

**Examining the Educational Film Work of Alice Keliher and the
Human Relations Series of Films and
Mark A. May and the Secrets of Success Program**

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Educational film from the 1930s and 1940s is currently receiving great attention in the fields of cinema studies and history of education. The Orphan Film Symposium, the leading research forum for the exploration of all films outside the commercial mainstream, featured education as a theme at its 2006 event, and an increasing number of visual pedagogy and educational film sessions have been scheduled at recent and forthcoming meetings of the American Educational Research Association, History of Education Society, Association of Moving Image Archivists, and the International Standing Conference for the History of Education. The journal *Film & History* published an issue in 2009 devoted to ascertaining the historical significance of the depiction of schools in film, and in 2010 the first collection of essays devoted exclusively to the history of educational film, *Learning with the Lights Off*, will be released.[1]

My 2008 Rockefeller Archive Center residency was devoted to examining General Education Board-sponsored theatrical and non-commercial educational film from the 1930s and, specifically, exploring a “mystery”— the relationship between the work of Alice Keliher and the Human Relations Series of Films and Mark May and the Secrets of Success program. Contemporary scholarship has combined these two film projects as the Progressive Education Association’s Secrets of Success program; however, my prior research on progressive education suggested that fundamental beliefs between the two programs (as well as between these two academics) were markedly different.

I could not quite understand how the Human Relations Series of Films, a component of one of the more radical educational experiments of the 20th century, could be merged with Secrets of Success (Success Series), a character education program developed by a group of ministers. I wondered how the Human Relations Series, sponsored by the Progressive Education Association (PEA), a liberal organization known for its socialist orientations, could become aligned with the Success Series, sponsored by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), a conservative agency administering the Hays Code (1930 Production Code) by which the decency of films was judged. I became more suspicious of the connection between these two programs after realizing that Human Relations Film excerpts, selected from, for example, the lynching footage in Fritz Lang's 1936 film, *Fury*, were being identified as Secrets of Success materials that sought to foster Christian character and teach good manners. Also, I could not quite understand the working relationship between Mark May, a social scientist/statistician who took his degree at Teachers College with educational psychologist E. L.

Thorndike, and Alice Keliher, an early childhood-psychoanalyst who studied at Teachers College with philosophers William H. Kilpatrick and John Dewey. Nonetheless, there is no disputing that the two series and two individuals were connected; my month-long residency sought to articulate the nature of these relationships.

This research “report” serves as an initial effort to begin to “unscramble” the seemingly conflicting and overlapping educational projects of those educators involved with Rockefeller Foundation and General Education Board-funded educational films of the 1930s. Many questions remain concerning the dynamics among those early educators seeking to harness “sight and sound” in the classroom—W. W. Charters, Charles Hoban, Robert Kissack, Frederic Thrasher Edgar Dale, as well as Mark May and Alice Keliher—who are found collaborating when seemingly their most basic educational beliefs clearly conflicted. What begins to appear is a confusing “interlocking directorate” of administrators, filmmakers, researchers, and educators who defined the use of film in American schools: educational psychologists and social science researchers, brought together for the Payne Fund Study and guided by research methods formulated at University of Chicago; educational administrators and public school teachers participating in American Council on Education projects with Rockefeller Foundation funding; social scientists, documentarians, and progressive educators working together in Progressive Education Association programs supported by the General Education Board. Within this context, I wish to bring attention to Alice Keliher, who has been overlooked in the history of educational film, and to introduce the innovative experimental nature of the Human Relations Series of Films.

Good research generates more questions than it answers, and my RAC residency has displayed many new areas for further study, including the need to articulate further the relationship between these two programs and the nature of human relations in educational film. I have prepared an introductory essay, oriented for the non-education film student that will appear in *Learning with the Lights Off*.^[2] This RAC report is intentionally more technical and complex, from an educational perspective, as I describe the Human Relations Series of Films within the context of educational theory and practice and attempt to go beyond the simplistic descriptions of progressive education that are all too commonplace today. I plan to return to the RAC in 2011 to continue my research.

A General Description: Secrets of Success and the Human Relations Series of Films

The Secrets of Success program arose from a 1930 report describing the results of a nationwide questionnaire sent to Protestant clergy who were screening motion pictures at their churches, primarily during their Sunday evening services. The survey, prepared by the Committee on the Use of Motion Pictures for Religious Education, described how films had been used in religious education for character development and identified specific titles that had been “*used with success*,” although later the term “success” would come to depict the project as a way “to re-interpret success in terms of social values.”^[3] Among the recommendations, the report suggested the creation of an independent motion picture committee to represent the movie producers and to edit existing (dated) Hollywood films for use in church.^[4] Thus formed in 1931, the Committee on Social Values in Motion Pictures was guided by board member Mark A. May, director of the Rockefeller Foundation-funded Institute of Human Relations at Yale

University, who oversaw the editing of a series of noncurrent theatrical films--“one reel motion pictures about interesting people and how they behave.” May maintained the program represented “the first attempt to construct film materials for educational purposes out of feature pictures that were made for entertainment.”^[5] Seeking to influence if not control the impact on youth of commercial film (no doubt in recognition of the research then underway by May and others as part of the Payne Fund Study), the Social Values committee was also addressing the realities of the marketplace since Hollywood studios were producing approximately ten times the number of features, short subjects, and newsreels than educational films. It seemed natural for the committee to not only concern itself with the impact of the Hollywood films on youth but also to draw upon resources that had not been brought into educational settings.^[6] Further, while May had not arrived at Yale University during that institution’s ill-fated educational film project, *Chronicles of America*, he certainly would have been familiar with the difficulties of producing educational photoplays. Turning to noncurrent Hollywood photoplays for film excerpts rather than producing new educational movies must have been viewed as a welcomed, untapped natural resource for schools.

The Social Values committee, committed to character education and moral teachings, also addressed an administrative matter of great practical importance—the distribution of film to schools. Hollywood producers questioned whether photoplays could be introduced into public education since few schools owned projection equipment. Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America provided funding and obtained permission from studios so that excerpts could be edited into the Success Series to determine whether there was interest for film in education. Ultimately, twenty edited, one- and two-reel, 35mm films were produced and distributed to schools and colleges, churches, social agencies, and community organizations throughout the United States. Between fall 1934 and spring 1936, over 47,000 students and adults attended presentations and participated in over 1000 discussion groups.^[7]

With strong Protestant beliefs and clear definitions of “proper character,” the Success Series represented “true” educational experiences for youth rather than mere entertainment for the general public, thereby easing MPPDA’s concerns that such photoplay excerpts would compete with commercial movie-going presentations. Selections were edited to encourage discussion rather than merely to serve as an alternative for classroom lecture and, since no proceeds were offered to the producers, no admission fees could be charged. The Series served to supplement the curriculum with factual information, offering an alternative instructional method and, no doubt, a more effective way to inculcate proper values for character development than the then-current instructional method of recitation.

When they ordered a Success film, local educators and clergy received not only the print but also posters of illustrated scenes to help leaders review (and recall) specific topics for discussion. Conversations appear narrowly defined and seemingly returned to established principles from the character education movement. For example, posters from *Huckleberry Finn* consisted of a still photograph with the following dialogue and discussion “prompt”:

Tom: Where you goin’ to Huck? (steamboat whistles)

Huck: Down the river.

Tom: And you ain't comin' back?

Does Running away from home ever solve any problems?

Aunt Polly: Tom Sawyer! Your Sunday pants! Your Sunday pants!

Tom: My old ones are tore, Aunt Polly.

Aunt Polly: Land sakes!

Sidney: I bet he done it a-purpose! Wants to wear his Sunday pants for ole Becky Thatcher!

Which is worse—Deceit or a Tattler?[8]

Christian ethics defined the Secrets of Success program's films: *Sign of the Cross* (1932) was edited "to perpetuate the best traditions of the past in our present social order as exemplified by the idealism of the Early Christians." *There's Always Tomorrow* (1934) sought "to facilitate family adjustments in terms of mutual obligation," and *Huckleberry Finn* was edited "to cultivate a spirit of social democracy in contrast to intellectual snobbishness." [9] The purpose of the Success program, while not used merely as supplemental "visual aids" for teaching the school subject, nonetheless remained rigid with predefined curricular outcomes and educational objectives. While May would refer to the Cardinal Principles (a somewhat dated document by that time) and core curriculum, concepts with "progressive" overtones, the Secrets of Success's fixed educational ends and rather narrow view of character education and its simplistic form of teacher materials (what would be criticized decades later as a form of "teacher proof curricula") would have seemingly prevented leaders of the PEA from embracing the program. [10]

While the Secrets of Success program emerged from a survey sent to the nation's clergy, the Human Relations Series of Films arose from an ongoing, nationwide educational effort to reconstruct the high school curriculum. Few predefined ends or established outcomes were determined for this project. Experimentation was the quest, and program development became an open-ended endeavor. This massive educational experiment, the Progressive Education Association's Eight Year Study, was well underway with an established administrative structure that included the direct participation of approximately 42 high schools and 26 junior high programs, hundreds of teachers, and thousands of students. The Eight Year Study's title referred not to the length of the project but to its intent of reexamining four years of high school and four years of college. Comprised of three commissions, the Eight Year Study began in 1930 and continued to 1942. The Commission on Human Relations (1935-1942), chaired by Alice Keliher, served as the administrative and fiscal agency for the Human Relations Series of Films. Other related PEA commissions included the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum and the Commission on the Relation of School and College. While contemporary critics may point out that the Eight Year Study did not eliminate the use of "the Carnegie unit" as a structure for the secondary school curriculum (what would have been an impossible task), the project helped to

transform the educational theories and practices for the areas of tests & measurement, program assessment, curriculum design, instruction, professional development, and educational change. The Eight Year Study commissions produced twenty-two academic books and countless tests, reports and sets of resource materials and it is viewed as the most important research-oriented experiment of American education in the 20th century.[11]

Mark May and the Secrets of Success Committee recognized that increasing the distribution of films to schools would be difficult if not impossible unless footage was transferred to 16mm format, since that was becoming the standard projector for classroom use. Faced with the anticipated costs of distribution, film editing and duplication, and forthcoming contractual negotiations with the studios, the Committee requested support from the GEB. Funding was forthcoming with a \$75,000 grant; yet, they—seemingly, Mark May—decided in 1936 “that the Secrets of Success should not be further developed as an isolated undertaking; that it ought to be related to the work Miss Kelleher [sic] is doing for the Foundation and that any subsequent pictures made in the series should be keyed to youth problems as revealed by her research.”[12] While the GEB grant was signed over to the PEA (an organization that gladly accepted ANY check and ultimately came to depend upon foundation grants for its existence), Keliher indicated that she would have no interest unless the film project was related directly to the work of the Commission on Human Relations. The theme, human relations, was becoming an integral component of the Eight Year Study and, with her direct lineage to GEB-sponsored events in 1930 and 1934, Keliher was engaged in activities that could include a film project but, also, would extend far beyond the editing of Hollywood photoplays for classroom use.[13]

During the next five years in addition to the Commission’s staff researching, writing, and programming activities with schools on the general topic of human relations and educating the adolescent, Keliher and staff produced, distributed, and assessed the use of feature film excerpts in high school classrooms as a way to engage students in discussing issues of human behavior and in defining themselves in relation to family and society. This work was quite independent from the conceptual foundation established by Secrets of Success. Yet, contemporary researchers who turn to period newspapers and GEB documents will find many accounts that combine the film projects. The 1937 license between the Hollywood companies and the PEA links the Committee on Social Values in Motion Pictures and the PEA’s Commission on Human Relations. In a June 1936 memo, May even noted that the PEA, with the GEB grant, would develop a “further extension of the Secrets of Success plan,” and a 1938 *Variety* article states that a second GEB grant supported the Human Relations film series that was merely a change of name from the Secrets of Success project.[14] This and other descriptions by May connect the two programs; however, throughout the life of the Commission, Keliher consistently and specifically separated the Human Relations Series work from the Success series (whenever mentioned at all). A 1938 description of the “motion picture project” of the Commission on Human Relations is characteristic in that she mentions the Hays Office’s Committee on Social Values as a preceding character education project that prepared 20 film shorts. But no reference or connection is made to Secrets of Success.

The initial selections of Human Relations Film Series represented a rather dramatic shift in content from the Success Series. Both programs, running simultaneously in 1936, sought to portray personal and social relations topics, but Keliher’s group ultimately emphasized social

issues as a venue to help adolescents explore their beliefs and values. *Fury* proved to be the most widely distributed film and was edited into three separate excerpts, each displaying issues stemming from a lynching. Other films also addressed social issues. The *Private Jones* short portrayed a nonconformist drafted into the army, *Captain Courageous* (1937) addressed aspects of competition and its effects on the individual and groups, *Cavalcade*(1933) illustrated war seen through the eyes of a mother, and *Black Legion* (1936) revealed the evils of intolerance towards foreigners. Adolescent needs provided the framework to prepare over 60 Human Relations shorts with themes centering on the family, an individual's adjustment to life, group relations, and the relation of the individual to society. Secrets of Success titles appear in the Human Relations series; however, excerpts were re-edited. For example, *Broken Lullaby* (1932) was originally prepared for the Success program "to make individuals feel their responsibility for war; and the church, its opportunity to promote peace." Keliher's group lessened the religious theme of the excerpt to "a sensitive boy's reaction to killing and the responsibility of the men at home who sent their sons to war with cheers."^[15]

All of the Human Relations films were edited and framed in such a manner as to elicit questions from students (called "the free entertaining of ideas"). Similar to the Success Series, the shorts were prepared to elicit subsequent discussion, however, the materials did not "necessarily contain the possible solutions for the problems they present. It is part of the student's education to help work out possible solutions and attacks on the problems" so not to lead students to a set of predefined values.^[16] The term "problem" takes on additional significance during this period since student "needs" were being forged into personal and social problems as a way to move the curriculum away from a simplistic focus upon student interests. The Eight Year Study's companion group, the Commission on Secondary Curriculum, was developing "the resource unit" as a way to counter the rigid (teacher-proof) curriculum manuals and teaching plans typically used in schools. The resource unit offered guidance and flexibility while continuing to reflect a belief in the abilities of teachers and the importance of teacher and pupil planning together. Film selections were not a replacement for traditional curricular content; the series was exploring new dimensions for teaching adolescents and experimenting with curricular experiences as a method to address issues of personal and social needs.

Encouraging action—social agency—among students was, for Keliher, the most important aspect of the Human Relations Series: "these solutions and attacks on the issues should involve actually doing something about them wherever possible to prevent either the frustrating feeling that nothing can be done, or the feeling that talking is sufficient." She described students forming a welcoming committee after seeing *Devil is a Sissy* (1936), a film describing the difficulties of an adolescent entering a new school; conducting a housing survey after viewing an excerpt from *Dead End* (1937), which depicted a social-class housing incident; and planning a community recreation center after seeing *Alice Adams* (1936). A distinct sense of involvement—"activity with meaning"—became the intent of the series.^[17] The Human Relations shorts were field-tested in selected Eight Year Study schools and other educational settings, and transcripts were submitted to Keliher's staff where they examined "how films are best used in the study of human relations as an integral part of a more effective general education." While the project focused initially upon Study schools (with total funding for the film component at well over \$1,000,000 in current dollars), by 1941 the Human Relations Series of Films was distributed to over 3,000 school settings throughout the United States.^[18]

While there is much overlap between *Secrets of Success* and the Human Relations Series of Films, similarly, there is much commonality between the professional activities of Keliher and May. As I was attempting to draw distinctions between the programs, I also began to notice substantive differences between the research leanings of these two individuals.

Human Relations, Keliher, and May: Certain General Distinctions

General Education Board program officer Lawrence K. Frank wrote to Alice Keliher in 1935 stating, “This looks to me like the kind of job which you and probably you alone could do and therefore, I am writing to ask whether you would be interested in such a venture . . . under the auspices of the Progressive Education Association and which will run for a year or 18 months and lead, it is hoped, to experimental courses in human relations in some schools and colleges.”^[19] So began Alice Keliher’s invitation to serve as chair of the PEA’s Commission on Human Relations, a position she held not for 18 months but for the next seven years. Perhaps now best remembered as the founder of day care, Keliher was selected to chair the Commission for a variety of reasons, the least of which being her background in film. Yet, some of her colleagues questioned her abilities to oversee what was a monumental and quite unstructured position. I wish only to underscore that her responsibilities with the PEA had not originally been seen as a way to merge or to continue the *Secrets of Success* program.

Lawrence Frank, often described as a catalyst or “the grand gatherer,” was forming an inner circle of colleagues interested in the topic of human relations and the “culture and personality movement” in American social science. Keliher was invited into Frank’s group that included Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, John Dollard, Mary S. Fisher, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd and, later, psychoanalysts Erik Erikson, Peter Blos, and Walter Langer (whose work served as the intellectual foundation for the Human Relations series). Frank was exploring a psychocultural approach for examining conceptions of human development—the nature of the individual to society—and investigating aspects of “personal adjustment in a social universe” as a major problem in human relations.^[20] This same tension between individual and societal needs became a constant theme, running continuously through all activities related to Keliher’s Commission and representing one of the most fundamental dilemmas of 1930s progressive education. In essence, Keliher had been selected by Frank to oversee the effort to bring a culture and personality-human relations movement into the field of education, and the PEA’s Commission on Human Relations would provide her with the resources to develop materials for teachers.

Viewed by the PEA as an educational administrator who was involved in the professional development of teachers, Alice Keliher was also recognized as a film person, stemming from a random and haphazard experience when she took a movie camera to film school practices during her 1929 European research travels. She would be offered a position in 1930 at the Yale University’s Institute of Human Relations (IHR) upon completing her degree in education and, as she would later write in her memoir, would produce “literally miles” of motion pictures of babies for the naturalistic study of infants in what proved to be legendary research conducted by Arnold Gesell, a founding figure of the child development movement and a rather interesting and difficult colleague at the IHR.^[21] At Yale University, Keliher was also introduced to the University of Chicago/Yale educational film contingent, including Donald Slesinger, who would

leave the IHR to become executive secretary of the Social Science Research Committee at the University of Chicago and later director of the American Film Center and, of course, Mark May, a longtime researcher and coordinator of many film projects. While May and Keliher both were affiliated with Yale University's Institute of Human Relations, working in different areas, I suspect their conceptions of human relations may have been somewhat distinct, even though May participated in the GEB's 1934 Hanover Conference on Human Relations, served for a period as board member on the PEA's Commission on Human Relations, and remained in regular contact with Frank on various GEB projects.

Mark May's original work as an educational psychologist was statistically oriented, much in keeping with the educational activity analysis of W. W. Charters, who was then directing the Payne Fund Studies of Motion Pictures and Youth. May was currently involved in one of the studies where he and Frank K. Shuttleworth sought to ascertain, through "scientific means," the actual impact of film on youth. May and Shuttleworth's research, *The Social Conduct and Attitudes of Movie Fans* (1933), maintained that film could change children's attitudes and that the school performance of youth who attended movies regularly was not as strong as the non-movie group of children. In some respects, the *Secrets of Success* film series, developed shortly after the actual Payne research, could be seen an "operational" effort to prepare film experiences in accord with recommendations from the Payne study. Perhaps of greater significance (in attempting to establish distinctions and commonalities with Keliher), however, was the *Character Education Inquiry* that May had just completed for the Institute of Social and Religious Research prior to his work with the Payne Fund Studies.[22] With funding from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., May had conducted a massive character education study of over 10,000 elementary school students, from 1924-1929; this work provided a foundational data base for *The Social Conduct and Attitudes of Movie Fans*. I must wonder whether May's research orientation, with strong leanings toward more pure, scientifically-oriented social science research, and his religious-oriented, character education projects would have embraced the PEA's rather flexible and exploratory conception of human relations, rooted in anthropology, psychoanalysis, and the humanities as it was being defined by Frank and Keliher in the mid-1930s.

Understanding the relationship between May and Keliher is more complex due to the difficulties of defining the concept "human relations," with its much different connotation from the more recent 1970s notions of self-introspective, moral relativist, humanistic psychology. Yale University's IHR, a social science/natural science-oriented think-tank founded in 1929 with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation and with close affiliations with the University of Chicago, served as an interdisciplinary center for professional schools and academic disciplines to forge a unified science of behavior. While "human relations" caused many misunderstandings during the 1930s (as noted by IHR staff), including the belief that the Institute engaged in social services, the term offered a flexible theme to bring together natural and social scientists with strong allegiances to pure scientific work where, as was the intent of the Institute, researchers helped to define a scientific system for classifying cultural behavior. May would later state that the research activities of the Institute were at times unrelated to its original purpose; however, he would note the foundational base of the IHR as "pure science." [23]

“Human relations,” as described by May’s colleague, John Dollard, was selected to represent the “social nature of human action.” Dollard believed “the Yale Institute existed to study human’s behavior and their relations to one another. . . . [and] . . . the concept was somewhat vague but have excused it on the ground that, in the minds of the founders, it was not intended to have a precise meaning. It was intended rather to point to an area and a need. It was at once a symbol and a call to united theoretical action.”[24] Such definitions create more difficulty distinguishing a conception of human relations from that held by Keliher with her interest in personality development, culture & personality theory, and psychoanalytic theory. Yet, I ultimately see a break between the two in what appears as different foundational beliefs of “predefined ends”: May’s work seemed to draw heavily upon Christian doctrine while being guided from the accumulation of scientific (or pseudoscientific) data. In contrast, Keliher’s embrace of “pragmatism and experimentalism” (in a Deweyian sense) and “democracy as a way of life” (ala Boyd Bode) seemingly caused the Human Relations series’ educational ends to remain more open-ended: “Human behavior grows out of the cultural patterns; cultures prize different values; human behavior differs from culture to culture and in sub-cultures. Therefore a deterministic view of personality development and of human nature is untenable.”[25] I even question whether Keliher was willing to participate in programs with predefined ends and mores. I notice that she was not a member of May’s 1937 Hays Office Advisory Committee to review 15,000 Hollywood-produced film shorts and then recommend what films should be made in the future.[26] While I will stand corrected on this interpretive leap, I suspect that May viewed film in a less dynamic, transactional way than Keliher, who seemed less judgmental and willing to allow cultural patterns and judgments to define themselves rather than to have been defined through external means.

There is one other dramatic difference between the manner in which May and Keliher approached these film projects. I have yet to fully ascertain May’s political and cultural leanings, which I have interpreted to be somewhat “staid.” In contrast, the Human Relations series film editors included many of the most radical documentarians in New York. Clearly, these were Keliher’s staffing decisions; in fact, a 1940 GEB document notes “the social views of some of the members of the Commission’s staff resulted in a majority of its films’ dealing with social problems.” Keliher secured the services of Joris Ivens as the first production director and later technical advisor for the series (who was granted leave from the project to film *The Spanish Earth*, a 1937 documentary about the Spanish Civil War). Irving Lerner, another production director, was simultaneously filming the documentary *China Strikes Back* (1937), and, due to the popularity of the *Fury* short, he was sent to the set of *You and Me* (1938) with Fritz Lang to plan excerpts for another Human Relations Series film. Helen van Dongen, who would later work on Robert Flaherty’s *The Land* (1942) and *Louisiana Story* (1948), served as the Series sound editor, and the production supervisor Joseph Losey was active in New York City’s agitprop workers’ theater while spending the majority of his Human Relations Series time talking with members of the Hollywood companies, “showing photoplays and getting their advice.” Both Ivens and Losey were later named as members of the Communist Party and blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and Keliher would have her own problems with a blacklisting incident occurring in 1950. Further, I found an internal RF memo suggesting that Donald Slesinger was a “fellow traveler,” a factual point that I am now exploring since Keliher would later collaborate with Slesinger at the American Film Institute, working on a variety of projects including (my current research topic) *One Tenth of Our Nation* (1940), which has been called the

first documentary of African American education in the United States. All of Keliher's Human Relations Series staffing decisions occurred in 1936 and represented a dramatic social, cultural, and political break from the religious leanings of the Committee on Social Values in Motion Pictures, whose board members, while contractually integrated into the project, were placed on a special advisory committee.

One final point: May, as director of the IHR, could have accepted the original film grant from the GEB but chose to direct the funds to the PEA in a decision that will continue, at this point, to complicate and mystify. Keliher willingly accepted the grant and, while meeting regularly with the Committee on Social Values in Motion Pictures, totally redirected the orientation of the film content as well as the approach, all under the guise of human relations. May would certainly have noticed the change in orientation. Was there a falling out between these two colleagues? This mystery may never be resolved.

Human Relations Series of Films, Progressive Education, and Implementative Research

The term "progressive education" is, for some, now considered to be vacuous and no longer appropriate to use as a descriptor of educational practices from an earlier time. Nonetheless, certain fundamental beliefs defined a strand of progressive education during the 1930s, and the Human Relations Series, unlike *Secrets of Success*, embraced these tenets: attending to the experience, interest, needs, and growth of the students; viewing schools as a venue to define democracy as a social/political construct and form of community; seeking to integrate knowledge and to develop a more exploratory conception of learning for both teacher and student; drawing upon the scientific method as a means for educational and cultural experimentation; accepting the dynamic, evolving quality of knowing. Self-proclaimed progressives such as educational film researchers Edgar Dale, W. W. Charters, and Ben Wood would never be considered progressives by today's educational historians, and few of their contemporary colleagues viewed them as such (a point I can attest having known Edgar Dale and his colleagues).

Too often progressive education has been described (somewhat exclusively) as a tension between child-centered and subject-centered curricula. Keliher and her Eight Year Study colleagues were distinct from educators who fall into today's commonly used categories of administrative and pedagogical progressives and social meliorists. They represent instead what is now being called "Eight-Year Study progressives" who were academically-oriented while also seeing student needs as both personal and social in nature and not merely as expressions of individual interests. With carefully-designed practices of teacher—pupil planning, core curriculum, testing and program assessment, they underscored the importance for schools to engage in experimentation. The Eight-Year Study project came to represent the importance of educational exploration and served as an experiment in support of school experimentation, implicitly asserting that a healthy school was an experimental school. Experimentation became not merely an objective of the Human Relations series but, instead, more of a way of life—a willingness to constantly search for new materials and new methods.

Further, to fully understand the significance of the Human Relations Series of Films is to become familiar with a much different conception of (exploratory) research and school experimentation. May would distinguish the *Success* series from the Human Relations series as the former being

exploratory and the latter being experimental; however, these are general terms and not used in professional ways. In fact, the Eight Year Study leaders pioneered a new approach—an implementative study—the first of its kind in the United States, according to the General Education Board staff.[27] As such, this type of research differed from the common “status study” (surveys conducted to document current practices similar to American Council on Education film research), the “deliberative study” (a gathering of “scientific” data to support normative recommendations, a more accurate description of the Payne Fund Study work), and a conventional “controlled scientific study” (the aspiration of the Payne Fund Study). Implementative studies tested no formal hypotheses, upheld no specific models to be implemented and evaluated, and established no set of predefined outcomes. Rather, Keliher and her colleagues embraced a determined faith in experimentation as “being with adventurous company” and including gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and discussing data for the sole purpose of improving educational practice. Similar to contemporary forms of design research, the Eight Year Study and the Human Relations Series sought not to “prove” hypotheses with the research constructs of validity and reliability but, instead, to implement and test the best thinking of seasoned educators as a way to embolden their colleagues—teachers, school leaders and staff—to engage in exploration and experimentation in the classroom. This helps to explain why the PEA leadership chose Ralph Tyler to head the Evaluation Staff rather than W. W. Charters, who would have guided the project in more traditional scientific assessment.

Tyler, who served at the Ohio State University Bureau of Educational Research under Charters and also worked with Charles Judd at the University of Chicago and later with Edgar Dale, repudiated the basic research perspectives that were used in the Payne Fund Study and dismissed such “impact studies” as offering no “indubitable proof of the success or failure of current educational endeavors.”[28] The participating Eight Year Study schools were not involved in testing pre-defined hypotheses or conducting a scientific, laboratory experiment with controlled variables and clearly-articulated propositions. Tyler recognized quickly that school faculties were engaged in their own implementative studies on their own terms and in accord with their situated, idiosyncratic problems and interests. Thus, evaluation of students and of film programs had to be reasonably objective and accurate, depicting the value of these experimental programs, but need not prove whether progressive education was superior to traditional education or whether the human relations films were changing the values and beliefs of students. Tyler did not dismiss scientific inquiry; rather he highlighted the importance of school experimentation not to prove or predict outcomes but, more importantly, “to suggest” promising directions and possibilities for schooling and, in this case, the use of film. The Human Relations Series was not intended to strengthen visual education, counteract those uncontrolled influences in society, or build good character. Instead, the project served as a component of a larger effort to instill “democracy as a way of life” so that students would engage in teacher-pupil planning, free-reading, and reader-response dialogue as they articulated personal and social needs as members of a vibrant democracy during unsettling times. The film program was not separate from the curriculum but integrated into the general education core as a way to help students address issues of social sensitivity, social responsibility, cooperation, and other arising concerns. All academic subjects and experiences, such as the Human Relations Series, were included in what became a way for students to ascertain their “scale of beliefs,” an innovative assessment form developed by Eight Year Study staff. Other student “tests” balanced content with inquiry and logic with reason; for example, the “Application of Principles in Social Problems” addressed issues of race,

class, gender, economics and politics through various situations: a high school graduation incident with racial overtones, the graduated income tax, and the tension between industrial profit and workers' health. For Keliher, Tyler, and Eight Year Study teachers, a purpose of education was not to teach beliefs, morals, or "character" but to allow adolescents to develop thoughtful, reasoned positions, and the Human Relations Series permitted educators to introduce vivid scenarios through the power of film.

Concluding Comments

Miss Baxter: Huckleberry Finn did have to have his face washed. He didn't seem to like it very much. . . . Why do people have to wash their faces and hands?

Paul: Because, if you notice on your hands, there's little holes. You breathe in---

Bobby: (interrupting) Those are pores.

Miss Baxter: One of the reasons you think you should keep your hands and faces clean, then, is because it is good for your health. Is there another reason?

Margaret: Nobody likes to see one with dirty face and hands.

Boy: It looks terrible.

[excerpts from a class discussion (in 1935) following the viewing of *The Secrets of Success* production of *Huckleberry Finn*]

Leader: How could we eliminate the situation which leads to lynching? . . .

Boy: If you take the ring-leaders of a former mob, -- put them in jail, it wouldn't take any effect because he doesn't know what he is doing. -- I mean the people in the mob, any mob, even if he isn't ignorant, even if he is following the crowd . . . he doesn't see anything that would make him ashamed . . .

Boy: Another solution would be if public officials would take a different attitude. In California after the recent lynching, the Governor issued a statement saying this was a lesson to the world that kidnapping isn't tolerated here. That is an encouragement to lynching; that acts as the sanction of the public officials. They do it then with a free conscience.

[excerpts from a 1937 class discussion (in 1937) following the viewing of *The Human Relations Series of Films* production of *Fury*][29]

When the GEB decided in the early 1940s to withdraw major funding of general education projects, the work of the Eight Year Study and the Human Relations Series of Films would end. The Teaching Film Custodians (TFC) had been established in 1937 by Mark May, with some involvement from Alice Keliher, and its educational films were available to schools by 1939.

While some contemporary accounts suggest that the Success Series—Human Relations Series became the Teaching Film Custodians, the TFC and Human Relations Series catalogs are quite different culturally and intellectually. The 1941 TFC catalog lists an array of content-specific instructional films and procedures for ordering, quite a contrast from the 1939 Human Relations publication filled with social issues films and theoretical discussions of human needs and adolescent relationships. The 1941 catalog refers to the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, of course, along with the American Council on Education and Mark May, chair of the TFC Board of Directors; however, no reference is made to the Human Relations film series and, by the mid-1950s, Keliher and the series seem to have disappeared (even though the TFC's 1954 catalog does include certain titles from the Human Relations Series).

While the Human Relations Series of Films may have vanished from today's historical record, Keliher's work remains quite significant during this "golden age of educational film" and beyond. Will H. Hays and others had anticipated difficulties in the negotiations with the Hollywood producers to secure the use of non-current, commercial film in schools. Much was at stake, financially and politically, with this effort to harness the "tremendous power" of box office films since, during the Depression, Americans were "flocking to the movies to enjoy their brief moment of identification, finding such release from the actualities about them as they may. The life of the American adolescent (including the adult adolescent) is colored markedly by his movie experiences."^[30] With Keliher's appointment as director of the Commission on Human Relations, the project benefited from an individual who displayed an uncanny ability to collaborate with disparate groups, and her skill to negotiate contracts with the commercial studios may explain Mark May's curious decision to redirect Success program funds to the Human Relations Series (with Keliher's subsequent alteration and reconception of the use of noncurrent theatrical films for school use). In fact, Keliher's successful talks with the producers were applauded by Hays and the GEB staff, and her efforts were specifically noted as "the opening wedge in securing the release to schools and colleges of films made in Hollywood for theatrical showing."^[31] One can only imagine the problems that would have arisen if, instead, the Hollywood studios had become antagonistic towards the efforts of May, Keliher, and other film educators.

After the completion of the Commission on Human Relations' work, Keliher accepted a professorship at New York University where, for the next 25 years, she taught numerous courses in human relations, elementary education, and child development, helped to establish the New York University Film Library with funds from the Alfred Sloan Foundation, and served for a period as vice-president and associate director of the American Film Center. The spirit of the human relations film group remained of some interest to educators, even if not endorsed by the Teaching Film Custodians. In the 1950s, a close colleague of Keliher's, Louis Rath of New York University, received a small grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to edit ten non-current, theatrical films for classroom use similar in conception to the Human Relations Series.^[32] Yet, by this time the various educational film companies had emerged in full commercial force to provide training and instructional films to supplement the more content-oriented, standardized curriculum for the "comprehensive high school" (educational films that were considered by some as the curricular deadwood of the twentieth century).^[33]

While the use of noncurrent theatrical films in classrooms proved not as prevalent during the late 1940s and 1950s as Keliher would have hoped, in contrast to the rise of independently-produced instructional films, one must not assume that the Human Relations Series of Films had no impact on educational thought or the evolving field of educational film. Such a simple concept of significance does not capture the spirit of innovation that the Human Relations Series brought to the Eight Year Study curriculum development workshops or, in fact, the vitality that the Eight Year Study brought to school experimentation and the evolution of educational theory and practice. Eight Year Study progressives had become a collective movement “to find, through exploration and experimentation, how the high school in the United States can serve youth more effectively,” and their efforts, while subtle, were profound.[34] In 1964, Keliher and others came together for a conference to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Eight Year Study and to discuss and to reconsider the work of the Progressive Education Association Commissions in relation to the then-current practices in American education. After witnessing the (traditional, non-progressive) nationwide educational and cultural developments of the 1950s, one would have expected the conference presenters to lament the lack of impact of the Commissions’ findings. Yet, rather than questioning the degree of impact, Harold Alberty (the unofficial curriculum director of the project) stated that the Eight Year Study had actually taken on “an aura of holiness” that he felt was somewhat unwarranted.[35] Rather than being dismissed as a failed example of educational reform, the conference participants discussed the many innovative practices and seemingly countless insights that arose from the project. All acknowledged that its many influences had been diffused throughout American education, and the “sustainability” of the project was seen not as perpetuating a static model or curriculum mold but, instead, as recognizing that “the processes of bringing about change must be constantly under way.”[36] Alice Keliher and the Eight Year Study progressives, with their trust in the ability of teachers and with an essential faith in school experimentation, suggested many viable approaches to the persistent problems of improving education. While this massive project could not have redefined American education for the country, specific components of the work of the PEA’s three commissions, including the Human Relations Series of Films, helped to broaden and expand the venues for classroom experimentation so that “laboratory settings” became a possibility for every school.

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The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

Abbreviations:

AVK: The Alice V. Keliher Papers; New York University Archives, Bobst Library, New York University.

GEB: General Education Board Archives, Series 1.2, file markup 632.1; Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

YALE: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library.

All future bibliographic references to these works will be abbreviated.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Among the many conference sessions that have occurred, one presentation should be noted for its comprehensive research and insights: Rich Angelo, “‘Realistic Stepchild of the Movies’: The Educational Film Institute’s Documentary Take on the Need for Rural School Reform, 1940,” History of Education Society Conference, Philadelphia, October 2009. *Film & History* journal (Spring 2009) 39:1. *Learning with the Lights Off: A Reader in Educational Film*, ed. Dan Streible, Marsha Orgeron, and Devin Orgeron. London: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2010.

[2] Craig Kridel, “1930s Educational Film Projects: Secrets of Success and the Human Relations Series of Films.” in *Learning with the Lights Off*.

[3] Report of The Committee on the Use of Motion Pictures for Religious Education (Boston, MA, 1930), GEB:1-2:B284:F2964. Secrets of Success Manual, front cover; GEB:S1-2:B284:F2966. “The pictures, for want of a better title, are known as The Secrets of Success series. Youngsters like secrets. They are interested in success. What we are trying to do is to reinterpret success in terms of social values.” H. M. LeSourd, “Motion Pictures in a Guidance Program,” *NASSP Bulletin* 20:60 (1936), p. 84.

[4] Report of The Committee on the Use of Motion Pictures for Religious Education Boston (1930); GEB:S1-2:B284:F2964.

[5] Mark A. May, "Educational Possibilities of Motion Pictures," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 11: 3 (Nov 1937), p. 155.

[6] May, "Educational Possibilities of Motion Pictures." p. 150.

[7] Summary of Secrets of Success (1936); GEB:1-2:B284:F2964.

[8] Secrets of Success Manual, inside front cover.

[9] Secrets of Success Manual, p. 36- 37.

[10] Oddly, May refers to the legendary Cardinal Principles as the "cardinal objectives" but draws upon this document for its support of citizenship education. Mark A. May, "Educational Possibilities of Motion Pictures." *Journal of Educational Sociology* 11: 3 (Nov 1937), pp. 149-160; Mark A. May, "The Relation of Motion Pictures to the Curriculum of the Secondary School." Memorandum No. 2; June 11, 1936; YALE: Mark May Papers (MS 1447); B9:F25.

[11] Craig Kridel and Robert V. Bullough, Jr. *Stories of the Eight Year Study* Albany: SUNY Press, 2007. From our research we have come to recognize a basic moral framework underpinning the Eight Year Study: (a) trust in the ability of teachers and school administrators to reason through complex issues towards sensible and worthy conclusions; (b) belief in democracy as a guiding social ideal, a basis for a community of investigation and endeavor; and (c) faith in thoughtful inquiry, including school experimentation, to find ways to make education more life-enhancing for students and teachers.

[12] Summary of Secrets of Success, p. 12; Secrets of Success (1936) p. 4; GEB:1-2:B284:F2964.

[13] Commission on Human Relations Final Reports:

Alice V. Keliher, *Life and Growth* New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1938, was written in second person and oriented for high school students, Keliher presents human relations as a way to understand oneself as well as others, thus creating an interesting balance between the personal/social dimensions of adolescence. Specific chapters were aligned to the Thayer Commission's Science in General Education, and the entire volume was linked to other Commission on Human Relations volumes (five of six being released within the next twelve months). *Life and Growth*, the most popular book among the final reports, focused on normality—adolescents' concern and fear of being different versus being abnormal—and was used as a textbook for courses in social relationships, sex education, and physical education.

Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938, currently in print in its 5th edition, addressed the social implications of the act of

appreciation and interpretation and was prepared both as a guide for teachers of literature and for instructional methods courses. Rosenblatt saw Literature as Exploration as the genesis of her “reader-response theory” and “transactional theory,” perspectives that have guided generations of language arts teachers.

W. Robert Wunsch and E. Albers (Eds.) *Thicker Than Water* (New York: D. Appleton-Century-Co., 1939) served as a companion to *Literature as Exploration* and consisted of a sourcebook of stories selected to illuminate problems of family and family member relationships.

Bernhard J. Stern (Ed.) *The Family, Past and Present* (New York: D. Appleton-Century-Co., 1938) was another sourcebook reflecting material accumulated at the 1934 Hanover Seminar. Oriented for post-secondary education, this volume examined the evolving trends and conceptions of family life and was to be accompanied by an edited collection for secondary schools, *Society and Family Life*, a compilation never released.

Katharine Whiteside Taylor, *Do Adolescents Need Parents?* New York: D. Appleton-Century-Co., 1938, reflected Lawrence Frank’s interest in parent education and was written specifically for parents whose children were going through adolescence. The title is, of course, a rhetorical question since the volume attempts to reconsider ways in which adolescents need their parents and, as noted by Keliher, ways in which parents need their children.

Walter C. Langer, *Psychology and Human Living* (D. Appleton-Century-Co., 1943) addressed the conception of needs from a more theoretical, developmental perspective and presented a Freudian primer of social and physical needs, personality, and adolescent development for teacher and parents.

Unreleased:

Lorine Pruette and Leo Huberman, *The Family in Our Times; Society and Family Life*.
Earl S. Goudey, manual on sex education.

[14] License, March 11, 1937; GEB:1-2:B284:F2965. Mark. A. May, “The Relation of Motion Pictures to the Curriculum of the Secondary School.” Memorandum No. 3; June 17, 1936, p. 7; YALE: Mark May Papers (MS 1447); Box 9, Folder 25. A 1937 *Time Magazine* article (“Education: Mass Review”; Aug. 09, 1937) even stated that May was responsible for the GEB grant to the PEA to test *Secrets of Success* in classrooms. “Rockefellers Grant Still Another \$69,000 for Classroom Films.” *Variety* May 4, 1938; GEB:1-2:B284:F2964.

[15] *Secrets of Success* Manual, p. 13.

[16] Petition to GEB (c. April 1938) p. 29; GEB:1-2:B284:F2961.

[17] Alice Keliher, “Human Relations Education and American Democracy.” *New England Educational Film Association* (n.d.), xi; AVK:MC-139:B17:F7.

[18] Alice Keliher, Commission on Human Relations Report (Jan 7, 1941); GEB:S 1-2:B 283:F2959.

[19] Lawrence Frank, correspondence to Alice Keliher (May 15, 1935) AVK:MC-139:B16:F14.

[20] Harold Taylor, personal interview with author-CK, Holderness, NH, July, 1989; Stephen J. Cross, "Designs for Living: Lawrence K. Frank and the Progressive Legacy in American Social Science." Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, 1994: xi. Bryson, *Socializing the Young*, pp. 170-180; Dennis R. Bryson, "Lawrence K. Frank: Architect of Child Development, Prophet of Bio-technocracy." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1993; Dennis R. Bryson, *Socializing the Young: The Role of Foundations, 1923 1941*. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 2002.

[21] Alice Keliher, "My Story." (circa 1975): VIII; AVK: MC 139; B 16; F 8.1. WAC-5.

[22] Frank K. Shuttleworth and Mark A. May, *The Social Conduct and Attitudes of Movie Fans*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1933; Mark A. May and Hugh Hartshorne, *Character Education Inquiry*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1930.

[23] Mark A. May, "A Retrospective View of the Institute of Human Relations at Yale." *Behavior Science Notes* 6: 3, (1971), p. 151. Yet, internal RF memos in 1934 and 1935 suggest that the IHR was in some disarray and redefining itself prior to the actual appointment of May as its director.

[24] John Dollard, "Yale's Institute of Human Relations: What Was It?" *Ventures* (Winter 1964), p. 34.

[25] Petition to GEB (circa April 1938), 23; GEB:1-2:B284:F2961.

[26] "Old Films Studies for Use in Schools?" *New York Times* (July 15, 1937), p. 14. (I believe this was the origins of Teaching Films Custodians).

[27] Mark A. May, "Educational Possibilities of Motion Pictures." p. 155; Robert J. Havighurst and Flora M. Rhind, 1940 Annual Report, New York: General Education Board, p. 19; Frederick L. Redefer, "The Eight Year Study – Eight Years Later: A Study of Experimentation in the Thirty Schools." Ph.D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951, pp. 2-3.

[28] Ralph W. Tyler, "Evaluation: A Challenge and an Opportunity to Progressive Education." *The Educational Record* 16: 1 (January 1935), p. 124.

[29] Secrets of Success Manual, 16. Motion Picture Project (Dec. 24, 1937), 71; GEB:S1-2:B284:F2966.

[30] Alice Keliher, correspondence to GEB/PEA (May 27, 1936), 1; GEB:S1-2:B283:F2960.

[31] Appraisal: Motion Picture Project (Jan 1940), 1; GEB:1-2:B284:F2962.

[32] Louis E. Raths, The Human Relations Training Films Project (July 1, 1950); GEB:S 1-2:B226:F 2165.

[33] A regularly stated comment by Paul R. Klohr, staff member for the Human Relations Series of Films and later director of the Ohio State University Laboratory School, considered one of the six most experimental schools of the Eight Year Study. Klohr was a leading curriculum academic during the 1950-1970s at Ohio State University, where he was a colleague with educational film expert Edgar Dale and educational radio legend, I. Keith Tyler.

[34] Wilford M. Aikin, *The Story of the Eight-Year Study*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942, p. 116.

[35] A. N. Zechiel, "Comments." In *Teacher School Child*, editor Wilfrid Hamlin. Plainfield, Vermont: Goddard College, 1964, p. 57.

[36] Harold Albery, "Comments." In *Teacher School Child*, editor Wilfrid Hamlin. Plainfield, Vermont: Goddard College, 1964, p. 51.