

What Are Life Needs?

To say that instructional programs should be designed to help students meet their needs is to be guilty of a truism. Just what these needs are is not always clearly stated. In this series of three articles, Harry Bard, Assistant Director of the Curriculum Bureau, Baltimore, Maryland, City Schools; J. Paul Leonard, President of San Francisco State College; and Henry Harap, Associate Director of the Division of Surveys and Field Services, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee, present their points of view as to the meaning of the term "life needs."

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

Harry Bard

MEETING LIFE NEEDS involves a dual responsibility. First, there are those needs which are related primarily to the self. Inherent in the American tradition is the concept that the individual has dignity and respect in his own right. Moreover, in our democratic concept we believe that the individual personality is the cornerstone of group living. To improve the group we must enrich each individual member. Therefore, the fullest development of the individual is sought both to improve his personal living and to advance the group to which he belongs.

Developmental Tasks

Education for life needs will concern itself first with individual developmental tasks. Fortunately, the literature in this area has become increasingly rich in its applications to different developmental stages, e. g., early childhood, pre-adolescence, young adulthood, and old age. Furthermore, in the last few years, the emphasis on longitudinal studies in personality and child development has brought forth great-

est promise for application to learning situations. By studying the growth and behavior of one child and noting such influences as physical development and affectional relationships, the teacher can apply this knowledge to an understanding of many children.

Thousands of teachers all over the country are participating in organized child study programs. Daniel A. Prescott and his staff at the University of Maryland, through an organized three-year plan in child study, have made outstanding contributions toward helping teachers understand children. Larger numbers of teachers, though not a part of organized programs in child study, have benefited tremendously from the writings of Arthur T. Jersild, Willard C. Olson, and Fritz Redl, to name but a few of the many contributors in this field.

Too numerous to identify completely, these individual developmental tasks are concerned with relating one's self to peers, with keeping healthy, with avoiding accidents, with communicating by words and numbers in daily

transactions, with earning a living, and with other common personal requirements. It is important, however, that *education for life needs recognizes the unique relationships between the individual developmental tasks and the common personal requirements*. For while all must have a concern for avoiding accidents, Mary, in early childhood, perhaps gives much attention to crossing streets; her fourth grade sister Jane spends time on how to ride a bike safely; and her high school brother Frank takes driver education lessons. Indeed, if Frank finds that he has faulty depth perception vision, he will need to make individual adaptations and leave more than the usual space between his car and the one in front. So safety as a common personal requirement will appear in the curriculum for Mary, Jane, and Frank, but the emphasis will always be on the individual developmental tasks these youngsters face.

Consider Society's Demands

Education for life needs must also concern itself with societal requirements. It is certainly a truism that the individual does not develop in a vacuum. Indeed, society's developmental tasks often become those of the individual! For example, government's relationships to the part-time worker require that many high school students understand how to fill out income tax and social security forms. Such requirements become the developmental tasks of the individual, and often it is difficult to decide whether a life need is imposed by individual or societal requirements.

Yet, the common requirements of society like those of man are fairly

identifiable. Leon C. Marshall points out that there are basic social processes such as establishing standards, transmitting and accumulating culture, and conserving and using natural resources which hold true for all groups—large and small, past and present.

However, it is not enough to consider these common societal requirements. Each community, like each individual, has its own developmental tasks and growth patterns.

In a recent article in *Educational Leadership*, Eduard C. Lindeman identified some basic concerns of the American community and included social security, housing, medical care, and international commitments. A mere listing of the major organizations of the United States and its specialized agencies—health, food, education, transportation—indicates the developmental tasks of the modern world. Stuart Chase, John L. Childs, Harold Benjamin, Ernest O. Melby, and others have done much to interpret societal needs in terms of their educational implications.

Education for life needs should take into account the *distinctive relationships between particular community developmental tasks and common societal requirements*. While all communities are concerned with transmitting and accumulating culture, Maintown has yet to develop a public library, whereas Anytown is expanding its public junior college. Moreover, Maintown needs to borrow money for its program and win over public opinion to the general acceptance of a library. Each community's developmental tasks will be affected by such characteristics as wealth, mores, environmental influences, values, and standards.

Developing the Individual in a Social Scene

The individual's developmental tasks and those of the community are inter-related in a life-needs program. Mary's task in learning to walk to school safely will be more difficult if her community has built a school near railroad tracks. Whether we like it or not, this hazard to safety is part of Mary's problem. The curriculum in a life-needs program will need to note both individual and community factors. It will seek to help Mary cross streets safely and will em-

phasize observing railroad signals. Moreover, it will aim to build community understanding about locating schools in the future. Education for life needs will note the dual responsibility to individual and society.

Thus the life-needs program will aim to develop the individual in a social scene. The curriculum will be concerned with individual developmental tasks as they are related to common personal requirements. It will be further concerned with particular community tasks as they relate to common social needs.

THE SCHOOL AND LIFE NEEDS

J. Paul Leonard

LIFE NEEDS have been frequently defined by psychologists in terms of psychological satisfactions and frustrations. Sociologists usually define them by showing the desirable actions of individuals with regard to institutions, ideals, and their fellow men. Subject teachers define them in terms of skills, knowledge, or power in dealing with facts or principles.

There is no *one* way to define "life needs," but whatever definition (usually a classification of experience) is accepted, it should be useful in the selection of instructional material which will be effective in producing the desired results. It should be specific enough to help in making a choice among curriculum materials. The classifications should be few in number, not a major listing of specific goals to be achieved, and the classifications should be closely related to human experience so that a need is at once apparent. By way of illustration, let us

indicate the principal life needs that the school should strive to meet.

Associating with Peers

First, there is the need for learning to behave the way your peers expect you to behave. This at once recognizes differences in capacity, achievement, and expectancy. It likewise makes foremost the pressure of public opinion and the need for discovering and accepting principles, ideals, and standards of the group in which you live. It presupposes maturity, self-control, courage, honesty, stability, and those other attributes which produce psychological maturity. Inherent in this need are the qualities ordinarily considered those of a good and informed citizen and a stable and energetic individual—knowledge, action, thought.

Earning a Living

Second, there is the need for getting and holding a job. This implies all the

Copyright © 1950 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.