

The Changing World

Ernest O. Melby

WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE

EDUCATORS AND LAYMEN alike are convinced of the heavy responsibilities resting upon schools in the atomic age. Much of this discussion, however, will have lost its significance if we do not make an accurate appraisal of the role of schools in education and in our society. The responsibility for building a peaceful world is too heavy for educational institutions, no matter how effective our schools may be or how devoted their teachers may be or become. Their efforts cannot alone give us a sound social and economic order at home and a genuine brotherhood in the international scene. These are larger tasks to which every individual in our society must devote his best efforts.

In particular the agencies for mass communication have heavy responsibilities. If the press deceives the public in regard to the realities of the international scene, if it fans the flames of prejudice and misunderstanding, and distorts the truth in its reports of current news it will be hard for schools to have much influence. If the radio commentators take advantage of their access to the ears of millions to mislead the American people there is little that schools can do for the time being. The plain fact is that we now have agencies of communication which reach many times as many people and reach them in far more subtle ways than schools and other educational institutions. The whole future of mankind may well be determined by the manner in which these agencies for mass communication will be used.

Similarly, schools will not get far teaching brotherhood and human understanding to children who daily come from communities in which these principles are violated on every hand. Somehow the various business and community agencies must come to understand their crucial role in these connections. Such businesses and agencies have no right to demand miraculous performance on the part of education when they daily violate the

very principles and codes which they expect the schools to teach.

Here in America we have the most beautiful social and educational philosophy in the world. Stated in words our conceptions of democracy, of human freedom, of human brotherhood are the most challenging ideas ever developed. When, however, our current behaviors are evaluated in terms of these philosophies they are frequently found wanting. In many foreign countries there is a feeling that our verbal expressions of democracy and freedom are not really taken seriously by a large proportion of our people but are merely smoke screens behind which we operate very much as if these principles did not exist. This may be a harsh generalization but it is made too often by persons from other countries to be ignored by educators and statesmen in our own country.

We not only "can't do it alone" but we should not try to do it alone, for the simple reason that a lone effort on our part becomes ineffective in the very process of its performance. Schools need to enlist the cooperation of the parents and of citizens in the community, because only through such cooperation can there be effective education of children and also because the very cooperative procedure itself constitutes an education for the adult. It is only as adults in our community begin to share in the process of education that they will become aware of their own responsibilities. As long as we merely talk to them about such responsibilities they will go on blithely ignoring them. Once they become participants in the educative process it will be a different matter.

If newspapers, radio stations, movie theaters, and business establishments would all recognize their responsibility for the education of youth the schools' task would be relatively simple. In our public relations work we should constantly reiterate the responsibility of the community and make crystal clear the position that we "can't do it alone".

Copyright © 1946 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.