

Some Aspects of Education in the Foreseeable Future

“There is a brave new world in the making, and a fine new order of human kind evolving.” This author selects several truths related to learning and examines the effect of their practical application in the school of tomorrow.

IT IS SAFE to say that the past fifty years have compassed more change in the way the American human kind lead their lives than in any previous five hundred. All vistas which open to the future indicate an anticipated rate of change at least as great as that of the past 50 years.

These changes are very significant to the educators in our American culture. This is especially true because there is the general expectation that our schools shall provide their populations with facilities for readying them for adult living. In our culture education has never been conceived as a privilege reserved for a fortunate few. Rather it is conceived as a prime necessity for all children of all the people. Our type of democracy was predicated upon an educated populace.

Through the years we have come to expect the public schools to serve our adult lives by the living-learning which leads sequentially from the playing-at, knowing-about of childhood to knowing and doing; to skill and understanding which characterize adult living. In this schooling-living rhythm we have come to recognize that the school cannot be much better than the adult life lived about it nor can the adult life move far beyond the values called true in school and community and translated into action there.

The American school and the American community bear an integral relation to each other.

Recently reported studies which originated in the National Education office, and were carried out on a world-wide scale establish the fact that American schools are not only good. They are the best in the world. Some of us think so, too, but we are often concerned when the choruses of criticism grow loud. Not only is ours a better education, but also more children participate in it, and they stay longer under its facilities. The actualities of our American education far surpass anything Jefferson was able to envision for it, although he was an eager supporter of education.

In spite of these facts, criticism of our schools is everywhere. This criticism stems from three major sources. The first of these sources concerns itself very little with process or organization. Criticism is directed at the product, the young people whom they employ. These young people, say the critics, lack common skills, such as spelling and arithmetic. The skills in which this generation excels seem not to be valued by these critics. These skills are considered “natural ability” and thus are not counted as academically secured.

A second critical group stems from the profession itself. It often includes persons who have been teachers for a long time. From these we would expect a fuller perspective and some evidence that they could see the whole picture. These critics have gathered into a single stream all the frustrations they have experienced and projected it upon their pupils. "Children aren't what they used to be," they say. This generation, one gathers, is a bad lot! To be sure they are not, nor do their critics go or do or be as they did thirty years ago. Life today is lived quite differently. Hard work and good craftsmanship, virtues so highly valued by our forebears are no longer appearing in their earlier guise. A push button world finds them irrelevant. "Ditchdigger" was once a label for people of weak heads and strong backs with which we sought to scare slow pupils. Now the ditchdigger is not even a living creature. It is a machine skillfully engineered and driven by a skilled workman who pushes buttons and pulls levers.

The third and perhaps the most numerous group of critics is composed of younger as well as older members of the profession. They are critical in the same sense as the other groups. These critics find many faults in our schools. They do not charge these faults to the learners. They trace them to their own ignorances concerning the nature of human nature, how it lives and learns. They know that we do not know enough. They recognize, too, the great lag between the time when new truths are uncovered in the laboratories, and the time when these truths are incorporated in our educational practice.

This group, to which the author gives allegiance, does not find fault as do the other two groups. Its criticism goes deeper. This group does not find it neces-

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sary to project fictitious negations upon the learners to protect itself. This group has learned to look at its own performance without taking fright at what it may see. Its members exert themselves to replace their ignorance with knowledge.

It is from this group, and particularly from its younger members, that we must expect leadership as we move into the future.

The truths with which our laboratories provide us are of two different kinds. The one variety may add some new detail, some greater refinement of the central concept with which we may be already familiar and accustomed to use. The added matters improve and amplify the main concept. They make for greater exactness. They do not alter the central concept.

Sometimes these answers are of such type that they challenge areas and aspects which are central to theory. Basic concepts, which have been held, through their antiquity, to be axiomatic, in the light of modern science may be revealed as not even truths. These old concepts must be relegated to the scrap heap. They are non-additive. They are disruptive. Whole areas of life have to be rethought. The ramifications are legion.

Concepts—and What They Imply

This type of finding has characterized recent studies. We are in slow process of acknowledging these disturbing new truths and making the consequent reorganizations. It is part of our imme-

diate yesterdays and involves our immediate tomorrows. Once these applications begin to be made, visible difference will be in evidence. The schoolroom will not look the same. The equipment will be of another sort. The activity which to some extent is replacing inactivity, and will continue to do so, will play havoc with the dead quiet of the old time school. The stir of life will replace the quiet of death. The teacher will be different, too. He will require competence in some quite different areas. His superiors will appraise him with quite different measures. These things have to be different, because the habitat for learning, together with the persons who partially compose it, have to contribute to different purposes and have to be consonant with such truths as are here stated, as well as with many others.

1. Every individual has to do his own learning. No one can do it for him.

This fact invalidates our concept of "imparting knowledge" by word of mouth or by the printed words, which have a useful function but not that of transference.

2. The sequences in the learning process which the learner has to do for himself are a parallel process to the selection, ingestion, rejection sequences on the physical levels. As there must be available air, water and food on other levels, on the mental level there must be problems to solve—things to think about.

The nature of this process invalidates our procedure of teacher-selected tasks, assignments, etc. It requires in the place of this, a learning habitat replete with items and facilities from which the learner can select, intake and reject.

3. Freedom to select must be afforded in terms of time, space, purpose, and achievement.

This fact invalidates the teacher-organized pattern of everyone-at-the-same-time, to the same extent. It requires facility for the learner to organize for himself, goal, procedure, achievement.

4. The dynamic of the learner-coming-to-know, is a movement out from self into externality, multidimensionally. As competencies increase, the periphery is extended into ever-widening areas. As capillary attraction draws ever farther from a central saturation, the questing of the learner moves outward. In the learning process there is also a return drawing from externality into internality.

This fact invalidates the concept of "bodies of knowledge," arranged in a "curriculum" of certain subjects in certain sequences. It calls for easy accessibility of knowledge and the tools of investigation, with freedom to acquaint the self with as much area as he cares to "contain."

5. Mankind is characterized by his necessity to think, to find needs and desires and to contrive fulfillments of these.

This fact invalidates our practices of providing answers ready-made, and achieved by others. It requires facilities and freedom to discover and rediscover answers. It indicates techniques and practice in problem solving rather than the solutions to problems. The life which he is and lives moves upon new levels. The problems involved in his being and doing must also present themselves on the new level.

This fact invalidates much of the knowledge and skill which have been seen as goals and values. It demands new skills, and new items of knowledge. Two generations ago our forebears were pioneers on plains or in forests. Logs or sod were at hand at the locale of the need. Strong backs and arms furnished the energy required. Each man did his own

work. He had little need for skills in interpersonal relationships. This generation has its shelter needs, but the means for fulfillment of the need is not at the place of the need. The prospective householder uses no muscles but his tongue. The fulfillment of his need is partially met in the heads of the financier, the realtor and the builder.

The knowledge items involved are also different. "He doesn't know Scylla and Charybdis," the Latin teacher says. "And she doesn't know superheterodyne," the science teacher counters.

6. The school of tomorrow will need to provide facilities for better knowing and understanding of the peoples of the world.

This fact invalidates the narrow withholding policy we have long held in relation to people who speak or eat differently from us. It demands a wide policy of interchange of students, teachers, professional people; different attitudes toward all members of the human species; a greater familiarity with diverse languages and customs.

7. The schools of tomorrow will need to provide facilities for the experiencing of deep feelings to fortify our youth against frustration, hopelessness, and intensive anxiety. The change in locale of solutions to our problems and our ineptitude with new techniques of living, all increase the hazard of mental breakdown.

This fact invalidates our practice of repressing feeling, and decrying emotion

while the processes of reason and logic are glorified. Some cold reason will need to be traded for some warm feeling if we are to safeguard our major claim to humanity. We shall need to work at the task. We must not "lose our minds," which is actually losing our human uniqueness. It is from deep feeling rather than exact logical reasoning that we derive our commitments to purposes and our dedication to causes.

These few items which have been discussed above are selected from the many. When a basic concept changes, a whole great bulk of concomitants changes in accord with the major change. The prescriptions are easily written. It is more difficult to fill them, for much more painstaking research will be required before we know to what they shall be changed, and how. Where teachers have undertaken to apply these principles under observable conditions, the positive results are surprising. They resemble those earlier wholesale changes, which took place in other disciplines when central concepts which had been mistaken, were laid down, and others were taken in their place — the four elements which gave place to the periodic table; the concept of an earth-centered universe which gave place to the concept of solar system. There is a brave new world in the making, and a fine new order of human kind evolving. The children of God must one day grow up and be at least helpful adolescents and finally dedicated co-creators.

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