Children and Youth Today

Ours is a period of crisis, of anxiety. Unease, like a restless autumn wind, roves the earth. It carries a disquieting rumble of a not-so-distant war. People of one nation regard those of other nations—often with hope and confidence, sometimes with distrust and fear. In such a time, it is well for us to know our purposes; it is well for us to continue to grow in our ability to attain these purposes.

What are important things for school people to remember in these days? One is that the present has always been a critical period, a time of anxiety. Another, that the major responsibility of school people is to the children and youth who throng our schools.

Each day we come face-to-face with these boys and girls—in the classroom, on the playground, along the street, in their homes. We have the privilege of being nearer than any other persons save parents, to this restless procession of boys and girls. This brings school people a special responsibility. We must see our job clearly: Our concern is with our young people and with the times in which we live. Through acceptance of this responsibility we gain strength and courage.

Children and youth today, as in every former day, represent the aspiration of our world. What we do for them, whether we will it or not, expresses our concept of the future. As we hope for a future of freedom, security and peace, do we provide, in schools and homes and communities, an atmosphere and environment which foster these conditions?

The world our children and youth are inheriting is an anxious one. They had no part in stirring up the winds of unease. Yet children and youth, as well as adults, are affected by these bitter gales. Theirs is a smaller world than ours was. No longer is disaster as individual a matter as it once may have been. A threat to an individual, whether a threat of war or disease or discrimination—now is likely to represent a threat to all members of a nation, or a hemisphere, or a world.

What is the answer children and youth give in this anxious time in this critical period that is not of their making? They join with us, as the young have ever done, in facing with hope and courage the uncertain future, determined that it shall be better than the past.

"The day has passed," reads the declaration of young people at the time of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, "when we can be concerned with ourselves only. What we want for ourselves, we want for all people. We recognize our responsibilities as good citizens. These are the goals we have set for ourselves as young people to achieve in cooperation with adults."

How can we meet our responsibility to children and youth? Only by acting in accordance with the best that we know or can learn from others; by a re dedication to the belief that all persons—including children and youth—who are affected by a problem have a right and a responsibility to work together to identify and to seek ways of solving the problem; and by remembering at all times that what we do for children and youth is so final. It is done in passing, and neither they nor we can travel this road again.—Robert R. Leeper, associate editor.