

Curriculum Research

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Educational Implications in the Concepts of Culture and Personality

IT IS RECOGNIZED today that a cross disciplinary approach is one fruitful way to raise significant questions to study in any area. Behavioral sciences, for example, recognize that anything like a full understanding of human personality and character structure requires the use of explanatory concepts of more than one discipline. It is understood also that this *use* implies more than mere borrowing of methods and concepts: it implies the use of a multiple approach to studying the problems of the individual and society.⁹

As an applied science, education needs to draw on other sciences for its foundations. Ideas about culture and personality are especially relevant, because education deals with individuals in culture, and serves the ends of a culture. New concepts about either are important to raise significant questions, to examine afresh the assumptions on which its methods and procedures rest, and to gain new perspectives about its role in the complex modern society.

Recent studies in this area have developed several new ideas of importance to education. First, it is rather generally assumed, that personality is in large part a product of the culture that surrounds it. These studies have made increasingly clear that individuals learn from their surrounding culture their values, emotional patterns, behavior standards, by internalizing the culture into their personalities so that they *want* to act as they

have to act.⁶ This process is variously called social learning, socialization and acculturation.

These concepts raise many questions worth pondering. First of these are the questions pertaining to variations in the life style of subcultures, such as social class, ethnic and racial variations, and the bearing of these variations on personality formation and on education. A large body of research and literature is devoted to spelling out these variations and their consequences on education.

Since many students in our schools come from groups which have only partly acquired the values which the school represents, what then are the discontinuities, anxieties and psychological threats that these students face in their acculturation to school? How do these conflicts affect their capacity and opportunity to learn? And what should the role of school be toward these students?^{7, 10, 12}

Further, there is a suspicion that schools reflect but a part of American culture, namely the middle class. It enforces the values of the middle class, shapes its programs to meet the mental systems and ways of thinking which are most appropriate to this class and thereby, in effect, is culturally biased in both the measurement and cultivation of intelligence. While there is strong evidence that different environmental demands lead to acquisition of different perceptual and reasoning abilities in the measure-

ment of intelligence and the methods of its cultivation, school people still trace it to unfolding of genetic and biological endowment and family lives.^{2, 4} Can schools institutionalize cultural variations in procedures of curriculum making, of learning and teaching so as to allow all students to use their previous learnings, to reduce anxieties for those who undergo a sharp cultural transition from home to school, and to enhance learning opportunities for all?

And then, what about the nature of the culture in modern America, and its impact on character and personality? Several writers are pointing out that our contemporary urban culture develops a greater conformity than is desirable for an individual or for the society: the American society produces a character which emphasizes uncritical conformity, other-orientation, publicly attuned adjustment, and which essentially denies the importance of inner life, autonomy and individuality, spontaneous and private in personality development.^{3, 6, 11, 13}

With this stress on conformity have come questions about the concept of adjustment in education. Does it mean largely docility and conformity: to teacher? to middle class values? to peer standards? to the popularity standards of peers? To what extent do schools permit individualization and autonomy of personality, and to what extent do even the devices of individualizing instruction involve conformity, submission to group approval to a so-called modal personality, or even what Fromm calls the "market personality"?^{10, 7}

Many questions are raised by these analyses. Are these developments in conflict with what we think of as essentials of human nature? To what extent are the new developments in our society destructive of democratic values as we have tried to conceive these values? Is the

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current society shaping the types of personality that we cannot accept? And, if so, what is the school's role?

Can school be more than a refraction of current social trends? Can it help fill in gaps in social learning? Can it institutionalize counter cyclical thinking and develop programs that counteract social conformity, repression of individual autonomy? Can schools deal with and preserve heterogeneity in motivation, mental systems and creativity?

What in our current practice must we reconsider and reshape if education is to accomplish more than reflecting a current social trend or adding its forces to those abroad in the society?

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2. DAVIS, ALLISON. *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948. 100 p.
3. DU BOIS, CORA A. "The Dominant Value Profile of American Culture." *American Anthropologist*, 57: 1232-39, December 1955.

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Finally, these researches show that child study is effective with both teachers and administrators and that the amount of benefit to be derived from this experience is not significantly influenced by differences in age, amount of teaching experience, grade level taught, the amount or recency of academic education completed, marital status, or race. Of the teachers who do not complete the three-year program a majority feels positive toward the program.

The results of research indicate that this in-service program of child study has been generally effective. In addition,

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some principles have emerged from these results which may have an important bearing on the success of other in-service programs. An effective in-service program seems to be one which focuses on a real and significant problem of all teachers. Providing an organized sequence of experiences for achieving new insights and understanding, encouraging teachers and administrators to work together in groups, furnishing professional guidance through workshop experience and consultant services, and seeking continuously to evaluate and improve its procedures are factors which contribute to an effective in-service program.

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