

The Ivory Towers Fall

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THIS WAR has brought a new measure of realism into the educational programs of millions of children and youth. Insistent demands from educational organizations, government officials, and local community leaders for full school cooperation in the war effort are being answered vigorously in the affirmative.

The schools are providing pre-induction training for the armed forces, preparing workers for war industry, collecting scrap, selling stamps and bonds, helping with rationing, caring for the children of working mothers, assisting in harvesting crops, promoting physical fitness, teaching conservation, and are taking an active part in community war services of all kinds. Of course, these demands and services are affecting the curriculum and teaching procedures. Some fields of study are necessarily being neglected in order to give time to the more pressing war needs. Usually however, the eliminations are deadwood which no longer has value in edu-

cational programs; many additions and changes promise a more realistic school offering.

Military leaders, representatives of government, and the lay public are not satisfied with schools that are isolated from the realities of these trying times. They are demanding education in new skills and better preparation in old ones which will be useful now in the war years and also in the postwar period. This article analyzes these new demands for useful skills and points the way to their fulfillment.

It is our responsibility as educators and laymen to evaluate the current demand for skills. Only in this way can we find a valid basis for modifying and redirecting the school program.

Wartime places a premium on performance, on delivering the goods—in industry, in education, and in the armed forces. It is this demand for *performance* and *doing* that is undermining the ivory towers of education today. The basis of adequate performance is competence or skill. This is the real reason for the outcry for the skills, and it is a good one. Nor is the outcry less valid for having been joined by those who seek to discredit the gains and progress of modern education.

Although the times place stress on doing, we must ask, "Doing what?" And also we need to inquire, "Who's going to be doing it?" So the evaluation of the demand for the skills involves

Walter A. Anderson and Edward A. Krug, both of the School of Education of the University of Montana, Missoula, present on these pages a searching analysis of some of the most heatedly debated topics in education today. They evaluate the current demand for competence in useful skills. They ask—and answer—the question, Does the demand for skills mean a reversal of modern educational viewpoints? In concluding their discussion, the authors point to both the dangers and the opportunities that go with the present emphasis upon the skills.

an analysis of the skills which are really needed and some indication of what people are needing them.

Skills Needed in the Armed Forces

To begin with, there is the group of young men who are being called to assume the responsibilities of armed service. If the young draftee is to go to the fighting front as a replacement after a relatively short period of basic training, the least the high school or college can do is to provide him with basic skills which will help assure effective service and survival.

What do these men need as they enter the forces? On this point there has been much misinformation and confusion. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, some enthusiastic school administrators began issuing manifestoes ordering every senior boy to take physics, mathematics, or shop work. One principal decided that the students in his school needed military snap and discipline. So instructions went out ordering the adoption of military courtesy. If a teacher saw a piece of paper on the floor, he was to command a student to pick it up. The student would salute, pick up the paper, throw it in the waste basket, return, salute again, and say, "The paper has been disposed of, sir!" Others jumped to the conclusion that the Army wanted close-order, infantry drill and proposed to put in squads right, squads left, and the manual of arms.

Fortunately, the Army has clarified its position and its needs, and there is now no excuse for misunderstanding. Here is a statement of Army needs:¹

¹ Brigadier General Joe N. Dalton: "What does the Army Expect From the Schools," *Montana Education*, September, 1943, 6-7.

1. Every prospective inductee must understand the issues of the war and what is at stake.
2. Every prospective inductee must understand the nature of military life.
3. Every prospective inductee must be physically fit.
4. Every prospective inductee must have command of basic language skills.
5. Every prospective inductee must have command of basic computation skills.
6. The Army needs competent, efficient specialists.

The first five points apply to all youth entering the Army, and they emphasize the importance of a sound, general education program. But what about the need for "competent, efficient specialists"? There are many kinds of specialists in the Army. Only those boys who have scores in the upper 20 per cent on scholastic aptitude tests are slated for highly technical training as engineers, personnel directors, language experts, and so on. It is for this group that pre-induction work of an advanced nature, in the sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages is important. But for most of the other 80 per cent, the specialties are different. The need is to give them "practical skills in such fields as radio, electricity, automotive mechanics, shop work, or machines—skills which provide a basis for further training in a wide variety of specialized army jobs."² Nor should we forget the Army specialists who use non-mechanical skills—the clerks in the quartermaster corps, aides in the medical corps, and those who assist with interviewing and classification of new men.

² Stanford School of Education Institutes on Education in Wartime: "What Pre-Induction Training Is Needed." (Based on information provided by the Civilian Pre-Induction Training Branch of the War Department.)

Regardless of this Army viewpoint, there were more boys enrolled in pre-induction physics in the nation's high schools in February, 1943, than in any other type of course with the exception of pre-induction physical fitness.³ While physics courses enrolled 320,408, fundamentals of shop work claimed only 163,112, and radio code practice (repeatedly stressed by the Army as an area of tremendous shortage) enrolled only 60,000.

The Army's position with regard to skills of military discipline is of significance to workers in education:

"The modern army is a well-disciplined army. Each soldier, *after* his induction, is taught military courtesy and military discipline. It is not necessary for schools to impose military discipline as preparation for army life, but it is helpful if students are assisted to see all discipline as arising out of needs of democratic group living, and if they see military discipline as arising out of the needs of a 'Citizen's Army' which has a military job to do."⁴

Skills Needed by All Citizens

Total war places many demands on soldiers and civilians alike that are not involved in the special demands for competence in the armed forces.

1. *Skills of working together democratically on common problems.* Community wartime problems create new needs for skills of cooperative, democratic living. We are all in this war together, and must present unity of effort. This demands cooperation. Skills needed range from those involved in leading community endeavors to those necessary in simple family recreations and day-to-

day associations with fellow-workers. This idea involves not only emotional acceptance, but also a great deal of "know-how." Working together demands more than just having one's heart in the right place. Here are a few of the specific things people have to be able to do in democratic cooperative activities:

Select people for responsible leadership.

Express points of view clearly and effectively.

Avoid side-issues and go to the heart of a problem.

Evaluate leadership.

Delegate responsibilities.

Present minority viewpoints.

Safeguard minority rights.

These skills, moreover, are demanded not only on the floors of Congress. They are vital everywhere—in the shop, church, and neighborhood groups. They are essential in civilian defense preparations and activities, in fact, everywhere where a group of people has a job to do, a problem to solve. Without the development of these skills, the future of American political and social life is a depressing one. Sooner or later people lacking these skills fall into the trap of totalitarianism—regardless of the name by which it may be called.

2. *Skills of critical thinking.* Wartime dangers place new values on mass intelligence. European nations were defeated partly because of their susceptibility to the lies, threats, and deceptions of the Nazi propaganda machine. Psychological warfare makes critical thinking an important necessity for all. And at home, the conduct of the war will be efficient only to the degree that people criticize and raise intelligent questions.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

To do this, we must acquire ability in the following specific skills or behaviors:

- Defining problems clearly.
- Gathering needed information.
- Evaluating information.
- Interpreting data.
- Drawing conclusions.
- Acting on conclusions.

3. *Consumer skills—the art of “buy-manship.”* Faulty and undirected buying habits could wreck our war effort. That is why the OPA regulations are set up. But lack of consumer skills could easily make the OPA program flounder in disaster. For within the rationing system, American consumers must maintain health and effectiveness. The budgeting of ration points has become as important as the budgeting of money. The well-being of a family can be dissipated by careless and unskillful buying habits now more than ever before. The prevention of inflation depends on widespread understanding of its causes and of the reasons for saving and buying war bonds. So the effective wartime citizen is one who has skill in using his money and his points and who refrains from throwing surplus purchasing power on a market short of purchasable goods.

4. *Recreation skills.* The importance of recreation to both military and civilian morale has repeatedly been stressed. There are, of course, the skills needed to take part in sports—even small group and individual sports such as golf, swimming, tennis, and boating. In addition, there are skills needed for good use of radio, motion pictures, and newspapers and in carrying out constructive hobbies. Then, there are the skills of social relationships needed to make a suc-

cess of such informal recreational activities as parties, dances, and hikes.

5. *Vocational skills.* By this is meant, not only the specific skills needed for doing a particular job, such as running a lathe, but rather those general skills needed by most people in relation to most jobs. These include, for example:

- Canvassing job possibilities.
- Evaluating one's capabilities.
- Interviewing prospective employers.
- Applying for a position.
- Getting along with fellow-workers.
- Evaluating arguments for and against unions.

These skills help people to get into jobs where they fit and have a chance for success. In these days of manpower shortages, when personnel workers have less time to care for individual adjustments, these skills take on new significance and importance. True, it is easy to get a job now; but simply putting a person into a job for which he may or may not be qualified adds to labor turnover and makes little contribution to solving the manpower problem.

6. *Health skills.* Lack of doctors in communities, the dangers of malnutrition due to food shortages, and the necessity for high degrees of vigor and energy—all make health skills matters of crucial importance in wartime. High on the list of important wartime skills, therefore, are those involved in proper habits of eating, resting, cleanliness, and the elementary precautions against contagious disease. They help keep people fit for wartime responsibilities.

The foregoing examples are designed to stress the point that there are many kinds of skills needed by our citizens in wartime whether they are in the Army or not. Some are old skills with

which the school has always been concerned; others are new to the schools.

Meeting Valid Demands for Skills

What, then, is called for in the schools? Does the demand for skills mean a reversal of educational trends, a return to some legendary past which existed before modern education had presumably weakened the fibre of American youth? Or does the demand provide, on the other hand, further incentive for continuous appraisal of curricula and procedures in the light of modern educational viewpoints? The view taken in this article is that the second is the sound position with regard to the new skills and also for the teaching of the three R's.

How can we teach the new skills?

The new skills are the ones demanded of all citizens. They are, therefore, a part of that general education provided to meet common needs. In many schools today these needs are met in experience or core programs. The flexibility provided by these programs makes it possible to meet new specific needs as they arise and to teach skills in relation to the constantly changing pattern of modern problems. As a general policy it might be stated, then, that *the demand for the new skills can best be met by a further extension and development of the core program at the high school level and the experience curriculum in the elementary school.*⁵

The teaching of the skills of cooperative living and activity demands widespread advances in democratizing the

school as a social institution. Those schools which are little totalitarian societies make it practically impossible for students to learn how to conduct their own affairs, how to set up and solve problems, how to take responsibility for individual and group conduct, and how to select and evaluate leadership. On the other hand, those which make the students partners in the enterprise of managing and organizing a social institution are providing such opportunities in abundance. Similarly, the extension of democratic procedures such as pupil-teacher planning into the classroom provides further for learning the skills of cooperative self-management and discipline.

The schools can and should teach democratic processes and skills as an integral part of the program. They must be practiced every day, in every classroom, and in all the activities of the school if they are to be effectively learned.

The learning of critical thinking skills demands many opportunities for realistic problem solving on the part of students. It means a wider use of the "problem-approach" in social studies and other subjects. The students in the senior social problems course at the Sequoia Union High School, Redwood City, Calif., studied the health problem of their community, carried out a housing survey in connection with their study, and drew the attention of U.S.H.A. officials to the need for granting funds for a housing project. In doing this they had to define their problem, gather data, interpret and evaluate their findings, draw conclusions, and act on them.

Stress can be placed on critical think-

⁵ For further development of this viewpoint see Harold Spears: "The Curriculum Movement Helps the High School Face Total War," *Education*, February, 1943, 359-367.

ing skills by evaluating progress in them. Usually we teach the things we test for. Objectives which are neglected in the evaluation program are often neglected in the classroom. If evaluation is an integral part of the teaching process, we should try to evaluate some of these "intangibles," such as progress in thought processes. The good work started along the line of critical thinking by the Eight-Year Study Evaluation Staff should be continued in wartime and emphasized as never before.

Teaching the three R's. Perhaps louder and more insistent than any other demand is the one for teaching the so-called fundamentals, best illustrated by the three R's. Now, no one with any educational sense advocates that they be eliminated. In fact, there is sincere effort in modern schools to teach them better. But this cannot be done effectively with time-honored methods and procedures. No subjects have received as much attention and time in the curriculum as arithmetic and reading; yet the armed forces and war industry apparently find the product of the schools lacking in these skills.

The answer to the demand for greater skill in the fundamentals lies in more effective teaching rather than in more of the same unproductive methods. Some of the most modern educational programs now in operation are carried on under the auspices of the armed forces. They have streamlined their training programs to meet military needs, they use modern techniques and equipment, they emphasize learning by doing, and they draw on all available resources to help them out. If they do not have what is needed to shorten the training period and to educate effec-

tively for war service, they get it. The Army film, "Military Training," is good argument against a return to old-time ways of teaching the three R's. Useful skill in the fundamentals results from purposeful learning, humane teaching, and modern methods.

There is no doubt that the educational program of the armed forces is costly, but it is effective for the purpose for which it is organized. Likewise, the school program of teaching fundamentals will be more expensive if it is done by well-qualified teachers who have adequate equipment and modern teaching aids. But it would be worth the cost.

Dangers and Opportunities in the Current Demand for the Skills

What will this wave of enthusiasm for the skills do to and for American education? Will the long-term results be good or bad? The answers depend on the extent to which educational leaders, teachers, and parents can guide school programs and practices to avoid the dangers and at the same time capitalize on fullest possibilities.

Dangers. The number one danger is that the demand for skills may be interpreted as a demand for repudiating modern educational advances. If this danger is not averted, we shall find ourselves abandoning classroom democracy, activities, curriculum enrichment, and other modern education features.

A second danger is that we may draw an artificial distinction between skills needed for wartime living on one hand and those needed for postwar reconstruction on the other. This may result in emphasizing only those skills which are thought useful for the war. The

program should include skills which have value both in war years and later on. A short-sighted version of skills for wartime living alone would handicap pupils greatly and deny them a sound and useful education.

A third danger is that skills may be narrowly interpreted and then stressed to the exclusion of other equally important educational outcomes—such as wholesome attitudes, interests, enjoyments, and appreciations. Over-emphasis on the skill aspect of such a subject as English literature may well destroy its values for enjoyment. The current demand for the skills could easily give us a one-sided educational program.

A fourth danger is that demand for the skills might lead to a disregard of the unique personality and needs of the individual pupil. Over-emphasis on standardized tests, minimum essentials, and research projects to find "best" methods could result in a return to the mechanistic philosophy of the 1920's.

Opportunities. Advances in education in the prewar period made it possible for many schools easily to place their programs on a wartime basis. The current need for realistic education and the stress on performance values provide new incentives for further progress. Education "by doing" has new prestige. Skills can be taught in relation to problems and projects of real and immediate concern to the pupils, instead of being isolated and detached from life. Such an opportunity was seized by the Denver Public Schools when point rationing was introduced in the early months of 1943. The pupils were asked to help make the intricacies of point rationing clear to their parents and their communities. In the course of this project,

the pupils had to carry on many activities which greatly sharpened their ability to use the skills of arithmetical computation.

The dangers and opportunities are symbolized by the High School Victory Corps. This project grew partially out of the need for pre-induction training and partially out of the need for building youth morale. When it was introduced some saw only the dangers, some saw only the opportunities, while others saw how they could avert the one and capitalize on the other. The various divisions, namely, air service, land service, sea service, community service, production service, and wartime driving service, provide opportunities for developing skills in relation to real activities. The various subjects of the curriculum are vitalized as illustrations are drawn from the activities and services of the Victory Corps. Likewise, numerous opportunities present themselves to the discerning teacher for close coordination of the subject fields and these services.

On the other hand, if school leaders, teachers, and parents are not alert, some important phases of the curriculum may be neglected as a result of time given to these enterprises. The idea could degenerate into empty symbolization and undemocratic distinctions. The High School Victory Corps then is an example of a project which needs careful evaluation and guidance if maximum returns are to be realized. Similarly, the movement for greater emphasis on skills can be so directed that it will result, not in the erection of a new set of ivory towers to replace the old, but in a solid, workmanlike structure for American education.

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