

What Are the GOALS of Modern Secondary Education?

This author presents a practical and penetrating analysis of the objectives of modern secondary education. Each of these is examined in the light of the important attributes of democratic living.

WE SEEM TO BE continually asking ourselves, "What are the goals of secondary education?" Almost always we feel that our answers add little to the realization of these goals on the part of our high school boys and girls. Perhaps it is because we are impatient or perhaps it is because these goals are defined in terms of content, largely static, instead of in terms of human function—i.e., method, process, "the how" of achieving is not considered an integral part of each goal.

Goal Setting Is Not New

One of the major statements of the past, which made a contribution toward the maintenance of some unity in secondary programs, was that of the seven cardinal principles: health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, worthy use of leisure, vocation, citizenship and ethical character. Worthy as these are, little is implied concerning the how of accomplishment in the goal-statement.

More recently other statements¹ have been made centering around performing certain tasks and developing skills, attitudes and understandings. These later attempts are more helpful for us since experience seems to show

¹Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948.

that the mere listing of static goals and even our conscious acceptance of them will not, of itself, bring about goal-attainment. For example, let us take health. Do boys and girls learn cleanliness by reading, thinking and verbalizing about the necessity for and advantage of cleanliness; while at the same time they are unable, because of inadequate facilities, to shower after physical education? In the same vein do boys and girls show their knowledge of nutrition simply by answering test questions correctly or by buying milk at the cafeteria instead of soft drinks at the hamburger stand? Does a sixteen year old boy display a knowledge of citizenship by giving an excellent talk on sportsmanship or by gracefully accepting the umpire's decision when he is called out on an attempted steal to second base? We hold that learning which is not revealed in action is more wishful than real. It is our position that learning and doing are one and the same. The goal or goals of secondary education should be defined in terms of action. Such will be our attempt.

Democratic Living

The goal of secondary education is not uniquely different. The tasks change with age but the central goal remains—to maintain and improve our democratic way of living. Oversimpli-

fied? Possibly. Not detailed enough? We'll get to that. For the moment let's remember that democratic living is a daily obligation of six, sixteen or sixty year olds. It is not something we prepare to do tomorrow, except as this preparation is rooted in needs felt today.

The secondary school cannot be primarily concerned with imparting knowledge per se; rather it must be concerned with helping boys and girls use knowledge for living more effectively today. To do this well young people must be afforded the opportunity to attack their problems—most of which are of immediate concern but some of which do not exert full impact until later. For example, achieving a reasonable degree of emotional independence from adults is an immediate common problem for adolescents, while becoming assured of economic independence is less imminent and more differentiated.

In our course offerings we tend to call those courses dealing mainly with problems of immediate and common concern, general, and those dealing mainly with problems impacting later and of differentiated concern, preparatory. Let us hasten to add that many times neither general nor preparatory courses are problem oriented. In these instances the main concern is usually with memorization and development of academic skills. It is our feeling that such courses do not assist as much

in the achievement of the goal of effective democratic living as do problem oriented courses. We will not say that all educational experiences must be problem centered but certainly this should be the emphasis.

Functional Attributes of a Democratic Man

Let us take a look at the functional attributes of a person who is an effective democrat. What are these attributes? Do these give us any leads as to the kinds of experiences necessary to produce them? Do our courses, activities and teaching processes produce these kinds of experiences within the individual boy or girl?

We think that some of the important democratic attributes are these: (1) using the method of intelligence; (2) appreciating and seeking to understand the other fellow—his values and attitudes, successes and failures, hopes and aspirations; (3) being truthful with and about oneself; (4) being active and productive; (5) believing in cooperative action; (6) using and continuing to develop skills of group participation; and (7) respecting due process of law. Each of these attributes is one of doing and is developed, or fails to develop, because of the quality of the individual's experience.

Our general goal then is the development of democratic persons as defined above and as revealed in human behavior. However, this is not the only obligation of the secondary school. The other obligation is to be concerned with these developmental tasks,² im-

² Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948.

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posed by physiology and the culture, upon our adolescent boys and girls:

1. Accepting one's physique and accepting a masculine or feminine role.
2. Developing new relationships with age mates of both sexes.
3. Becoming emotionally independent of parents and other adults.
4. Achieving assurance of economic independence.
5. Selecting and preparing for an occupation.
6. Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence.
7. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior.
8. Preparing for marriage and family life.
9. Building conscious values in harmony with an adequate scientific word-picture.

Are We Hitting the Target?

To evaluate our efforts we suggest two types of criteria: the first having to do with the kind and quality of the resulting individual experiences which contribute to or detract from the development of democratic attributes and the second having to do with task achievement in accord with developmental age.

Concerning the development of democratic attributes what do our children find us believing as revealed by our words and deeds? What effect do our actual words and deeds have on the development of the parenthesized attributes?

(Using the scientific method):

"Why do it this way? Simply because I say so!"

"John, you're not challenging what I said, are you?"

or

"There are often a number of effective ways to attack a problem. Just be sure you understand what you do."

"We must always be willing to have our ideas or facts challenged and our conclusions tested."

(Appreciating others):

"Right from the beginning I warn you, class, that I'll tolerate no cheating."

"Why must you be so careless? Do you want to grow up to be a garbage collector?"

or

"Let's be friends."

"All necessary work is dignified."

(Being truthful with self):

"Anyone can master this if he will only work hard enough."

"How can he possibly learn anything? He only has an I.Q. of 82."

or

"We don't all achieve at the same rate or with equal effort but we can all learn."

"The wise man does not rebel against his limitation nor does he sell his possibilities short."

(Being active and productive):

"Yes, we could learn a lot about nutrition by feeding guinea pigs, but it takes too long. Besides we can learn just as well by reading about other experiments."

or

"O. K., let's try it."

(Cooperating):

"Always do your own work."

"I expect everyone to cooperate with me."

or

"We can certainly help each other learn. Of course, there are times when we must work without help in order to test ourselves."

"Cooperation is a two-way street of give and take—an action resulting from common agreement."

(Skills of group work):

"Oh, yes! I've tried organizing committees but it's a waste of time."

or

"How else can we learn except to participate and analyze results of our actions?"

(Respecting due process):

"When the person who did that confesses, I'll let all of you go."

"I didn't see it happen but I know you did it!"

or

"We believe people are innocent until proved otherwise. We think it is better that the guilty be allowed to escape rather than risk punishing the innocent."

Democratic ways are easy to verbalize, harder to practice. Let's look carefully at what we do, for it is our deeds more than our words that influence the direction of growth.

All Teachers Are Concerned

The developmental tasks listed previously in this article change with maturity and with varying cultural demands. They do not suddenly change when a boy or girl goes from algebra to physical education or from social

studies to woodshop. Each task has great implication for our way of working with boys and girls and each makes some demand upon the content offered in the secondary program. By way of illustration let us consider the implications of but two of the tasks, achieving emotional independence and selecting and preparing for a vocation.

Increasing willingness to make decisions and to assume responsibility for the consequences is positive evidence of growing emotional independence. All of us then must be certain that our actions encourage this development in boys and girls. Too, all of us must constantly seek to provide decision-making opportunities consistent with the level of individual development and the possible impact of the ensuing consequence.

The task of selecting and preparing for an occupation is of broad scope. It includes learning about one's interests and abilities, developing communicative skills, becoming acquainted with the requirements of vocations possible for the particular individual and using all in course selection. This task is further given recognition in program building as evidenced by the provision of required exploratory courses in many junior high school programs and pre-vocational experiences at the senior high level.

A thoughtful reflection upon each of the developmental tasks can reveal vital implications for every one of us in our contacts with boys and girls. Such reflection is always appropriate and often productive of greater goal-realization.



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