

# One World for Children

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It is the realist in today's world who understands that his concerns lie far beyond a nation's boundaries. Today's American educator cannot view his problem as existing simply between the boundaries of Canada and Mexico. Agnes Snyder of The Bank Street Schools, The Mills School, New York City, presents the world-wide consideration which all people must have for all children of the world, with a consequent revamping of values, if the great numbers of unknown children are to be salvaged.

RECENTLY, in a cathedral in Prague, the world's first war memorial to "The Unknown Child" was unveiled. In the altar a bronze plaque was placed, and beneath it a tiny casket containing the finger bone of a child—sex, nationality, parents unknown—who had died in a Nazi death march. World War I brought us "The Unknown Soldier;" World War II, "The Unknown Child." There were 1,800,000 boys and girls killed in Poland alone during the war years; 30,000 in the street battles of Warsaw in 1944.<sup>1</sup>

## These Unknown Children

Nor are they all dead—the unknown children. They are roaming by thousands over Europe and Asia, huddling for shelter in the rubble. They are part of the human mass that has found refuge in the camps for displaced persons. Many will never know their origins, birthplaces, parents, or names. They are the uprooted ones lacking all the precious identity with home. These are extremes, but there are practically no children in all the war-devastated countries who have escaped serious deprivation. Almost all are hungry—in a Budapest hospital twenty-five percent of the

children admitted in recent months were starving. Even when not racked with disease, undernourished bodies are not developing normally—fourteen-year-old boys in Athens today are three inches shorter than boys of the same age four years ago. Many have been orphaned—25,000 in Czechoslovakia. All are living under the most crowded of conditions at school and at home—twenty-five percent of the dwellings in industrial Germany were destroyed; in Nuernberg there are forty school houses where before there were 138. Almost all these children have known the shock of bombings, arrests, searches, and murders.

Very few of us in America know these children far from our shores. They are, in reality, *unknown children* to most of us. Not only have we not seen them but, more significant, we have no base of experience through which to interpret their plight. Our land has not been ravaged by war.

## Today's Children—Tomorrow's World

Five years, ten years, fifteen years from now as these children unknown to us grow into maturity, what kind of world will they make? Unless food, clothing, shelter, medical aid are secured for them in quantity many times that

<sup>1</sup> *Going to School in War-Devastated Countries.* A Publication of UNESCO and CIER, 1947.

now available, it is certain that as adults they will not only lack the physical stamina to carry on vigorously the staggering problems of reconstruction facing them, but by their very physical handicaps they, themselves, will impose upon the rest of the world an unprecedented medical problem. Meantime the toll of death continues—last year in some parts of Poland and Yugoslavia one baby in three died before he was a year old.

Intellectually, the picture is no brighter. The years that are upon us demand increasingly of greater numbers of people the ability to think and to engage in group action. Otherwise there is little hope for the democratic way of life. But children crowded into classrooms, almost as many as a hundred to a teacher, have little opportunity, even with teachers inspired with democratic zeal, to learn the techniques of thinking and of group cooperation. When, as in Germany, few teachers, though many are well-intentioned, have any comprehension of the democratic process, the prognosis for the future is grim. When, too, there are few books, papers, or magazines, horizons become very limited. Initiative, resourcefulness, the spirit of inquiry—all so important in the equipment of a people that would live democratically—are stifled when the teacher is the main source of knowledge and the final voice. Then the school becomes the training ground for the dictator.

With little equipment for play, almost no paper, crayons, paints, tools for the expressive arts, these children are keeping within them memories of the horrors they have known, their fears, their loneliness, their lack of love.

Small wonder that from all war-devastated countries comes the complaint that children are restless, nervous, irritable, suspicious, arrogant, hard. A very successful Norwegian educator at the close of her first year of teaching after the war declared: "This was the hardest year of teaching I have ever had. I have had to face more problems in this one year than in all my years of teaching before this. The children seemed so different . . . and perhaps I was different too."<sup>2</sup> Yes, these post-war children are difficult; even ours, who have suffered so much less, show effects of the war years. But regardless of how difficult these children, deprived of normal childish outlets of expression, may be, their infractions of social behavior now are only a shadow of the aggression and hostility that can be expected of them in adult life. Only wise guidance of normal outlets of expression and materials for expression and an outpouring of love and understanding, comparable to the food that must be sent them for their undernourished bodies, will prevent the distortion of attitude and behavior that present conditions must inevitably breed.

We have seen the brutality to which twentieth century man descended in World War II. We see his impotence daily as he struggles to solve the problems of human relationships in the post-war world. We look at all these physically, mentally, spiritually handicapped children of the war-devastated countries. And we ask: what of the future? The future can be no better than the

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<sup>2</sup> *The Teacher and the Post-War Child in War-Devastated Countries*, prepared by Leonard S. Kenworthy. Published by UNESCO, 1947.

people who make it. The adults of tomorrow no better than the children of today.

### **One World Imperative**

The possibility of One World of peace and understanding seems today farther off than it did when, not so long ago, the phrase came into use as an imperative for survival. But immediate events are too swift-moving and turbulent, human beings too varied in motivation and too unskilled in the art of cooperation to bring together quickly now the broken pieces of this world into unity. Can we learn quickly enough—quickly enough for survival?

The imperative remains as we see the line between East and West in Germany become more sharply drawn, as, indeed, we see the line between the Eastern and the Western worlds become more sharply drawn. In the meantime the scientists raise their voices in unison, as never before, warning us that a terrible force has been let loose in the world, a force that must be controlled lest we perish. And we come to no agreement as to ways and means of controlling atomic energy. We are piling up a terrible measure of problems and confusion for the adults of tomorrow—those physically, mentally, and spiritually sick children of today.

### **Toward One World Through Children**

Perhaps the approach toward One World can best be made through efforts to create many minor one worlds which will gradually fuse into one global world. To strive for a One World of children would seem a most practicable procedure. The nature of children makes it so. They know nothing,

until they are taught, of prejudices against others because of membership in group, class, or race. Children's values—again, until they are taught otherwise—are intrinsic, of the good earth. Unimpeded by irrelevancies, children move quickly and directly toward a goal. All this is in contrast to the prejudices, the irrelevancies, the hesitations with which adults clutter issues.

It will be far simpler to broaden the base of understanding among children than among adults. Kinship among children of different backgrounds in the same community is more common than among their elders. Easier, too, to establish relationships among the children of our land and those of other lands, especially today when relatives in the armed services have brought distant places close to children. The "here and now" is undergoing a subtle transformation through the sudden mobility that the war has brought upon us. As a result, it will be easier to bring our children and the children of other lands into contact. Family experiences bring the far-off close. The concept of the common bond of our humanity held clearly and firmly by adults and acted upon by them can be transmitted to children and become for them a guiding principle.

Since the ultimate achievement of One World will mean a revamping of our values, it is of particular importance that the tendency toward intrinsic values in childhood be preserved and expanded. This means the sheer sensory and muscular enjoyment of sun, air, wind, earth, of the sights, sounds, smells, feel of things around us; the appreciation of companionship, of

friendship; the joy of the creative effort; the pleasures of exploration; the joy in quiet times. It means also the guarding against the formation of values on the mere basis of money cost, of the fashion of the time.

The quickness and directness of action of childhood is again a requisite of our imperative One World. To keep this tendency in childhood, guiding it toward increasingly important objectives, tempering rashness with thoughtfulness and planning is to insure group cooperative action in adulthood.

Of course, there are many other lesser spheres that cannot be neglected while developing the One World of children. Some of these One Worlds may be on an institutional basis such as the efforts toward unity of action by the churches. Others may be spheres of human interest and directed, like the food conferences, toward solving basic pressing problems. All such efforts are mutually re-enforcing and tend toward the fusion of the minor One Worlds into the global One World. Our concern with this child world must take into account the activities in these other worlds and utilize them wherever possible.

### Finding the Way

In working toward the One World of children, more than a mere modification of procedures is needed. While it is true that certain established principles operate and must be taken into account today as much as ever—growth through self-activity, the continuity of growth, differences in rate and pattern of growth, cataclysmic events of the war and of the post-war years, and the new strange era into which we are being

thrust demand new emphasis in application.

Taking into account the effect of the war years upon children means, first of all, more realistic concern with food, clothing, and shelter than ever before. As early in life as it is consistent with the capabilities and interests of children, they should participate in meeting their basic needs. There will be more of a work and less of a play approach as children garden, sew, and build. This should be as true in our country as in the lands where the necessity is far greater. For our children can be led into a One World fellowship with the children of the war-devastated countries by both knowing what the needs of the latter are and how they are meeting them, and by finding the most intelligent ways by which they, on this side of the world, can help the children on the other side in their great need. The spirit of play need not be lost because the work has great importance. Quite the contrary. However, there may be, for a while at least, a sharper distinction made earlier in the life of children between the kind of play that is purely recreational and the more serious work aspects of life.

Another major emphasis due to the effect of the war is upon corrective measures. The educational process can never move along smoothly in accordance with a perfectly planned pattern. There are too many accidents; life itself is too imperfect; children are too variable. But today with so large a part of the child population of the earth seriously harmed—physically, intellectually, and spiritually—by the shock experiences they have known, techniques for dealing with abnormal con-

ditions in all three areas must be developed. There is no more reason to believe that processes designed for normally healthy children will be entirely adequate for these children with whom life has dealt so harshly than to assume an ordinarily good regimen of living will cure cancer. There is imperative need for the cooperation of specialists in all aspects of human growth and development in devising corrective techniques to salvage great numbers of children destined otherwise to become social liabilities.

### The Task Ahead

When we look forward to the atomic era with its equal chances on the one hand for untold richness of life of man on earth, and, on the other, for total

destruction, our imaginations in this chaotic moment simply cannot be freed sufficiently to plan with any definiteness either for the utilization of the potential values of the atomic age or for the prevention of disaster. But we can say with sureness that this frightening era must be anticipated; that plans must be made for meeting it, that the planning of many groups must be coordinated; that, in every quarter, techniques of cooperation must be developed, and that these techniques, as well as the will to cooperate, must be taught to children. In the last analysis, the One World of Childhood is the most potent sphere of influence toward the development of the One World, the imperative of the twentieth century.



### A NEW PUBLICATION

Building skills of democratic competency is a topic of major consideration in the discussion on the organization of the elementary school to serve the nation, one of the chapter themes in the ASCD 1947 Yearbook, *Organizing the Elementary School for Living and Learning*. You won't want to miss this book which will be ready for distribution early in November. It discusses the important topic of organization in relation to the elementary school's service to the child, the community, and the world, in addition to that of service to the nation. Willard E. Goslin and Mary Beauchamp of the Minneapolis schools are co-chairmen. Teachers, principals, and supervisors from four widely scattered parts of the country are responsible for the liberal amount of illustrative material included. ASCD members receive the yearbook as a part of their membership. Others may order the book separately. It sells for \$2.25 and may be ordered from the ASCD office, 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington 6, D.C. Use the order blank on page 55. If you are a member and therefore entitled to the yearbook, pass the order blank on to an elementary classroom teacher for her use.

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