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VanOverbeke, Marc A. (2008). *The Standardization of American Schooling: Linking Secondary and Higher Education, 1870-1910*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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In America at the turn of the 20th century, the absence of central educative authority meant that education was shaped by numerous divergent forces. Little to no federal and state control of schools meant widespread institutional fragmentation. College admissions practices, for example, were not uniform, as institutions varied widely in their judgment of the value of high school curriculum, certificates (i.e., high school diplomas) and type of college entrance examinations. Secondary education generally complained that their graduates did not qualify for more colleges and universities.

Marc VanOverbeke's *The Standardization of American Schooling* highlights this fragmentation and the emergence of a conjoining relationship between high schools and colleges

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and universities during an era when Americans increasingly expected higher education to prepare future leaders of industry, government, and business. In this environment, according to VanOverbeke, secondary education did not simply bow, scrape, and yield to the demands of higher education. Instead secondary education advocated its position, staking out a place that higher education was obligated to acknowledge. Consequently, with the assistance of energetic reformers and dynamic institutions and associations, secondary education played a key part in carving out its own future. It still took a back seat to higher education, but not without active debate and sometimes substantial compromise.

The book focuses primarily on educational changes in the Midwest, New England, Mid Atlantic, and the South and flows chronologically through the time period discussed. In chapter one, the author provides an explanation of societal factors that led to an increased focus on higher education and the need for better articulation between secondary schools and colleges. VanOverbeke identifies a major turning point toward reform of the relationship between secondary and higher education in the call by James McCosh in 1873 (at the National Education Association meeting) for improved secondary schools that prepared students for the university.

Chapters two and three are not entirely about the University of Michigan as might be suspected by their titles but other communities and institutions are discussed. These chapters follow the rise and spread of high school accreditation programs (as initially developed by James B. Angell), which created a hierarchical structure that VanOverbeke claims actually led to mutual strengthening of high schools and universities.

Chapter four explains that though high schools may have benefitted from their relationship with colleges and universities, they were hard pressed to fill their dual purpose: to prepare students for life and for higher education. Between 1870 and 1890, universities encouraged high schools to focus on preparation for the university but high

schools refused to completely give up their long time role as a training ground for life and citizenship. According to VanOverbeke, one Springfield, Missouri superintendent contended that “The high school is really the poor man’s college” expressing no desire to cater to the demands of colleges (p. 98). High schools successfully advocated for colleges to see the value in secondary school curriculum that embraced teaching modern subjects (e.g. French as opposed to Greek), ultimately encouraging college admissibility. Although the debate between higher and secondary education continued, VanOverbeke suggests that this period saw great improvement in articulation of curriculum for both secondary and higher education.

In chapter five, the author shows Charles W. Eliot leading the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies that marked a shift toward nationalizing educational reform. VanOverbeke argues here that the Committee of Ten was not the first group of reformers to advocate that the professional educator should control American schools, claiming that states and regions had argued for this previously, such as the Michigan inspection and accreditation program. Nonetheless, the Committee of Ten differed in scale and duteous recommendations for course subject content, unlike Michigan’s inspection program.

Though the success of this committee was marginal at best, it paved the way for further reform work that, as VanOverbeke claims, helped solidify high schools as the gateway to higher education. The story moves into the twentieth century in chapter six, which explains the work of several reformers and committees that worked at both national and regional levels. Of special note are discussions on Nicolas Murray Butler, who was instrumental in creating the College Entrance Examination, and Henry S. Pritchett of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that encouraged clarity in defining universities, and led to stronger educational relationships.

VanOverbeke does not include a conclusion, but one might re-read parts II and III of the introduction and the end of the epilogue for a recapitulation of the major arguments and

contributions of this book. A few pictures, diagrams, or flowcharts (to show connections among people or institutions) would have added to the visual appeal of the monograph. Some of the narrative appears repetitive but this is largely due to the many entities participating in similar reform movements over the chronological progression of the book.

Though ample histories discuss the restructuring of secondary and higher education during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a time when significant social changes perplexed American society, VanOverbeke maintains that scholars have referenced these changes from either the perspective of the high school or the university, but have not adequately recognized the relationship between the two. His book is an attempt to fill this void and provides an insightful view into the development of the articulation between institutions of secondary and higher education at the turn of the 20th century.

While *The Standardization of American Schooling* meticulously illustrates articulation in selected regions of the United States, it seems to lack a national or representative discussion from other geographic areas. Though VanOverbeke readily admits he makes only “a few stops in the Rocky Mountain West and along the Pacific Coast,” for example, this leaves the reader longing for additional geographic representation (p. 4). In this way, perhaps, the author seems to suggest future areas of research.

The Standardization of American Schooling is most appropriate for those who already have substantial knowledge on the history of American education. Nevertheless, VanOverbeke includes useful descriptions of reformers and committees that help the general reader appreciate the substance and importance of the material. Further, the author relies on extensive primary source research, including school catalogues, letters, proceedings, and reports from university presidents, regents, committees, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to name a few.

On the whole, VanOverbeke deftly weaves a convincing narrative on the dynamic relationship between secondary and higher education that questions stereotypes of both real and imagined boundaries. Clearly, secondary education surfaces as a major competitor. Not only does this book provide valuable context that teases out the roots of divergence in college admissions, but the larger story highlights the developing relationship among eclectic educational professionals who debate pressing issues. Secondary education asserted itself and, in fact, played a large part in reinforcing its own institutional structure. Here is an example where dialogue, although frequently challenging, infuriating, and sometimes debilitating, ultimately provided a path for increased unanimity for both higher and secondary levels. VanOverbeke's book, as he aptly claims, is a story of success where reformers persistently carried out greater articulation that is more easily appreciated in hindsight. This book demonstrates the value of careful historical research that sheds light on a crucial period in the development of American education.

About the Reviewer

Benjamin A. Johnson is a Ph.D. candidate in the history and philosophy of education at Ohio State University. His research interests include the history of ideas, educational philanthropy, and comparative education.

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