

Philosophy and Values for the Future

"The values which emerge from an analysis of classroom teaching are the stuff of which philosophy of education is made." Basic principles of policy formulation may assist in such an analysis.

FEW elements contribute as much to the success of an educational program as a faculty's having a philosophy. Yet most "philosophies" that faculties work out are practically useless. This seeming paradox may perhaps be dispelled if consideration is given to the manner in which faculties often evolve their philosophies.

Someone advances the idea that a school should formulate its theory of education. Accrediting committees sometimes "request" statements of educational philosophy, administrators occasionally want to publish a statement of purposes as a part of a school's public relations program, or an individual staff member may get fired up in a summer session course and return with the conviction that every good school ought to re-evaluate its objectives. Whatever the source of the idea, a school may undertake the task of stating its basic philosophy. Usually a committee is appointed. It meets and decides to canvass the literature—statements of aims formulated by national committees, philosophy of education textbooks, and brochures published by other school systems. From these sources are culled those statements which strike the fancy of the members of the committee. Their efforts are then submitted to the faculty as a whole and,

after minor revisions, accepted. The formulation of a philosophy is thus finished, filed and forgotten.

Policy Formulation

Is it any wonder such a "philosophy" is next to useless? And even though the formulation of educational theory has not followed precisely the pattern just described, even though significant refinements in technique have been employed, basic principles of policy formulation may well have been ignored. These principles are suggested by the following questions:

1. Is the entire staff convinced the school's objectives need to be re-evaluated? Do all faculty members really believe a philosophy is needed to make their day-to-day decisions intelligent and effective? The first step in problem solving is to become aware of the existence of the problem. It is one thing to recognize a need intellectually. It is another matter to know a need behaviorally. The latter comes only when experience is analyzed in such a way that basic problems are identified. A teacher may listen to someone explain why a school should have a philosophy. Perhaps he may come to agree intellectually. He may even serve willingly on a committee that has been given the task of formulating such

a philosophy. But unless his recognition of the need for a philosophy comes from an analysis of his own teaching experience, the problem is not genuinely his. Thus it would seem that *the formulation of a philosophy of education might well begin with a consideration of the problems teachers and administrators actually face.*

2. Is the relation of philosophy to practice actually perceived? Do teachers really see how they can utilize theory in making practical decisions? We are often told that a person needs a philosophy to guide or direct his behavior. From this we deduce that if a person can state in an articulate manner a set of consistent beliefs, his behavior will be molded thereby. This is a *non sequitur* of the first order. For have not all of us upon occasion become aware of a discrepancy between someone's behavior and the behavior expected of that person in light of his stated beliefs? Do such discrepancies result from man's hypocrisy? A less cynical explanation may be more accurate. It seems more likely they result from our inclination to identify stated beliefs with values actually held. That these two are not identical should be recognized if the distinction just made between intellectual and behavioral acceptance is perceived. We may have been told that we ought to believe in certain values so long and so logically that eventually we come to accept these values intellectually and to express them verbally.

At the same time, our experience may have taught us a different set of values. If we remain unaware of this, moral conflict results and we are constantly torn between what we "think" we ought to do and what our experience leads us to desire. However, when our values emerge from a thorough analysis of our own experience, this conflict does not arise and

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in this case there is little likelihood that the relation of philosophy¹ to practice will escape us. Thus it would seem that *a philosophy of education should consist of those values that emerge from an analysis of attempts to solve educational problems.*

3. Are the original sources of values as well as secondary sources tapped? Do teachers study the learners and the social order as well as philosophical literature? Wherever the educational process goes on there will be found two indispensable ingredients—a learner and a culture. That which is learned results from the interaction of the two. This being the case, it would seem to follow that in formulating their values, teachers should study children and society.

Descartes,² in maintaining we learn better from life than from letters, went so far as to state that "to converse with those of other centuries is almost the same thing as to travel. It is good to know something of the customs of different peoples in order to judge more sanely our own. . . . But when one employs too much time in travelling, one becomes a stranger in one's own country, and when one is too curious about things which were practiced in past centuries, one is

¹ The term "philosophy" has countless connotations. It may refer to a stated or written set of beliefs, it might refer to the search for truth, or it can designate a configuration of values that have emerged from an analysis of experience. While each of these uses is legitimate, it is the latter which is here advocated.

² Descartes. "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking for Truth in the Sciences." Quoted in Ulich's, *Three Thousand Years of Educational Wisdom*, p. 315. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.

usually very ignorant about those which are practiced in our own time." Indeed, Descartes may have underestimated the value of the written word, for surely we would be foolish indeed to ignore the wisdom of the greatest minds of all the ages. It would be well if all teachers were familiar with the educational classics for they are a fruitful source of suggestions. Still, it is well to remember that the wisdom of the sages was distilled from the study of man and his culture. Emerson, in his essay on self-reliance, remarks, "The highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato and Milton is that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but what *they* thought. . . . In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts."³ Therefore, *the study of the learner and his social order as well as the writings of philosophers and educational theorists is essential to the development of a sound philosophy of education.*

4. Do teachers consider all the aspects of an experience and all the consequences of an action when they analyze their educational practices and procedures? Are long range results as well as immediate effects considered? A few paragraphs back it was stated that some times there is a conflict between the values to which we give lip service and those our experiences yield. It was then stated that when our values emerge from a thorough analysis of our own experience, such conflicts do not arise. A casual reading of these sentences might lead one to believe that he was being urged to ignore the moral injunctions of elders and ancestors for the pleasures promised by experience. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reader who harbors such a belief has either overlooked or slighted the meaning of the word

"thorough." An analysis of one's experience must indeed be thorough or the values which emerge therefrom may be quite indefensible. For example, the teacher who uses sarcasm to quiet a noisy student may defend the practice by stating, "I know from experience that sarcasm works, for when I employ it, pupils cease talking." But has such a teacher considered all the aspects of the experience and all the consequences of his practice? Has he analyzed the long range results as well as the immediate effects? If we consider only the immediate satisfaction or pleasure that an experience brings, we have failed to analyze it thoroughly. We are intellectually dishonest and we become morally delinquent. Thus it follows that *a thorough analysis of experience is a prerequisite to the formulation of a defensible educational philosophy.*

5. Are the members of the staff aware of the assumptions that underlie their procedures? Do teachers and administrators ask themselves why they do that which they do? It has already been stated that the values which emerge from an analysis of classroom teaching are the stuff of which philosophy of education is made. But just how do values emerge? We may be faced with a problem, analyze it carefully, consider possible solutions, even hit upon one that we feel solves the problem successfully and never be aware of evolving any values. When this happens it may be that we have failed to identify the assumptions upon which the solution rests. We may not have asked ourselves such questions as, "To what concept of human nature must I subscribe in order to advocate this?" or "If this is how I would proceed, what must I believe concerning how man comes to know?" When we raise such questions as these, it becomes clear that all our ac-

³ Quoted in Ulich, *op. cit.*, p. 594.

tions are based upon beliefs. And our values are related to such beliefs. For if we hold that man is a rational animal or that it is his nature to grow, we are likely to value critical thinking and growth. Hence, *the identification of assumptions underlying educational practice is essential to the formulation of a consistent philosophy.*

6. Do teachers test the values which emerge from an analysis of experience in subsequent practice and, in light of the results which follow, do they reformulate, if need be, these values? Is a theory of education something which once formulated remains fixed or is it something which is continually refined throughout life? Philosophy of education is often regarded as a foundation subject. In some teacher education institutions prospective teachers are required to take it in their preservice program of studies. The impression may be conveyed that the subject should serve the teacher in much the same way a concrete block aids the house builder. That is to say, it is something which, once correctly laid, gives support by staying put. This is ridiculous. What could arrest one's growth and development more than the belief that one had the key by which he could solve all his problems? Or to put it differently, isn't it absurd to entrust to a person who is no longer educable the task of educating others? Prospective teachers may indeed receive benefits from a preservice course in educational philosophy and the latter may correctly be regarded as foundational.

From what has been said previously, is it not clear that philosophy grows out of experience as well as modifies experience? Consequently, *the formulation of a philosophy of education is a task that is never completed but is always ongoing.*

7. Are all members of the faculty involved in formulating a theory of education? Do teachers and administrators realize that while they can receive help from others, ultimately they, themselves, must solve their own problems? If all educators face problems and if each must somehow struggle with his own, it follows that for a staff to expect a committee to formulate a school's philosophy is analogous to Junior's asking his father to do his homework for him. In both instances, problems may get solved, but they are not the faculty's or Junior's. In both cases, benefits may result, but it is the committee and father who gain the most. Indeed, it would seem that *if a philosophy of education is to do the job expected of it—namely, influence practice—its formulation must be the task of the entire staff.*⁴

It is not claimed that there are only seven basic principles that deserve to be considered in formulating educational theory, but space limitation prohibits further enumeration. To this point, only the manner in which values evolve has been discussed. Nothing has been said yet about what values teachers should hold. But if there is nothing more essential to the development of a sound educational program than a faculty's formulating a philosophy of education, can it not also be said that nothing is more important to the development of effective living than a student's formulating sound values?

If teachers and administrators need to perceive the relation of philosophy to practice, do not students equally need to

⁴ If each staff member must work out his own set of values, it follows that any faculty composed of more than one person is likely to have more than one philosophy of education. To speak of any particular school's philosophy, then, is to refer to those values upon which its faculty agree.

perceive the relation of the curriculum to life out of school? If so it would seem to follow that one value to which teachers should subscribe is the importance of helping learners analyze their problems so thoroughly that the values they acquire are defensible. When democracy is regarded as more than a form of government, when it is held to be a way of life,

its essence is found in the need for every human being to participate in the formulation of values and ends that regulate his life and conduct. Thus, the process in which teachers engage in working out a philosophy to help them meet the emerging needs of the future is the same process in which students should engage in order to prepare for the challenges of tomorrow.

EARL C. KELLEY

The Road We Must Take

“Research in learning tells us that the teaching-learning process has to be human-centered. . . . This calls for not just a little fixing of our educational method, but in many cases a complete change of direction.”

AS WE LOOK upon the social scene today, we see the human race beset by grave problems and dangers. We do not need to name them here, for they are well known. It is altogether apparent, however, that if any of us are to survive we must have better, more social, and more enlightened people. We have been too free with the words “must,” “should,” “imperative,” in the past. We ought to have saved them for now. Before these words are finished, we may, in our inadequacy, have resorted to race suicide as a solution to all our vexations.

Also, as we look, we see our great school system, enormous in size, reaching to all of the people. It is perhaps man's greatest social experiment. Its purpose is to produce a people who are social and enlightened so that they can live together in peace and mutual aid. This great school system has been in existence long enough so that it should

have produced this enlightenment by now. That it has not done so is the cause of our alarm.

We must recognize the possibility that in view of this fact, the school may have been running on the wrong track, carrying us all in the wrong direction. This is in the direction of authoritarianism, materialism, and their resulting isolation. This direction tends to produce people who lack skill in or capacity for mutual aid.

We are most fortunate, however, to have this great institution with its potential for human betterment. If we did not have it, we would indeed have cause for despair. We are fortunate, too, to have the findings of research into the nature of human growth and development, so that we can see a more promising path for our education to take. Having the school and scientific knowledge of the way in which growth and improvement

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