

To Start Your Thinking

• • • J. PAUL LEONARD

This statement by J. Paul Leonard of Stanford University sets the stage for this issue of Educational Leadership by introducing our theme, Exploding Myths Through Education. Mr. Leonard reminds us that there are myths in every field of human thought which we as teachers may take the lead in exploding. He tells us, too, that there are fetishes in our own profession, which—if not discarded—can blind us to the real purpose of our job.

SUPERSTITIONS and myths are the result of ignorance and neglect. They are in the dark zone of human experience. They can be met only with facts and experience, accompanied by social pressure for intelligent action. Social pressure, or public opinion, is the leaven which urges on the lazy, indolent, or careless man.

Prejudice, too, can sometimes enter the shadow zone of superstition and myth. It, too, can lead to injustice, discrimination, intolerance, and even abuse of those who disagree. On the other hand, it can direct men's actions into more civilized channels. In fact, we expect prejudicial action toward things *we* do and toward those *we* love. As Lawrence Frank, writing on reorganizing our prejudices, points out in this issue, "values rest upon a prejudicial attitude or viewpoint and feelings of greater desirability and worth."

Our problem, then, is to get rid of our myths and superstitions and to use wisely our prejudices to warm and enrich life, rather than to block progress. Blind action resulting from ignorance, neglect, or indifference does very definitely block progress. Unfounded faith in the protection of two oceans and the resulting isolationism combine to build a mythical sense of security which blocks progress toward international cooperation. The constant exploitation of other lands has given some people a prejudicial justification for such actions, leading them to influence nations to adopt imperialistic policies. Blind acceptance of the idea of racial superiority leads to action that ranges all the way from our intolerance of colored races in this country to the bestial action of Hitler and his associates.

In all of these matters the school has a definite responsibility. If men's action can be changed by the acquisition of knowledge and by learning the process of scientific reasoning, the school can get hold of the major controls of behavior. Once a grasp of these controls has been secured, the school should pursue its opportunity without fear of reprisal, guided only by the light of progress resulting from knowledge and freedom from emotional blindness. Thus can public opinion be enlisted to support the work of the school.

But all our prejudices and myths are not confined to the field of political, economic, or social problems. In our own field of education, both in the areas of method and content, are abundant illustrations of faith in conventional practices, leading to action contrary to facts. Continued teaching of facts irrelevant to levels of development can only be justified by mythical faith in mental discipline. Blind faith in book learning, devotion to the conventional subjects, adherence to the "classroom recitation," resistance to improved methods of study, evaluation, and curriculum, all range somewhere along the scale from myth through prejudice. Even more dangerous is the belief that only a few should be educated or can learn, or that secondary education is college preparatory education.

We need to look to ourselves if we expect to change the habits of others. The beam in our own eye must not blind us. While our energies are occupied with petty quarrels over our own fetishes, the real purpose of our job is taken over by others. We do not expect those in education to be *free* from prejudices, but we do have a right to expect those most familiar with the use of factual information and methods of work to be ahead of others less capable of dealing with such materials.

Thus our freedom from blind action is a measure of our effectiveness to remove the mote from the eyes of others. There has hardly been a period in history in which education is more needed or in which freedom from blindness is more essential. If education is indispensable to progress, we in the field now have a chance to prove it.

Watch for Program Plans

The program for the summer meeting of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development to be held in Pittsburgh, Pa., on July 4 will be announced in the May issue of *Educational Leadership*. Earl A. Dimmick, Associate Superintendent of Schools of Pittsburgh, will act as program chairman. The Department meeting is being planned in connection with the annual business session of the National Education Association.

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