

Tools for Learning

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A CULTURE IS KNOWN by what it does and what it produces. The best way to understand a people and to get the feeling of the way they live is to look at the way they use the materials they find about them. A Greek temple, a Persian rug, or a Victorian chair speak more eloquently about life habits and values of these people than their preachments.

One example of this is found in the contradiction between Victorian statements of morality and Victorian practices. In spite of their outward allegiance to polite manners and modesty, the underlying pattern of the Victorian society was motivated by greed, ruthlessness, and the so-called "rugged individualism." It was basically a garish period in which the furniture, homes, and cities portrayed life more truly than the stated values of the time.

Today we also have been unsuccessful in translating our commitments to democratic values into the fabric of society. Witness our slums; mass produced and shoddy merchandise; cheap, vulgar statements in the cinema, music, and literature; and our expensive public buildings, with the symbols of a dozen other cultures. These are signs of the times and speak more accurately of our values than do our words.

At times courageous and honest men who are true to the heritage of our ideas buck and penetrate this mass of trivia. These are the men who stand forthright in their own integrity, anchoring themselves in the solid traditions of the past, but who do not beg, borrow, or steal from them. Although the number of such leaders is small, their message is being accepted by more of us every day. The result is a George Washington bridge, a TVA dam, a housing project, livable homes, an Eames' chair, or an egg beater that works. There is an awakening in the land. The few glimpses that we have had of the potential

beauty that modern technology can create are stirring the imaginations of more and more people. However, the beautiful world that we foresee will remain a dream until a more creative approach to the social, economic, and political problems of the world is adopted.

The responsibility of the schools is to provide opportunities for children to experience learning situations in which the technological as well as the human relationships of our democracy are present. This cannot be done through courses and credits. No matter how good our art instruction is in teaching skills with tools and materials, and no matter how good our other academic courses are in showing the relationship of man to his world, our students will not get the kind of insight they need to understand the relationship of man and the machine until they can participate in *real* creative enterprises.

A pioneering attempt to do this is being made by the Allendale Farm School. Students and faculty are working together in cooperation with community agencies to set up a toy and furniture factory, print shop, and food processing plant. These work experiences will be the kind of activity around which the whole curriculum will be designed. After three months with this program, it is already evident that there is greater growth in the number of varied learning experiences than in previous formal classroom work. The need to expand one's environment in order to function in such real projects has made it necessary to extend the campus to the local town and nearby cities. In the future, Allendale School hopes to see the curriculum include a wider sphere of community contacts. It is through this integration of real living situations and directed learning that children will be able to adjust better to the intricacies of modern technology.

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