other. Social efficiency obviously implies attention to

> individual development, and *per contra* the development of the individual could not take place without some regard to social life. (p. 96)
>
> Luther, in Germany, John Knox, in Scotland, great men everywhere, illustrate the fact that individual completion and the highest possible social service are not necessarily concomitant. Social efficiency demands conformity of individual capacities and powers to a state of imperfection, to a division of labour determined by the stage of civilization. Like the cells of a biological organism, therefore, the individual must sacrifice his own completion to the needs of the whole. (p. 99)

For Howerth, social efficiency meant the ability and willingness of people to recognize their social responsibility and to fulfil their duties with respect to the individuals and institutions they were associated with. Like Ward and Dewey but contrary to Kidd, Howerth considered reason, not religion, and co-operation, not competition, of highest importance for human evolution. In fact, individuals acted rationally when they practised 'social solidarity' and rendered 'social service', although thereby subordinating their specific needs and interests to the general good of society; they knew that sympathy with and support of fellow-men would bring about its own 'satisfaction' and 'happiness'. '[T]he primary task of education', Howerth (1899: 107–108) proclaimed, 'is that of assisting nature in developing the social, and eliminating the unsocial impulses'. In the process of 'socialization', as well as in the process of schooling, external social control had to be transformed into rational self-control. For this reason, Howerth called for a profound reorganization of the school. The common school, he explained, should be restructured from a place of rote learning and recitation to an enterprise in which children were engaged in 'social actions' and in 'activities' that would generate 'social good will' and valuable 'social habits'. It was only by 'self-discipline' and 'social intelligence' that the chief aim of education: '*the constant increase of social efficiency*'—could be achieved (p. 95). With the same argument Hobson had used, Howerth rejected what he called Kidd's 'biological solution' of social progress: 'It regards quantity rather than quality. It is based upon a too narrow utilitarianism' (p. 103).

From that point on, the idea spread quickly.[13] William N. Hailmann, the distinguished Froebelian from the US Midwest, having pleaded all along from a distinct humanitarian point of view for 'life-efficiency' and 'all-sided efficiency' (Hailmann 1873, 1890, 1898), promptly considered social efficiency a vital element of progressive education. 'The old school', Hailmann (1899: 593) asserted in an address before the Elementary Department of the National Education Association:

> was satisfied with a certain degree of individual excellence in knowledge and skill; benevolence and social efficiency in life took care of themselves. The new school would actively direct all individual excellence into channels of benevolence and social efficiency.[14]

Hailmann developed his version of social efficiency in an (apparently) unpublished, nevertheless significant and noteworthy manuscript. 'With reference to this [mutual sympathy and helpfulness]', he wrote passionately in 'Culture and efficiency':

> all else—physical vigour, intellectual power, and moral strength—are but means which derive their value from their service in the attainment of the end. Benevolent social tendency on the pupil's part is the chief concern of education. Social efficiency in the outcome, much more than mere individual success, is the high criterion of every and all educational activity. (Hailmann n.d.: 11)

However, a more visible impact than Hailmann's address came from a paper in the *Teachers College Record* written by an inspiring, dynamic professor from New York City. Putting theory into practice, Charles R. Richards (1865–1936), head of the manual training department at Teachers College, Columbia University and early adherent of Dewey, transferred the new educational vision into the field of curriculum and instruction. 'The aim of education', Richards (1900: 249) wrote in 'The function of hand work in the school'—presenting the innovative and influential Horace Mann School curriculum for the study of industry and art—'may be stated in terms of our current philosophy as the development of social efficiency in the individual'. Like Dewey and Howerth, Richards believed that the school had to provide children with learning opportunities which would reconcile their drive for 'self-expression' to the common ideal of 'social service'. Mere book learning was not enough. Through carrying out 'projects' and 'social occupations', the students were supposed to use their intelligence and apply their knowledge in order to enhance personal culture and social progress.

> The real thing is to connect with life, to connect with healthy instincts that make for mental, moral, and physical growth in such a way that every step tends to strengthen the sense of self-fulfilment and the powers of social effectiveness. (p. 258)

It was not surprising, however, that Richards wrote so fluently about the subject because social efficiency in the broad, humanitarian sense was the ideal and standard the rising and ambitious Teachers College had adopted for its school and college curricula. All its senior faculty members: President Nicholas M. Butler (1900) and Dean James E. Russell (1900) as well as professors Alfred V. Churchill (1900), Frank M. McMurry (McMurry *et al.* 1902), and Henry C. Pearson (1903)—promoted the new concept. 'Educators are more than ever convinced', Churchill (1903: 12) said before the Eastern Art Teachers Association, 'that social efficiency is the true object of education, and the final criterion by which all subjects of the curriculum must be appraised'. Naturally, it did not take long before educators from outside Teachers College followed suit and integrated the phrase into their professional vocabulary.[15]

Yet, as Krug and Drost pointed out, there is another side to the story. At the same time as Charles Richards and his colleagues were introducing the new curricula at Teachers College, David S. Snedden, a young, unknown superintendent of schools at Paso Robles, CA, was speaking on 'social efficiency' from what he considered the 'utilitarian' point of view. In his address 'The schools of the rank and file' (Snedden 1900), inconspicuously published in the *Stanford Alumnus*, Snedden advanced the idea of engaging the school to prepare young people for life and work. State and community had not only to provide for liberal, but also, and specifically, for vocational education.

Without schooling in the trades, Snedden argued, industry, commerce, and progress were hampered. Only by developing 'the greatest degree of efficiency' at all levels of education would America be able to compete successfully in the world market: 'Training for life in the sense of securing this broad efficiency, individual and social, must, it seems to me become more and more a public charge' (p. 187). Snedden did not refer to Ross's paper on 'Social control' as Krug and his followers maintain, but to Kidd's book on *Social Evolution*. In fact, as a dedicated admirer of the British philosopher, Snedden (1900: 188) embraced the social Darwinist notion that 'in the long run of social progress society knows no law except its own fullest survival'. He also accepted the concept of equality of opportunity and supported Kidd's exclusive theory of democracy wherein elites were in control of politics and—legitimated by election and excellence—decided themselves all important governmental issues. Yet opposing Kidd, Snedden believed in co-operation, not in competition, as the necessary ingredient for a civilized society.

Snedden's call for specific vocational training and productive social efficiency was not listened to for a long time. Ironically, it took—above all—the help of Dewey's disciple Charles Richards from Teachers College in founding the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education in 1906 and in inviting Georg Kerschensteiner (1854–1932), the progressive educator and 'father of the modern system of occupational education' in Germany, to a lecture tour through the US in 1910, to make Snedden's concept known and get the movement for vocational education off the ground.[16] By that time, however, most educators could no longer remember the origin of the term social efficiency. An early example of 'pop sociology', Kidd's *Social Evolution* was forgotten as quickly as it had won fame.

William Bagley, David Snedden, and the high tide of social efficiency

Evidently, Bagley's (1905) book *The Educative Process* was a reflection of the on-going discussion and not, as Krug and his followers assume, the starting point for the social efficiency movement. Nonetheless, with its numerous reprints and the first concise treatment of the topic, it contributed significantly to the popularization of the concept.[17] What Bagley, at the time a professor of psychology and pedagogy at Montana State Normal College, Dillon, undertook in his chapter on educational aims was the task all his predecessors had abstained from, that is to define 'social efficiency' crisply and to characterize it persuasively as '*the ultimate end of education*' (p. 58). After a short discussion of 'Herbartian ethics' and the 'social essence of morality', Bagley concluded:

> Social efficiency, then, is the standard by which the forces of education must select the experiences that are to be impressed upon the individual. Every subject of instruction, every item of knowledge, every form of reaction, every detail of habit, must be measured by this yardstick. Not What pleasure will this bring to the individual, not In what manner will this contribute to his harmonious development, not What effect will this have upon his bread-winning capacity,—but always, Will this subject, or this knowledge, or this

> reaction, or this habit so function in his after-life that society will maximally profit?. (pp. 60–61)

The definition Bagley developed in his book resembled Howerth's concept in that it rendered the wants of the individual subservient to the needs of society; and it looked like Richards's concept in that it was as wide and inclusive as the one Teachers College had adopted for its school and college curricula. Besides the 'moral', the 'knowledge', the 'culture', and the 'harmonious development' aim, Bagley incorporated what he called the 'bread-and-butter' aim. 'No man', Bagley (1905: 64) said, 'would be socially efficient who was unable to earn his livelihood'. Bagley made it clear, however, that his idea of 'earning his livelihood' had nothing to do with Snedden's—or Kidd's—notion of utility. For him, as for Hailmann, Howerth, Richards, and their associates, social efficiency did not imply specific training or 'vocational efficiency', it rather meant commonality and character-building, hence embracing all essential features of a general and truly liberal education: moral integrity, self-support, and social service.

With Bagley's book, the debate intensified and 'social efficiency' became the catchphrase of the day.[18] Some educators differentiated 'individual efficiency'—at times still called 'personal culture'—and 'social efficiency', considering them, however, as correspondent and equivalent educational ends.[19] Others accepted Bagley's inclusive approach and maintained that the aim of the school 'should transcend mere academic training, accuracy, thoroughness, scholarship, and centre in practical social efficiency' (Call 1909: 10).[20] And nearly all educators were, most likely unknowingly, at odds with Kidd and Snedden but in deliberate accordance with Bagley and Albert B. Wolfe (1876–1967) (Wolf 1909: 60) of Oberlin College who asserted that 'social efficiency' should not be 'hauled ruthlessly into the helter-skelter stampede for industrial education'. Vocational efficiency, they argued, was an indispensable part of the socially efficient individual, but not the total of it.[21]

Although there existed general agreement with the new guiding principle, critique of its use arose gradually as well. Charles B. McLinn of New Albany, Indiana, for instance, pointed out that social education was in danger of taking the wrong direction. In order to further 'social efficiency', McLinn reported in a paper for the *Journal of Education*, some high schools had employed a 'social director' to plan and manage the social affairs of the school—a practice he strongly disapproved of. 'The holiday pleasures of a picnic or dance do not touch the serious side of the matter', McLinn (1911: 345) insisted:

> These forms of amusement develop social interest, the desire for contact and intercourse; they teach social conventions; they may indeed divert from secret societies, but they do not touch the all important matter of developing the boy and girl into capable and efficient members of society, strong in initiative, willing in co-operation, ready in resource.

Another critique, put forward by the educational philosopher William C. Ruediger (1874–1947) of George Washington University, focused more on the theoretical than the practical aspect of the problem. In his book *The Principles of Education*, Ruediger challenged Bagley's—and incidentally,

Dewey's—position to establish 'social efficiency' as the primary end of education. '[T]he social aim is but a partial statement of the aim of education', asserted Ruediger (1910: 60–61):

> In actual life the individual is not subordinated to society to the extent that is implied by Bagley. Man [*sic*] indulges his taste in music, art, literature, philosophy, and even science, largely for his own immediate enjoyment, without any thought of social benefit, and it is conceivable that such benefit might not ensue.

'[F]rom the human point of view', he added, 'society exists for the individual, and not the individual for society, for it is the individual that really lives and experiences, and not the group'. Unlike Ruediger, Superintendent James H. Harris of Dubuque, Iowa, took issue not with the first but with the second component of the slogan. '[E]fficiency as an educational aim', Harris (1916: 148) wrote in the *Ohio Educational Monthly*, 'tends to overemphasize action; it tends to exaggerate the motor side of life—the making or doing something. It tends to ignore, if not directly to condemn, the reflective and contemplative side of life'. '[T]o exalt it to the rank of a philosophy of education [was] to do violence alike to common sense, to intelligence, and to the nobler purposes of education' (p. 149). A much milder objection was raised by the educational sociologist Charles A. Ellwood (1873–1946) from the University of Missouri. 'I prefer the phrase "social service" to "social efficiency" in stating the aim of education', Ellwood (1911: 138) declared in a perceptive paper on 'The sociological basis of the science of education', 'because "social service" indicates more clearly that the aim is outside of the individual, that is in the life of the group or rather of humanity'.

About 20 years after the publication of *Social Evolution*, the discussion about Kidd's creative phrase reached its flood tide. Laura H. Wild, a professor at Lake Erie College, Ohio, presented a series of 17 papers about 'Training for social efficiency' (Wild 1911) in the journal *Education*; Irving King from the University of Chicago followed with a bulky first book on *Education for Social Efficiency* (King 1913); Frederick G. Bonser (1875–1931) and his colleagues of Teachers College, Columbia University, published the widely applauded social-efficiency-based *Speyer School Curriculum* (Speyer School 1913); and in the year Dewey's (1980a) *Democracy and Education* came out, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (1916: 9) made nationally known through its report on *The Social Studies* that 'the keynote of modern education is "social efficiency", and instruction in all subjects should contribute to this end'.[22]

As people know from experience, conventional wisdom does not always correspond with historical evidence. In the present context, however, this truism is valid more often than is usually the case. Frederick W. Taylor's bestseller *The Principles of Scientific Management*, for example, which appeared in 1911 and inspired school administrators and curriculum theorists to economize the educational system and maximize the educational output had—because of its late arrival and different purpose and contrary to the assumptions of today's historians[23]—no identifiable influence on the discourse about the end of education and the social mission of the school. Similarly, Edward L. Thorndike's numerous papers and books on

educational psychology which had been published since the beginning of the 20th century and focussed on the laws of learning and the measurement of mental processes[24]—because of their statistical basis and empirical foundation—had neither direct nor indirect impact on the definition of educational goals. Finally, there were only a few who concurred with David S. Snedden's utilitarian concept of social efficiency as the main road to competency, prosperity and social progress[25], a fact always genially ignored, yet not really surprising because Snedden, like Bobbitt and Charters,[26] too, used the phrase very sparingly; indeed, he wrote about it extensively only in his magnum opus *Educational Sociology* (1922),[27] i.e. six years after Dewey had presented his view of social efficiency in *Democracy and Education*. At the height of the discussion, however, and in a famous exchange with Bagley before the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association about the 'Fundamental distinctions between liberal and vocational education', Snedden (1914: 153, 158) rejected the postulation of today's historians explicitly and effectively dismissed social efficiency as a general aim of education because it was in his opinion 'shrouded in the clouds of mysticism' and, paradoxically, could not stand 'the test of efficiency'. 'Social efficiency', Snedden (1914: 158) said, was—like 'culture' and 'mental discipline'—'too vague, intangible, and unrelated to the means actually employed in education to be of value in scientific analysis of educational means and methods'.[28]

John Dewey and the definitive meaning of social efficiency

Of course, the grand star of US philosophy and education, John Dewey, by then a professor at Columbia University, New York, could not be counted among the utilitarians, vocationalists, or scientific managers when he raised his voice and made, in 1911, his first statement on social efficiency.[29] Contributing the key entry to Paul Monroe's monumental *Cyclopedia of Education* (Monroe 1911–1913), Dewey turned at the end of his paper on 'Education' to the various aims philosophers and pedagogues had devised during the 19th century. Like Bagley, he came up with a list, but somewhat differently. Dewey (1978: 432) spoke of 'harmonious and complete development' of the individual and singled out several 'social definitions' which he specified as 'patriotic citizenship', 'philanthropic spirit', and 'industrially efficient service'. Then, Dewey referred to the current situation:

> At the present time, 'social efficiency' is probably the favoured phrase. Social efficiency may, however, be taken in a narrow and external way, or in a broader and more liberal sense. In the former, social efficiency is supposed to be measured on the basis of definite output of overt acts and external products, with little attention to their reaction into the individual's appreciation of the meaning of these acts and commodities. To be doing something is set over against the enrichment of consciousness at the expense of the latter. In the truer and more generous sense, social efficiency means also increase of ability to share in the appreciation and enjoyment of all values of social intercourse, and thus necessarily includes the enriching of conscious experience. (p. 432)

It was only natural that Dewey adhered to the then dominant opinion and pronounced social efficiency the chief aim of education—he had read Kidd's book and studied Ward's work, and, after all, as author of 'My pedagogic creed' (Dewey 1972b), 'Ethical principles underlying education' (Dewey 1972a), and particularly *School and Society* (Dewey 1976), had laboured more than anyone else to shift the emphasis of the educational discourse from 'individualization' and individual achievement to 'socialization' and social learning. Nonetheless, Dewey expressed reservations about the way some of his contemporaries dealt with the subject. As always, he did it indirectly and tactfully. Distinguishing between a desirable and an undesirable definition, Dewey in effect opposed the 'narrow' approach Kidd and Snedden had advanced and shared the critique Hobson, Ward, and Howerth had levelled against the 'quantitative' and 'utilitarian' interpretation of the phrase. Similar to Charles McLinn and James Harris, he insisted that simple pleasures, trivial actions, and external products were educationally barren and useless. Only if the coursework or the assignments and projects which had to be carried out made sense to the pupils and involved 'intelligent effort' and 'social intercourse' were they worthwhile, enriching the lives and experiences of the children. Social efficiency, Dewey could have said, is not the result of 'learning by doing', as the proverb runs, but the outcome of reflective doing in a wholesome social environment.

Five years later, Dewey dealt a second time with the matter. In a crucial chapter of his principal pedagogic work *Democracy and Education* (Dewey 1980a: 118–130) entitled 'Natural development and social efficiency', Dewey went beyond the prevailing view and formulated a differentiated conception. Instead of calling 'social efficiency' straightaway, as before, the main and final end of growth and progress, he considered it now as one of three basic educational aims—with 'natural development' and 'culture' the other two. While 'natural development' signified the use of the inborn powers of the child and while 'culture' indicated the personal—intellectual and moral—accomplishments of the individual, 'social efficiency' meant the constructive use and direction of innate capacities and acquired competences in social situations. In Dewey's (1980a) words:

> [T]he value in the idea of social efficiency resides largely in its protest against the points at which the doctrine of natural development went astray; while its misuse comes when it is employed to slur over the truth in that conception. It is a fact that we must look to the activities and achievements of associated life to find what the development of power—that is to say, efficiency—means. The error is in implying that we must adopt measures of subordination rather than of utilization to secure efficiency. The doctrine is rendered adequate when we recognize that social efficiency is attained not by negative restraint but by positive use of native individual capacities in occupations having a social meaning. (p. 125)

> In the broadest sense, social efficiency is nothing less than that socializing of *mind* which is actively concerned in making experiences more communicable, in breaking down the barriers of social stratification which make individuals impervious to the interests of others. When social efficiency is confined to the

> service rendered by overt acts, its chief constituent (because its only guarantee) is omitted,—intelligent sympathy or good will. (p. 127)
>
> The fact is that the opposition of high worth of personality to social efficiency is a product of a feudally organized society with its rigid division of inferior and superior. The latter are supposed to have time and opportunity to develop themselves as human beings; the former are confined to providing external products. When social efficiency as measured by product or output as an ideal in a would-be democratic society, it means that the depreciatory estimate of the masses characteristic of an aristocratic community is accepted and carried over. But if democracy has a moral and ideal meaning, it is that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all. The separation of the two aims in education is fatal to democracy; the adoption of the narrower meaning of efficiency deprives it of its essential justification. (pp. 128–129)

What Dewey presented in *Democracy and Education* (Dewey 1980a) was new and unique in some ways. Unlike his predecessors, Dewey did not proclaim an educational end that was considered as the only and ultimate one, and more importantly, he did not depict educational aims as fixed and isolated entities, but as parts of a complex system consisting primarily of three interconnected elements. Thus a modification of one element would lead to conflicts with the others. Dewey (1980a: 127–129) reasoned that when 'culture', for example, was taken in the narrow sense and regarded merely as 'polish', 'refinement', or 'inner personality', the goal of 'social efficiency' in the broad sense could not be achieved since the children would neither acquire nor develop 'intelligent sympathy', 'good will', 'social service', and other essential features of benevolent communal living. Actually, Dewey's scheme constituted what might be called a 'magic triangle'. The 'magic' to be accomplished was that all three elements had to be thought of and carried out at the same time, or else education fell short of its real and ideal meaning. Nevertheless, Dewey left no room for doubt that among the three educational aims 'social efficiency' was the principal one and had to have its place, so to say, at the top of the triangle. 'Natural development' and 'personal culture' were worth little, he argued, if they promoted selfishness and self-perfection or hampered social intercourse and social learning.

For Dewey, social efficiency as an educational aim had two aspects, a political and an economic one. The economic aspect referred to 'industrial competency' and implied that all children should be taught to earn their own living and to use beneficially and constructively the material resources they had attained. Knowledge of industrial facts and skills, Dewey insisted, had nothing to do with fitting the child in advance for definite occupations. On the contrary, Dewey (1980a: 126) believed that the native capabilities of children should be methodically trained and extended so that they, the children, were able to take part in communal activities without being hindered by the social status of their parents or a narrow utilitarian education which would perpetuate 'unfair privilege' and 'unfair deprivation'. Referring to the second, political aspect of social efficiency, he invoked 'civic' competency and proclaimed that all children should learn to become

agreeable companions and competent participants in politics and social affairs. Moreover, they should be stimulated to contribute to the welfare and happiness of the social group in which they lived; and in this context they should learn how to advance science, how to produce and enjoy art, and how to engage in valuable social and recreational activities.

In other words, taken together with 'culture' and 'natural development', Dewey's concept of social efficiency aimed at the development of the whole child or, as Herbert Spencer used to say, at the preparation for 'complete living'. However, unlike Spencer and most of his contemporaries, who assumed an antagonistic conflict between the interests of the child and the needs of society, Dewey was sure that there was no submission or sacrifice necessary because the dualism of individual and society, of personal culture and social efficiency, could be healed through the 'utilization', instead of the subordination, of the wants and interests of children. The school, he maintained, would educate best by initiating 'active occupations' which co-ordinated theory and practice, individual and social ends. Like Ward, Dewey (1980b: 119) viewed efficiency as a 'servant of freedom' and laid emphasis on the democratic purpose of education; and like Kidd, he stressed that education should not only train for 'social sympathy' and 'good citizenship', it also had to further equal opportunity, social democracy, and human progress.

On the other hand, Dewey favoured—in school and society—co-operation and communality, therefore ardently opposing Kidd's notion of competition and Snedden's theory of elitism and specialization. For him, as for Ward, democracy was a way of life with social interaction, mutual aid, and political participation of the common man and woman as its key elements:

> [U]ltimately social efficiency means neither more nor less than capacity to share in give and take of experience. It covers all that makes one's own experience more worthwhile to others, and all that enables one to participate more richly in the worthwhile experience of others. (Dewey 1980a: 127)

It was a long but steady way from Kidd's *Social Evolution* to Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. Just as Ward had settled the matter in sociology, it was Dewey who gave social efficiency its definite meaning in education. Subsequently, there was no paper or book that added anything really new to the state of affairs.[30] In the mid-1920s, the term was gradually relegated to the background because it seemed in a way outmoded as a general pedagogic aim—although indispensable—and not easily applicable to the practical matters of education and instruction; yet during the socio-economic crisis of the 1930s the term had a short revival. In a philosophical paper about 'Social efficiency and education', Michael J. Demiashkevich (1891–1938), an enthusiastic supporter of William Bagley's essentialist movement and a fierce critic of George Counts's call for a 'new social order', admonished the teachers of the day not to indoctrinate their students with the intention of transforming the social system but to educate them with the purpose of controlling and restricting their selfishness and egoism. 'To help to increase these hours, when—to paraphrase Hobbes—man is not a wolf but a man to another man is the supreme contribution to social efficiency of which the school is capable' (Demiashkevich 1933: 7).

Social efficiency, democracy, and empowerment

How people determine the end of education changes from age to age as civilization proceeds and people move ahead. At the beginning of the 20th century, no educational end seemed so much in harmony with the needs and highest ideals of the time as that of social efficiency. It was an aim that was not only advocated by the members of the so-called 'social efficiency interest group', as historians of today assume; it was supported by a broad coalition of US educators to cope with the disturbing consequences of individualism, industrialization, immigration, and social stratification. As Krug accurately observed, social efficiency covered all aspects of socialization from social control to social service; and it united both conservatives and progressives, including—to use convenient labels—vocationalists and scientific management enthusiasts as well as essentialists, Deweyites, and social reformers. Even child-centred developmentalists who, like the traditional classicists, had no natural place in that powerful coalition occasionally employed the term. William H. Kilpatrick (1916: 93), for instance, the propagator of the child-centred project method, professed in *Froebel's Kindergarten Principles Critically Examined* his allegiance to 'social efficiency'.

Social efficiency, however, was not a unified, homogeneous concept. At the apex of the movement, radical verdicts and suggestions popped up. The editor of *The Independent* wrote in 1911:

> By 'social efficiency' we do not mean anything so idealistic as 'social service' in the ethical sense, or philanthropy, or theoretical justice. We mean a practical social efficiency that is measurable in hard cash, a social efficiency that spells dividends to stockholders. (Editor 1911: 1103–1104)

Such a tough and materialistic definition was the exception to the rule, and the softer utilitarian concept did not fare much better. Contrary to today's conventional wisdom, Kliebard's 'social efficiency interest group' with David Snedden as its front-man represented just one wing, and not the most important one, of the movement. In fact, the vast majority of US educators shared the broad, humanitarian interpretation expounded by John Dewey.[31] Even Franklin Bobbitt (1918: 87), an advocate of Snedden's utilitarianism and Taylor's scientific management, paid tribute in his major work *The Curriculum* to the 'humanistic view' of efficiency, emphasizing that 'Efficient management of the *social factors* is as vital as technical efficiency. The economic mechanism is to be operated by society in general for the sake of maximum human service.'

Apparently, Dewey and most of his contemporaries chose Kidd's terminology—but not its substance—because they thought 'social efficiency' the best expression for all the ideals they aimed at in education—communication and participation, interaction and co-operation, social intelligence and social service. It is really odd: Dewey, who wrote extensively and succinctly about the term, is not mentioned in the relevant chapters of recent educational histories; but Snedden, Bobbitt, and Charters, who dealt with social efficiency just in passing, who criticized the term at times vigorously, and who represented anyway only a minority opinion, stand at centre-stage and appear as the heroes, or more exactly, the villains of the play. The motive for this

confusion of facts is not difficult to understand: because John Dewey, the icon of progressive education, should not be disgraced and associated with such a narrow and biased concept as social efficiency, leading historians of US education to present a selective and one-sided view of the past—in fact, they play 'Hamlet' with Hamlet left out.[32]

No doubt, efficiency—or social efficiency—was a term beset with disparate connotations.[33] 'It is evident', wrote Hobson (1902: 187–188) in his critique of Kidd's *Social Evolution*, 'that there are many kinds of social efficiency'; thus it could mean, for example, 'the fighting capacity in war and trade' as well as the 'qualities which go to make a good society' (p. 156). The ambiguity of the term was the main reason why the early proponents of social efficiency stated very carefully what they had in mind when they employed Kidd's imaginative phrase. Ward, Howerth, Bagley, Dewey did it, as did Charles W. Eliot, the legendary President of Harvard, who concluded a paper on 'Education for efficiency' with a word of warning: 'Education for efficiency must not be materialistic, prosaic, or utilitarian; it must be idealistic, humane, and passionate, or it will not win its goal' (Eliot 1904: 113).[34]

Today, the perception is different. Distinguished historians of education regard efficiency as irreconcilable with freedom, participation, and equal opportunity. In essence, they consider it as inhumane and as a technocratic device to impede change, reform, and social progress.[35] Yet efficiency, or social efficiency, is not *per se* anti-democratic, anti-liberal, anti-humanistic, or anti-social. On the contrary, for most educators of the progressive era, efficiency was the prerequisite for the realization of the 'common good', the 'just society', and the 'worthy life'. As Herman H. Horne (1906), the educational philosopher and renowned interpreter of Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, pointed out long ago: 'Efficiency is an indispensable word in any system of universal education … and [an essential ideal] in all democratic, progressive, and free societies' (p. 34). The belief in the need of 'democratic efficiency' was reinforced a generation later by the Educational Policies Commission (1940) in its report on *Learning the Ways of Democracy*: 'Democracy is not only compatible with efficiency but is the only type of human association in which highest efficiency is possible' (p. 26). John Dewey represented the mainstream when he understood social efficiency not just as a barrier against rugged individualism and ruthless capitalism but also as a crucial aid for the attainment of social welfare and democratic growth. Indeed, for Dewey (1980a: 126, 130) and most of his contemporaries, the term did not imply something negative like 'social engineering' and fitting the child into the new industrial order; it rather meant 'social empowerment' and the capability of the child to solve problems and put insights into effect. George Vincent (1902: 287–288), Dewey's colleague from the University of Chicago, shared this view in a remarkable talk about 'Efficiency and education' at Chautauqua, NY:

> There is a certain strut about the word, efficiency. It seems to describe only strong men doing great things. Yet it carries a general idea, the ability to meet situations, to solve problems whatever they may be. Efficiency is problem-solving, adequacy. There is need of efficient persons in a world of problems.

In this essay, I offer a case study of how an educational term came about and how historians constructed and reconstructed its origin and meaning. Krug's discovery that social efficiency was a major topic in the progressive era deserves the praise and admiration it has received. On the other hand, Krug (1964: 255, 431) was very hesitant to put Dewey among the proponents of social efficiency. In fact, he never quoted a positive statement of Dewey on the subject and never mentioned the central place the term occupied in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. Krug's reluctance initiated and hastened a process that carried his students and followers far away. Actually, Drost (1967), Spring (1972), Kliebard (1986), Tozer *et al.* (1998), Labaree (2005), and others accentuated the negative connotations of the term and—stimulated by studies of Callahan (1962) and Haber (1964) and motivated by their own agenda to identify practices that furthered or hampered social progress as they understood it—successively painted a new, yet distorted picture of the past. In particular, they revised the historical facts in three respects: first, they construed relations that originally did not exist but looked evident to them (e.g. inclusion of Taylor's scientific management and Thorndike's mental measurement); secondly, they cut off relations that initially existed but seemed from their point of view out of place (exclusion of Dewey's humanitarian approach); and thirdly, they brought relations to the fore that were in reality of minor importance but coincided with their own attitudes and prejudices (e.g. elevation of Snedden's utilitarian approach and Ross' theory of social control). This technique of dealing with the past could be called 'creative writing' of history because Krug's followers correlated or eliminated historical notions and concepts imaginatively without really minding that these concepts had different roots, served different purposes, covered different areas of application, and were strictly kept apart by contemporary educators.

Aside from the method of writing, I want to point to a second—general—shortcoming of historical studies in the educational field. Among historians of education in the USA—but in Europe as well—there exists a widespread diffidence to look beyond the spire and explore territories that transcend national boundaries. No doubt, many historical papers and books have an international perspective and examine the impact of foreign ideas upon specific issues and institutions. Think, for instance, of the numerous studies that analyse the effect Dewey had on educational philosophy and procedure in Europe,[36] or the ones that illustrate the Herbartian influence on curriculum and instruction in the US and elsewhere.[37] Nevertheless, it is not yet standard to cross national boundaries when seemingly indigenous topics are concerned. However, experience shows that it often pays to search for foreign precedents in those incidents as well. The project method with its roots in 18th-century France and the continuation school with its beginnings in 19th-century Germany[38] are points in case, as is this essay which reveals that the term social efficiency did not emerge as a product of economic and scientific theory in the US, as generally assumed, but as a product of philosophical and sociological thought in the UK. It is indeed my conviction that historical research does not generate valid results as long as the international—and by the way, the interdisciplinary—context is not being explored and, if helpful, taken into account.

Acknowledgements

The material for this paper was gathered in connection with a project on Georg Kerschensteiner and the Vocational Education Movement in the US, generously supported by a grant from the Swiss National Foundation, Bern. The staff of Special Collections of the University of Chicago and of the University of California, Los Angeles provided invaluable assistance with information not otherwise available, as in particular did David Ment and Bette Weneck of Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. Special thanks also go to an anonymous reviewer for his helpful comments and editorial suggestions, and to Craig Kridel for his ability to create at the University of South Carolina's Museum of Education an atmosphere which stimulates friendship and thought.

Notes

1. See, e.g. Brennan (1975), Hays (1959), Kanigel (1997) and Schiesl (1977). The rhetoric of efficiency did not miss out anyone and, indeed, showed up in the 'most unexpected' quarters. Even poets and novelists like Henry James, Ezra Pound, and Dorothy Richardson proclaimed their belief in 'precision and compression' and identified themselves with the 'elimination of waste' and the 'economy of words'. See Raitt (2006).
2. Two years later, O'Shea (1906) actually wrote a short paper on 'Notes on education for social efficiency', oddly enough, however, without ever trying to define or to delineate the term.
3. See, e.g. Bergen (1981), Beyer (1982), Luetkemeyer (1987), Spring (1986), and Stevens (1972).
4. See, e.g. Franklin (1986), Hogan (1986), and Wrigley (1982).
5. See, e.g. Kliebard (1999), Labaree (2005), Ravitch (2000), Tozer *et al.* (1998), and Wirth (1972). There are some historians who do not follow the conventional line of interpretation. See Veysey (1965), Johanningmeier (1980), Tanner and Tanner (1990), and, most recently, Null (2004).
6. Apart from Crook's (1984) biography on Kidd, I recommend as introductory texts for social Darwinism and New Liberalism the studies of Hofstadter (1955), Bannister (1979), and Freeden (1978). As far as I know, only one educational historian (Connell 1980) has discussed the concept of social efficiency in the context of social Darwinism.
7. For a critical reading of Kidd's concept of 'equality of opportunity', see, e.g. Sprague (1895).
8. Roosevelt employed the term 'social efficiency' on many occasions. See, e.g. Roosevelt (1902, 1909). In this context, see Spring (1968).
9. Ward had already commented on Kidd's book in 1894; see Crook (1984: 85). Tanner and Tanner (1990) are probably the first and the only ones who have considered Ward in the context of social efficiency.
10. See, e.g. Parker (1894), Runkle (1878), and Woodward (1882).
11. For Hailmann, as for Clifford (1875) and Punnett (1881), the concept of efficiency was from the start intimately linked to social intercourse and social learning. '[T]he young human being', Hailmann (1872: 144) explained, 'is taught from the very beginning that all its surroundings are, similar to itself, both part and whole, and that it can increase its own efficiency for usefulness and happiness by uniting with others'. Speaking of 'happiness' and 'usefulness', Hailmann did not refer, however, to Spencer and Bentham but to Froebel and Pestalozzi. For another source of the concept of efficiency in education, see Cremin (1961: 192).
12. In a notable paper, Rodgers identifies 'social efficiency' as one of three languages of discontent during the era of progressivism—the rhetoric of 'antimonopolism' and of 'social bonds' the other two. As Rodgers (1982: 126) tries to explain its success,

> The language of social efficiency offered a way of putting the progressives' common sense of social disorder into words and remedies free of the embarrassing pieties and philosophical conundrums that hovered around the competing language of social bonds. … clearly it was the merger of the prestige of science with the prestige of the well-organized business firm and factory that gave the metaphor of system its tremendous twentieth-century potency.

This interpretation sounds plausible but does not hit the point as far as the field of education is concerned. See also O'Neill (1975).

13. See Hall (1899) and Major (1899).
14. It may be mentioned that about 30 years later Rugg and Shumaker (1928: 62–63) described the dissimilarities of the old and the new education quite differently:

> The spirit of the old school was centred about social adjustment, adaptation to the existing order. The aim of conventional education was social efficiency. Growth was seen as increasing power to conform, to acquiesce to a schooled discipline; maturity was viewed from the standpoint of successful compliance with social demands. In the new school, however, it is the creative spirit from within that is encouraged, rather than conformity to a pattern imposed from without.

It could be that the educational historians of today are influenced by this interpretation; like Rugg and Shumaker, they ignore the empirical evidence and a variety of important historical facts.

15. See Bawden (1904), Coe (1903), DeGarmo (1901), Hall (1902), Horne (1904), and Thwing (1901).
16. See Knoll (1993).
17. See Null (2003).
18. See Cubberley (1909), DeGarmo (1908), Gilbert (1905), Gowen (1908), MacVannel (1912), Mann (1910), O'Shea (1906), and Small (1914).
19. See Bennett (1911), Maxwell (1905), and Suzallo (1909).
20. See Betts (1912), Litchfield (1908), and Patterson (1909).
21. See Bonser (1908), Butler (1906), Hanus (1913), Monroe (1913), and Noyes (1908).
22. This sentence is often quoted but, as I think, habitually misunderstood because it does not refer to Snedden's narrow, utilitarian concept but to Bagley's broad, liberal interpretation of social efficiency; see Kliebard (2002).
23. See, e.g. Kliebard (1986) and Spring (1972); Veysey (1965) is a notable exception.
24. See, e.g. Franklin (1986), and Kliebard (1986); Clifford (1984) is a notable exception.
25. See Davenport (1909) and Dean (1915).
26. Whereas Charters (1923: 5, 41) in his main work *Curriculum Construction* accepted 'social efficiency' as one of several educational ideals, Bobbitt (1918: 41) used the term in his landmark book *The Curriculum* only once, and then even without much sympathy.
27. See Null (2004).
28. Bagley (1914: 162) answered Snedden's charge with these words: 'Because "social efficiency", for example, or "adaptability", or "morality" are so broad as to make analysis difficult, it does not follow that they are unimportant or that we can replace them by narrower aims'. For a perceptive comparison of Bagley's and Snedden's concept of social efficiency, see Null (2003).
29. Horne (1932), Peterson (1987), Null (2004), and Hackman (2006) belong to the few educators and philosophers who pay attention to Dewey's concept of social efficiency.
30. See Bonser (1920), Charters (1923), Coursault (1920), Cubberley (1933), Cummins (1920), Meriam (1920), Rugg and Shumaker (1928), Sears (1928), and Snedden (1922). Since the appearance of Krug's (1964) book there has been an exhaustive debate about the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education's (1918) report *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* and its chairman's (Clarence D. Kingsley's) affiliation to the social efficiency interest group. See, most recently, Herbst (1996), Wraga (1993, 2001), and Kliebard (2002). I want to point out that in his report Kingsley used the terms 'efficiency' and 'vocational efficiency' several times, but he did not once use the phrase 'social efficiency'. This is the reason why I do not discuss the case here. It is my contention, however, that Kingsley was—despite his close personal relationship to Snedden—a proponent of the liberal and not of the utilitarian concept of education.

31. See Null (2004).
32. See, e.g. Franklin (1986), Kliebard (1986), and Ravitch (2000).
33. See, e.g. LeFeber and Vietorisz (2001), Slichter (1937: 437–439) and Haber (1964: ix–x).
34. Contrary to this quotation, Charles Eliot is often considered an adherent of Snedden's utilitarian concept of social efficiency. See, e.g. Ravitch (2000) and Tozer *et al.* (1998).
35. See, e.g. Kliebard (1999), Reese (1986), and Wirth (1972).
36. See, e.g. Oelkers and Rhyn (2000).
37. See, e.g. Coriand and Winkler (1998).
38. See, e.g. Knoll (1993, 1997).

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