

What Shall We Salvage?

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This is not an arm-chair discussion. The author bases his conclusions on a random sampling of the opinions of one hundred fifty air cadets who represent schools in the West and Central States, sixty college freshmen, members of the armed forces, members of boards of education, seventy-five upper classmen in a liberal arts college, students in an apprentice school of a large corporation, youth who left high school to work in war industries, a few parents and teachers, and school administrators from eight states.

MAKING postwar education serve the needs of all youth in a democracy is a challenge to the best minds and the bravest souls. However, judgments concerning the postwar curriculum and program come too often from arm-chair philosophers nestled in ivory towers rather than from those who are sensitive to the stresses and strains of Main Street. Altogether too infrequently do we solicit the ideas of our consumer public. In the final analysis, it is quite certain that postwar education will be determined by public opinion and demand. Then, too, the public pays the bill, and it has been evident throughout the history of American education that the rank-and-file citizen is glad to support that which he feels is vital and important. What education does America value? To what extent has the war curriculum of the American high school appealed to participants and patrons? What do our citizens want continued, what curtailed, what enhanced?

To learn what aspects of the war curriculum should be salvaged, the writer has questioned nearly five hundred persons who have experienced the program of the contemporary second-

ary school and who will have a significant role in shaping its future. Air cadets were selected for this study because they represent a group of young men who have just come from the secondary schools, are now pursuing a specialized program, and have some opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of their previous education. The students in the liberal arts college represent another group of youth who have just finished their high school education and who have various professional goals in view. Young people who left school to enter industry or the armed forces are significant, for they valued their present pursuits more than schooling of the sort they were receiving. School administrators were questioned, for they have had an opportunity to view school programs over a period of years and should have some perspective. It was aimed at choosing a sampling which would give a good cross-sectional view of those who will influence the future of American education.

Those who were interrogated by interview or questionnaire were reminded of most of the vast changes which have occurred in the program

and curriculum of many secondary schools due to the war emergency. They were asked to evaluate those changes and indicate those which they felt should be retained, which expanded, and which discarded in the postwar period.

The great majority of those questioned feel that tomorrow's secondary school must differ a good deal from the institution of yesterday, if it is to prepare youth for effectiveness in the type of society which will characterize postwar America. Many interesting and valuable suggestions were offered. While there was some difference of opinion in regard to the program American education should foster, generally there was much closer agreement than one would expect. Although youth in college was less radical in its opinions than youth in industry, the vast majority in both want a new education. Strange as it may be, there was a high correlation between the majority opinion of youth and the point of view of most of the school administrators.

Physical Fitness for Peace

Shall we develop rugged men? Practically all of those questioned feel that health and physical fitness have been seriously neglected in the prewar secondary schools. They think that the impetus given to this area during the war should, by all means, carry over to the postwar school. Very few would have military training or "too strenuous" physical activity, but they want every youth to have health, coordination, and physical alertness. Although a few school administrators feel that the leisure recreational type activities of prewar physical education were

Samuel J. McLaughlin, Director of Teacher Education at Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, reports for us here on how a representative group of persons who are acquainted with the contemporary secondary school feel about such matters as How much stress shall we place on physical education? Shall we go "all out" for vocational training? Are semesters and credits sacred? Shall we insist on mathematics and physics for everybody? Does learning have to be segmented?

wrong and would substitute "tough" activities for all, the vast majority are not of that opinion. They want physical education designed for health in a life of peace and feel that the recreational aspects should be stressed.

Practically all would have required physical education every day and would provide health examinations, health facilities, and adequate health instruction. "Our prewar physical education needed revamping and much more emphasis, but not so much in the direction of making us physically tough." Only nine in the group would have military training and procedures in the postwar secondary school. Typical expressions are these: "We certainly don't want the oncoming youth educated in a military atmosphere. Our propagandists have scandalized Germany for just that thing." "We must not educate for death as was done in Germany." Only five out of one hundred fifty cadets favored military training after the cessation of hostilities. It seems that the vast majority desire to emphasize health and alertness in the physical education offerings.

Curricula With a Purpose

Do we want a new deal in education? In examining the ideas presented by

this varied group, it is significant to note that youth in colleges, industry, and in the armed forces (the voters, parents, school board members, and taxpayers of tomorrow) are more insistent than many of the older adults that the prewar school needs renovating. About one-fourth are rather complacent, but most of these come from high schools in well-known systems where more modern curricula are in operation. Then, too, the group which was more or less satisfied with its high school background is composed mostly of college students.

The majority of the group desiring a great deal of change have been impressed by the purposefulness of the war curricula, much of which is headed toward a discernible goal. Many of the renovations suggested involve "method more than curriculum." The bulk of the youth and the majority of the adults have been impressed by the "narrow, academic, textbookish procedures in the school" and wish for "more subjects of actual experience," "more problem solving and action rather than mere reading." They state that "too many courses in the prewar school had no purpose or the purpose was not made known." Some attribute this deficiency to "teachers who were too old and whose methods were out of date."

Cadets, for instance, although they feel that some of their present instruction is poor, see the part that purpose plays in learning and they feel that too many of their former high school teachers went through the motions but had little notion of the result desired. Most of the youth questioned insist that more high school courses should be organized "the way we learn things in

life outside the school," and the majority of both youth and adults indicate the importance of work experience and the application of school courses to their environment, to life situations, and to community resources. A functional curriculum appears to be the demand.

Too Much Education for "Storage"

Shall we have robots or men? While a few strongly urge a more or less "all out" vocational or industrial education, it is generally conceded that a well-balanced program of general and vocational education will be needed in the postwar school. However, nearly all are insistent that general education needs to be vastly different from that which has been in vogue, for it is widely felt that so-called general education has been too academic and too out of tune with contemporary life. It is frequently stated that the additions to the general education program during the war have been beneficial and should be continued.

It is asserted that general education should prepare youth to live effectively in the areas common to all citizens and should deal with those problems which are basic to the contemporary world. To quote from a cadet, "In evaluating these changes, one must first choose a viewpoint and a setting. What kind of a world are we going to have . . . or want . . . after the war? What kinds of citizens do we want and need to mold for life in this world? Most of these war changes, I feel, will be discarded as emergency measures. Personally, I am in favor of a basic liberal education . . . to which must be added the modern viewpoint, the past brought up-to-date, the wealth of the ages interpreted by the understanding of today."

The majority feel that our general education program in the future must develop a higher degree of relationship between curriculum content and the actual life of youth, and they stress the necessity of teaching the material on a more experimental, functional basis. General education for "storage" and courses with no more objective than "it's good for you" are pointedly condemned.

There appears to be no clear-cut majority opinion concerning vocational education in the secondary school. About half of those questioned believe that vocational education has been seriously neglected and that the impetus given to it by the war is much needed. A large majority emphasize that most high school students do not go to college and, therefore, have to begin their vocational career as soon as they graduate, if not before. Consequently, opportunities should be offered for better preparation for the occupation they will pursue.

Most of the youth interrogated believe that vocational education should be a part of the "four-year high school," but practically all of the adult group think that vocational education should come during the junior college years (thirteenth and fourteenth grades) or be sponsored by industry after youth has graduated from high school. The older adults think that "vitalized" general education is so large a program that there is not room for vocational education of a specialized type. Many assert that the curtailment of vital general education offerings to make place for industrial courses, even during the war, would seriously handicap youth in the postwar years. Many youth from small

communities stress the need of school consolidation so that broader vocational offerings may be available to all.

All Groups Favor Some Form of Vocational Training

There is no agreement on the type or kind of vocational education which should be available in the postwar school. Some would have the high school offer a generous variety of specialized vocational offerings which would fit individuals for definite jobs in industry. Others would have no specialized courses, but would provide broad, general background of vocational and industrial courses which would prepare the youth to fit quickly into any industrial pursuit. Many older adults, principally school administrators, think that the high school should provide broad technical background courses so that youth can adapt itself to changes in industry and make labor more mobile, but believe that specialized courses should be offered in addition to qualify the individual to do a special type of work. This last group emphasizes that we are going to live in a world where technical knowledge becomes more and more important and that, therefore, industrial education must be made available to youth.

It should be especially noted that practically all of the youth who left school to enter industry feel strongly that more vocational education should be offered in our schools. It seems, then, that there is fair unanimity of opinion that the postwar school should stress vocational education, but there is not agreement in regard to the type or the placement of vocational and technical offerings. Furthermore, there appears to be almost

complete agreement that schools can learn much from industry and from the armed forces concerning effective, shortened methods in industrial education.

"Shelve the Dusty Rules"

Are semesters and credits sacred? The fact that the war curriculum has shown that all courses need not necessarily be a year or a semester long has evidently impressed the majority, especially youth. Many ridicule the idea of measuring accomplishment in terms of credits, units, and hours spent rather than in terms of achievement. "Schools need to shelve some of the dusty rules and regulations" is the feeling of many. Others assert, "The credit system will be radically changed and students will be admitted, promoted, and otherwise treated in accordance with ability tests."

It is stressed that short courses and the needs of the war have demonstrated the inappropriateness of our customary credit system for this purpose. Many courses or areas should be pursued several years, while others need be only a few weeks in duration. Interestingly, while the majority favor short courses for special purposes, they are strongly opposed to speed-up courses, for they think that they "develop technicians without vision." It seems that the assumption that *all* learning is divided into two semesters and that an educated youth is the product of a sequence of courses, credits, and time-clock periods has been given a severe bombing during the past two years.

Educate for World Understanding

Must we be isolationists? A good many secondary schools have intro-

duced courses during the war which deal with postwar America and the postwar world. Such courses have impressed youth, especially the cadets, and many school administrators stress the importance of such consideration. A good many emphasize the importance of "vital civic education and international relations to teach the errors, mistakes, and causes of this war and how to bring about international cooperation and everlasting peace." Although a few older adults feel that we are going to live in a highly competitive world where survival will depend on might and technological knowledge, nearly all youth believe that we must and will develop a cooperative world economy. It is generally asserted that schools need to study the cultures and problems of all important nations and to consider the structure necessary to develop a world organization and a world economy. It is repeatedly stated that our focus in history and social science has been directed too rigidly to Europe and Western civilizations, to the utter neglect of the highly populated nations of the East. "We need to give more thought in the future to Russia, China, South America, Japan, India, etc."

Who will direct postwar America? The majority, in fact, practically all youth, believe that the courses concerning postwar America are extremely important. "We need to think critically and realistically about the tremendous problems that will face us after the war is completed." We must learn "to direct the forces of technology toward the common good." We have to "develop better techniques for teaching people to think clearly and justly and it is all so much a matter of attitude." "It's so

difficult to get the facts. Our courses must deal with the analysis of propaganda and include newspapers, radio, movies, magazines, and current literature rather than just textbooks."

It is stressed that social consciousness and civic alertness come by practice, not by dictate or preaching. It seems that youth and adults are aware of the importance of being prepared for the problems of postwar America and the postwar world and they want the schools to devote the necessary time for such consideration. Furthermore, they feel that the way an individual acquires information is extremely important and that opportunity for social action should be provided.

Giving Learning a Focus

Must learning be segmented? Another wartime procedure that seems to have impressed many youth, especially cadets, is the new courses in high schools and Army and Navy schools in which materials from many fields have been unified around a central task or problem. For example, the cadets stress the reality of their work in which necessary science, mathematics, economics, practical arts, etc., are focused on the functional result rather than pigeon-holed in several classes. It is felt by many that this idea should be used more widely in the postwar school. The majority believe that in the public school the curriculum is too segmented and unrelated and that it could be organized on the basis of relationship rather than fields. One youth states the problem rather concisely when he asks, "Why can't we attack the problems of society as they are rather than to get lost in a maze of subjects which bear little on

the problem and give one-sided views?"

Whither guidance? The adults questioned seldom mention guidance specifically, but youth feels that the impetus given to this function by the war and by the Victory Corps is to be commended. Youth believes that the war has caused many schools to practice vocational guidance genuinely and to use aptitude tests widely, and that the trend should be continued and greatly enhanced. It seems to the writer that youth feels more strongly concerning guidance than any other aspect discussed. Many feel very bitter toward their schools because of the lack, "absolute absence," some state, of worthwhile guidance. They attribute the neglect of guidance in the schools to the fact that too few teachers know the work-a-day world and "too many others don't give a damn." Guidance is very generally considered one of the most important aspects of a good school.

Education to Meet Needs

Shall the servicing of needs be left to chance? It is felt by the majority, both youth and adults, that the new short courses in first aid, home nursing, nutrition, consumer buying, etc., are very important and should be continued after the war. "Those are courses which are needed in all periods of a person's life." Many stress the fact that the war has emphasized the necessity of courses in family relationships, mental hygiene, and child development. They desire all of those areas included in the postwar school and want them "taught realistically and practically to both sexes." Courses which meet the personal and social needs of youth are evidently valued highly.

Mathematics and physics for all? So much has been said and written by speakers, writers, educators, military leaders, instructors in flight schools, etc., in regard to the lack of background in mathematics and science evidenced by members of the armed forces, that it might be assumed that citizens would want the present stress on those fields continued. Strange to relate, that is not the case. Thirteen individuals specifically mention mathematics or physics and only eight indicate that more emphasis should be placed on those fields. Others indicate that mathematics and physics should be taught functionally in the postwar school with generous application to everyday problems and to the local environment. It is quite possible that deficiencies in mathematics which have appeared are due to lack of goal, neglect of applications, and to purposeless drill. It is too easy to assume that the postwar school should stress more and longer drills and more coercion, when the basic need may be more purpose and more real situations for use of material.

Activists Rather Than Escapists

What of the future? To all appearances, it seems that public education

has been presented an unusual opportunity to evaluate its curriculum, program, and services. Shortage of teachers, demands of educational organizations, and numerous pressure groups have saturated many of our schools with courses that were not there before 1941. The adoption of the new has caused the temporary curtailment or abolition of much that characterized the prewar school. When peace comes, or preferably before that time, society will have to decide what an effective postwar school should sponsor. It is extremely important that intelligent criteria be used in this evaluation so that our new school will not be a mere hodge-podge of unrelated, purposeless exercises.

What shall we salvage? What shall we retain from the prewar program? If we follow the ideas of the youth and most of the adults contacted in this report, our postwar school will fit men and women for the world of tomorrow in all of its areas. The secondary school will become a living, regenerative, prophetic institution which wrestles with the vital problems of youth and its world, and more teachers will become activists in our hurly-burly society rather than institutional escapists.



UNITY IS NOT CREATED by pep talks, but by mutual interests, and, above all, by the experience of doing things together. There is enormous work to be done in the world that can only be done by a great many doing it together in an organized way. . . . In the mutual performance of necessary world tasks lies the hope of the gradual evolution of a world commonwealth. It will never spring full-fledged from the mind of some genius, all drawn up on tables of stone. But if we . . . go on working together for specific objectives, our children's children may one day look around about them on this earth for peace and, behold, they will find it there.—From "The Only Road to Peace" by Dorothy Thompson in *The American Mercury*, December, 1943.

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