

If We Have Time

H. H. GILES

IF ONE PERSON has a goal which is not understood or shared by another with whom he works, it is doubly difficult for either to reach his goal. If, on the other hand, both have worked out together a common goal, there is twice the likelihood that it may be attained. This is the simple arithmetic of group planning.

Psychologically it is sound procedure to plan *with* instead of for another person. Democratically it is a necessity.

We are in a race against time, in world affairs. Will it be possible to create world government before we destroy ourselves? The instruments for destruction can do the job in a few minutes. They are at hand—the hand of any ambitious national group. What of the instruments for human understanding? These are questions which each of us has been given a terrible imperative to answer afresh, no matter how earnestly we have wished for someone else to take the responsibility. The answer will not come primarily through trying harder but, rather, through seeing more clearly and working more unitedly. Something more than a desire to do well is needed. Even the raising of the most searching questions about ourselves and our institutions—the school especially—is not enough.

Has the School Worked Full-Time at Practicing Democracy?

It is not our fault, we may say, if the leaders of nations are unequal to the task. Yet what can we say of our own part in the processes by which leaders take power and

sustain it? What has each of us done, however small, to build roads to the expression and achievement of the great yearning of human beings for peace and for a decent life of fair-dealing among all men?

Have the schools done their part of the job, even in America which has the oldest system of universal, free education? Have we, the teachers, actually seen the hard fact that the national life can be made truly democratic *only if each of us knows how to take part in the processes of group life?*

It is not enough to wish that good things may be planned and carried out in the interests of all. It is necessary to learn how this is done. Learning how can nowhere be better done than in the school. Here is a society of young people and elder statesmen. There is a space of time to be planned for. There is building and playground space to be used. What an opportunity the school society presents for learning to create a life together!

An opportunity means nothing unless it is recognized.

Who Cares?

If the school is to be a testing-ground, a pilot plant of democratic processes, it is first of all requisite that its guardians—the board of education, the administrators, and the teachers—recognize and deeply care about human development.

It may sound ridiculous to point out this need. Actually, the writer knows of both laymen and school persons:

—who care more about problems of personal prestige than about the growth of young Americans

—who worry more about protecting wall paint than promoting creative experience in the arts

—who are more concerned about subject matter than about learning

—who care greatly about “minimum essentials” (especially as taught by the previous teacher) but who are entirely ignorant of

The race between civilization and the atomic bomb is on. We are in it—our schools are in it. To win, we must bring about unity and understanding among all people. The school, writes H. H. Giles, director of the Bureau for Inter-cultural Education, is a “testing-ground” for democratic processes and as such has great responsibilities in setting the pattern for a world of peace and decency.

whether their students have the essentials of food, love, play, self-respect, hope, and freedom that they need, at home, in school, in the community

—who are much more interested in asserting authority than in winning the confidence and cooperation of their colleagues and their pupils

—who regard critical-minded children and parents as enemies rather than assets

—who look so hard at their courses of study that they become blind to the actual events of their students' lives

—who actually shy away from difficult personal and social problems instead of welcoming them as central foci for educative experience and study.

But why go on? Perhaps each of us is only too much aware of his own shortcomings in these respects. Yet my purpose is not to rub in the badness of any person but to cry out the news of our power as persons, our power to mould institutions like the school. Nor do I ignore the evils in other places. For example:

Many parents have sinned against children by establishing homes in which the child is not treated as a partner, even a junior partner in home management.

Many teachers colleges have sinned in treating teachers-to-be as if they were unable to participate intelligently in directing their own learning experiences.

Many taxpayers have sinned in seeking to pay less than a living wage to those to whom they entrust their children—they paid them less, on the average, last year than those to whom they entrusted their mechanical jobs.

Many administrators, the employers of administrators, and the teachers of administrators have sinned most grievously, for they have perpetuated the ideal of authoritarianism.

What Can We Do?

How can a new world be built?

It will be built, if there is time, by each person who sees a way to begin. The time to begin is now. The place to begin is on the daily job.

The school administrator can, at the least, announce the freedom of teachers to attempt democratic methods. At the best, he will be himself an exponent of the kind of leadership which seeks out and encourages the con-

tributions of all faculty members to the common enterprise. He will constantly seek ways to develop faculty, student, and parent participation in administration.

The teacher can, at the least, listen to pupils—not just the bright ones or the acquiescent ones—but all of them. From listening he can learn about them as human beings. At the best, the teacher will be able to develop a group aim, group thinking about topics, materials and methods, group evaluation. The classroom will become a place of adventure. Decisions will not be made by a thoughtful teacher but by a thoughtful class with the teacher. Perfection or even surface polish may not be obtained. Mistakes will be made. Difficulties will be encountered. But learning will take place and it will be real learning, not a temporary performance of a set task, but steps toward a lifelong self-education and cooperative solutions of common problems.

Dare We Change?

Make no mistake. The schoolroom, the school, the school system which attempts true group planning will change. It will not be the same old, comfortable, conforming place with a new frill or two by the name of Group Planning. It will become a center of dynamics. The energy and ideas of many young people if released can move mountains. Their energy will need discipline, to be sure. But the better disciplined they become, the more effective they will be in creating an ever-renewed curriculum, new forms of organization, new contacts with the daily life of the community, all in all; new visions of what can be done and the ways to do it.

Such an adventure in using *all* the human and material resources of the school is frightening to many a parent and pedagogue. The writer knows parents who say, "By all means let us have new and improved education—so long as nothing changes." That is, so long as you do better what has always been done.

Then there are those in the profession who say, "That's old stuff. We tried it twenty years ago and it won't work." They mean that they are quite comfortable as they are, thank you. Tired teachers.

Worst of all, are those who say, "I don't see any need for a change." These are the fabulous mental ostriches who will bury their

heads in the shifting sands; they do not close their eyes in order to see new visions of new developments to meet new circumstances: they only present their immovable behinds to the rising winds of eternal flux.

Can We Afford to Wait?

If we have time, we may be able to afford to ignore the opportunity of making the

school a proving-ground of democratic practice. We may be able, if we are personally smug enough, to be repetitive rather than creative. We may be able to ignore the world-shaking revolution of which war is only the most dramatic episode. We may be able to continue saying, "Children, your lesson for today . . ." instead of "Let's think about this together."

If I Wanted Fascism

IF I WANTED the American people to discard their ideals of democracy and "go Fascist," I would not try to achieve this by putting on a colored shirt and joining a drill squad of some Fascist organization. Instead, I would try to weaken the work of our public schools by means of the following program:

1. *By whittling down the work of the schools to the three R's plus some "vocational" training.* I would deride the "fads and frills" in education and strive to eliminate music, art, and the like from the curriculum. But, especially, would I laugh off any attempt to introduce young people to social problems. . . .

2. *By swamping the teachers with overwork so they could do nothing but a routine job. . . .*

3. *By intimidating teachers through inadequate tenure provisions and job insecurity. . . .* By this means, I would guarantee such timidity on the part of teachers that they would lose their disposition to work toward democratic objectives in education.

4. *By insisting that schools adopt and maintain "hard-boiled discipline" and other undemocratic forms of human relationships. . . .* In this way, I would destroy any possible influence teachers might have as leaders of youth in our society.

5. *By throttling the teachers into a "fine impartiality" on social problems and controversial issues. . . .* Then, no matter what I might stir up in the way of race antagonisms or suppression of civil liberties, I could count on the teachers not taking any sides.

6. *By getting teachers to quarrel vigorously among themselves.* I would encourage dissension . . . by stirring up a fuss over the "progressives" and the "traditionalists." . . . I would encourage the teachers of "academic" subjects to quarrel with the teachers of the "practical" subjects, and the other way around. . . .

Now, if this platform were original with me, I would be tempted to try to sell it to organizations opposed to democracy. But it looks very much as though such organizations were already alive to these possibilities. It is likely that attacks on education along these lines will be made increasingly as we go through the tensions and difficulties of the postwar world. . . .

This program does not mean the setting of teachers above society. It means rather freeing teachers to do the job society says it wants done. We have a clear mandate from the American people so far as democratic objectives are concerned. Educational activity can either degenerate into insignificant routine carried on by timid people, overloaded with routine work, or it can become the very most significant of any enterprise in American life, carried on by courageous people who have the chance to do the job they are getting paid for. . . .—E. A. KRUG, Assistant Professor of Education, Montana State University, in *Montana Education*.

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