

Learning To Live in the Foreseeable Future

“Education for the foreseeable future must be guided simultaneously by two landmarks (a) our keenest insight into the problems of contemporary life with their implications for the future, and (b) our finest ideals and aspirations as to what it means to be a man and to live.”

IT IS startling to speculate on the fact that most of the children in today's elementary schools will live through the first quarter of the twenty-first century. What problems of life will these children encounter? What will they need to know? How will they have to manage their lives? What kind of persons will they need to become?

Such are some of the fundamental questions to which we must direct attention in thinking about “Education for the Foreseeable Future.” Indeed these are the very questions which concern us in education today. But answering them means to predict the problems of the future at a time when we ourselves are keenly aware of the accelerated changes in our own life's problems during the past half century.

Because we have not been too successful in meeting the immense changes in our own problems of living, we *could* choose to educate our children for practical living in an unpredictable world—to acquire basic skills, to learn to adjust, to accept uncertainties, and to deal with emerging problems. I would contend, however, that such an educational goal is limited and inadequate. In fact, it fails

to recognize the requirements of life in the foreseeable future. Such a goal is dangerous because it is expedient. It lacks direction and ultimately becomes devoid of positive purpose. Furthermore, it is contrary to our finest traditions.

Education for the foreseeable future must be guided simultaneously by two landmarks: (a) our keenest insight into the problems of contemporary life with their implications for the future, and (b) our finest ideals and aspirations as to what it means to be a man and to live. Insight into the problems of contemporary life is the reality framework in which education must be conceived; ideals and aspirations are the potentialities we envisage for building a life out of the problems we encounter.

The foreseeable future will be the age of organization, automation and the atom. Tomorrow's education will be the product of our current aspirations as to the life our children can build for themselves in this age. These aspirations will guide us in organizing our schools and in selecting curriculum content. “. . . any content selected . . . for the curriculum amounts to an assertion about the nature of man. By what we encourage children

to do and to avoid, we guide them toward what we think they ought to become."¹ The education we provide for the future is the expression of our courage and our faith in our children and the kinds of persons they can become.

Implications of Contemporary Problems

Our most critical problems stem from difficulties encountered in the growing complexity, increasing instability and depersonalization of contemporary life. Today's paramount need is for the recovery of distinctively human qualities of life—the feelings of the individual and his capacities for self-fulfillment. Today our capacities to control the physical environment are outstripping our ability to manage ourselves.

During our own lifetime we have witnessed the growth in the staggering productivity of American industrial genius fed by research in the physical sciences—the miracle of electric and petroleum energy is about to be overtaken by the magic of the atom; electronic automation masterminds complex sequences in production routine; the fruits of nature are being supplanted by the magic of synthetic composition in the laboratory; scarcity of goods has been turned into abundance and surplus; money is plentiful; work is easier and much less time consuming; and the average life span has been vastly increased.

Our generation has also witnessed great advances in the social arena. While we reward individual ingenuity, we have learned to recognize the importance of minimal human needs in a plentiful economy. Within the past generation, far sighted social legislation has become axiomatic in American life. In these very

days we are slowly but determinedly erasing those customs which have segregated a large segment of our population to the status of second class citizenship. We have even made progress in international affairs. Although we still face terrible hazards because our actions are often awkward and unproductive, most of us have grown to understand that as a nation we must fulfill our responsibilities in the shrinking space of the world.

We are paying a heavy price, however, for the progress made at the expense of new and unsolved problems which are growing in intensity. It is small wonder that we are experiencing a national restlessness and dissatisfaction—a feeling of void and an increasing need to pay attention to human values.

The accumulation of knowledge, the creation of worldly goods and the readjustments in family and communal living have "pulled the rug" from under our legacy of 19th century modes of thought and conceptions of life and education. A good deal of our material progress has come through the deliberate obsolescence of still useable material goods by supplanting them with somewhat newer fashions. As a people, we have been quick to accept changes in the fashion of material goods. We have been willing to verbalize traditional values although our mode of living has grown increasingly contradictory to them. We have not paid sufficient attention to the need for reconstituting our value systems to harness our changing way of life into harmony with our finest traditions.

The obsolescence of material goods such as washing machines, refrigerators, automobiles and Christian Dior's latest

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¹ Arthur W. Foshay, "Choice of Content," *Educational Leadership*, March 1956, p. 341.

fashions may serve some limited purpose. The uprooting of values, however, is traumatic. Value changes develop slowly, fitfully and often painfully. We grow out of them as we simultaneously grow into them. We certainly do not just discard them onto the outmoded junk heap, even if we would sometimes like to do so. And when we allow circumstances to urge us to discard cherished values before we have paid attention to their reconstitution, we find it difficult to maintain our sanity and our self respect. Learning to develop an awareness of self and a devotion to what we believe in is, therefore, the critical problem for education in the future.

Material accomplishments are the fruits of efficient industry, but industry has also created an "organization man." Work has become depersonalized and routine at all levels, to the extent that standardization and conformity have permeated our lives. Too often, it has become dishonorable to doubt and wonder. The stereotype has become more respectable than the unique. Unconventional thoughts elicit a fear of the unknown rather than excitement in their adventure.

Industry itself has begun to recognize the pitfalls of its own creation. Witness the recent interest in "brainstorming" and creative thinking: "... most executives are worried about their lack of contact with art, letters and ideas; they will plunge into such matters with the same gusto they show in business, if they get the chance to do so without embarrassment."²

An efficiently routinized job limits a man's scope, his capacity for choice and his freedom to be himself. "If . . . people are not free to control their working

actions they, in time, habitually submit to the orders of others and, insofar as they try to act freely, do so in other spheres. . . . If their way of earning a living does not infuse their mode of living, they try to build a real life outside their work. Work becomes a sacrifice of time, necessary to building a life outside of it."³ When people have resources to build a life of positive involvement they will do so. Lacking these resources they often succumb to involvement in personal and social negative living.

Earning a living is work to a man, and learning in school is work to a child. When learning in school does not infuse a child's mode of living he too builds a life outside of his work. When schools fail to create resources for positive involvement, children succumb to avenues for negative involvement.

In our way of life and in the process of education itself, we have drifted into a limited conception of practicality. In our drive to be scientific and objective we tend to recognize as practical only those things that are directly observable and physically useful. Even in education have we underemphasized the extremely practical dimensions of human aspirations and inner well-being. To this extent mechanization has overtaken the educational process itself.

If we can muster the wisdom to survive some of the international hazards we now face, and are able to enjoy the even greater bounty which the future holds in store, we will witness an intensification of some of the very problems that now baffle us. Our present difficulties in comprehending mounting complexities will become more apparent; earning a living will continue to be a routinized task; and people will grow

² "Adventure at Aspen," *Time*, July 15, 1957, p. 88.

³ C. Wright Mills, *White Collar*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 59.

more strongly dependent on their own inner resources to create a good life for themselves.

Our Ideals and Aspirations

To meet the challenge of the foreseeable future we must rekindle our faith in the human spirit and the essential freedom than can nurture it. We need to look to our tradition to refresh some of our finest ideals in order to reconstitute them into moving forces in contemporary American life and education. These need to be taken out of their verbal past and infused into our life stream through the ways we organize our schools and the ways we teach our children. Education for tomorrow must create conditions for learning in which the human spirit will be nourished and given sufficient centrality and strength. This will take the most creative ingenuity, faith and courage we can muster because the very power, wealth, abundance and complexity of the atomic age may operate against the goal to which we must aspire.

Education for tomorrow will have to interweave the nurturing of scientific intelligence, practical know-how and artistic sensitivity. A good school will provide the sympathetic climate for encouraging children to live in the spirit of the humanities in order to handle themselves amidst the many incomprehensible complexities of an atomic age. Learning to live in the foreseeable future will pay attention to the building of inner resources for positive involvement both in work and in life. The overarching task for all areas of instruction and at all levels will be to teach children how to strengthen their inner capacities in order to learn how to live a creative life.

To live creatively is to feel secure enough to be able to exercise control, while at the same time experiencing the

unpredictable risks of venturing into the drama of the "unknown." It involves sympathetic identification with others accompanied by sensitive detachment. It means discipline and organization guided by humane purpose. It means willingly accepting one's own stake in the experience at hand so that the things one feels, thinks and does assume importance and count. It means being open and receptive to the quality of events that emerge in an experience with awareness of the relationships and direction of the experience. It means having the capacity to sense the logic inherent in the particular experience in order to avoid distorting its intrinsic character. It means giving oneself wholeheartedly to an experience so as to find oneself in the experience. Living creatively is living openly toward oneself and toward others. It is dedication, the reverse of "playing it safe and cool."

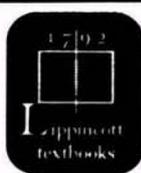
There are potentialities for creative living in all areas of human experience. Different individuals may operate more freely in some areas than in others, but some areas of experience, because of their inherent nature, may offer more extensive possibilities. One important criterion for the creative potential of an experience is the relationship between the intrinsic and instrumental values it offers. Experiences of greater intrinsic value offer greater potential for creative involvement, because a greater degree of fulfillment is derived from the experience itself. Conversely, experiences of greater instrumental value offer lesser potential for creative involvement, because the satisfactions are extrinsic to the nature of the experience itself. A person obviously feels more secure and willing to give himself to an intrinsically fulfilling experience than he is to an instrumental experience.

Most human experiences, however, can be directed more heavily toward either intrinsic or instrumental values *depending upon the way we learn to act in the particular experience*. I would contend, however, that the arts present one of the cleanest unfettered forms of experience in which the moving spirit is the man, his insight, and his awareness of himself. For this reason, the arts offer one of the most potent avenues for learning how to live creatively. If education for the foreseeable future is to meet its challenge, we need to reconstruct our conceptions about the relative worth of different school activities. We need to reallocate the time we consider valuable to devote to different experiences. We need to encourage each form of experience to make its unique contribution to children's learning. To a considerable degree, we need to re-educate ourselves to allow children to interplay

with different modes of experience without prejudice and distortion.

Learning to live in the foreseeable future will not be easy, and the educational task is not simple. Our own best efforts may fall short of the goal to which we must aspire. It surely would not be a new experience in contemporary life for us to approach this task with too little and too late. Should tomorrow's education fail to engender the necessary creative self-awareness, the abundance of the atomic age might create its own form of boredom. And boredom is difficult to tolerate because it is the ultimate nature of man to seek value and meaning in life. Intolerable boredom might itself stimulate a quest for insight and self-worth. We dare not leave this to chance, for suffering would surely accompany it. Our educational responsibility is to use our wisdom and our ingenuity to create the education that tomorrow requires.

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