The Curriculum and the Future

How can the school help the child achieve faith in himself, in other people, in a common life process and purpose, in the evolving intelligence of man to create a better world with a good life for all? This is both the present task and the opportunity for the school.

EVERY CHILD knows that the present curriculum affects his future. The emotional values conditioned in his home and more formally taught in his school determine to a high degree the kind of person he will become, for each is a dynamic product of his past curriculum used and tested in present behavior. Those who formulated this topic accept this relationship. I assume they wish me to discuss a present curriculum offering greater assurance of effective future results than the one through which most of us worried. This important problem, so untouched by educators, allows me an opportunity to redefine some broad behavior guides known for many years but seldom applied. I shall examine facts, meanings and events better to impress you with the crucial importance of your educational responsibility.

Future, according to the dictionaries, has various meanings. The time that is to come—days, months, years ahead—cannot be altered. What will happen, what is to be, is too predictable and fatalistic. The prospective or potential conditions of a person, his probability of succeeding or achieving in something seems more reasonable. I interpret this to mean that educators must help each child discover, release and develop his potential abilities by a process which enables him to become a more mature self with high probability of steadily increasing his becomingness.

To have a better future, educators must make better decisions now—today, this fall—for the coming school year. Each child inherits the capacity and the normal process for becoming. Educators must select immediately to help him develop this heritage. Failure to make this choice means that each child can expect a relatively less hopeful future than our generation for he must deal more effectively with increasingly complex problems.

Since all educational meanings should be in consonance, the curriculum for a better future must be centered in people, for only people have a potential capacity for becoming. The direction is toward improving life behavior in interpersonal situations where tendencies to action are externalized, examined, enriched and integrated in the self. The nucleus of this becomingness is the normal learning process which enables each person, through interaction, to release,
identify, accept and transcend himself; to observe, study and interpret the behavior of others and to clarify his process of self realization. The test of the curriculum is in the probability of present behavior for future maturity. What goes on inside the school should be evaluated by this criterion.

As the present curriculum is concerned only incidentally or accidentally with life behavior, some exploration of the term is appropriate. All behavior is an attempt to reduce or satisfy some internal disturbance or tension called need. It has three identifiable aspects. The overt act which can be observed by others, the covert or internal response which cannot be seen, the process of relating and modifying these which cannot be observed but can be inferred. The unseen aspects are more important in the becomingness than those which are observed.

The spearhead of all behavior is the unobserved perception or meaning of the situation by the behaver. His overt action is controlled by this internal perception which he releases by the process developed and accepted from his past experience. This meaning changes in the same person as experience unfolds. It also varies among persons in the same situation as all parents and teachers know. But every child or adult always acts on his meaning, never on that of the other fellow.

The external action of a person to satisfy his need is his best internal judgment at the moment of action under his perception of the situation. Such judgment may be subconscious or conceptual, impulsive or deliberative, but it is judgment, nonetheless, for the action represents a selective evaluation of an unfolding series of perceptions or meanings. Since value judgments cannot be suppressed or eliminated, a good home or school helps children make, test, modify and improve them. This includes clarifying the process by which they are derived and shared with others. And since the continuous direction of behavior of child and adult is toward self satisfaction or enhancement, the value judgment of the moment is a means toward that end.

Over a period of time each person develops groups of meanings or values which become his internal probabilities of behavior and, when externalized, are to the observer predictable tendencies to action. No person can escape acquiring such tendencies. Those developed in childhood, prior to physical maturity, have high probability of continuance unless they are later challenged by some powerful internal upset which causes the person to remake his value system. This is the psychological basis both for higher maturity and for brain washing, except that the process for each is different.

Tendencies to Action

Since tendencies to action developed by pupils in the existing curriculum determine their probability of becomingness, the topic of the curriculum and the future will now be examined under three questions. First, what tendencies to action are pupils now developing? Second, what is their likelihood for future growth in behavior? Third, what changes should be made in the curriculum to increase the probability of becomingness? These will now be discussed.

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The present subject-matter curriculum promotes in pupils three large area tendencies, fertile with individual differences and prolific with overlapping. Yet the basic behaviors and variations in each case can be clearly defined and the movements in individual action can be readily grouped.

First is the **conforming** tendency, involving more people and persisting longer than the others. Individuals are disposed to accept inwardly and overtly the demands of outside authority. They do what they are told to do without question, with little internal disturbance which they dutifully suppress, and with external eagerness to ingratiate themselves, to the limit of ego involvement, with the controlling persons. They give and accept these dependent tendencies in return for such favors as high marks and academic honors which lift them above the majority into acceptance by a limited social class.

Second is the **rejecting** tendency of those who inwardly and outwardly refuse to meet demands which to them are unfair and unreasonable due to low value in meeting their needs. They find in these requirements very limited present or future life value. Thus they oppose the authorities who, in turn, denounce them by such terms as trouble makers or slow learners, or any others which assign them to an inferior position on the educational scale, usually without understanding their own action or that of the objectors. Educators have a tendency to fight any challenge to their authority. The higher the echelon and the greater the power, the more ruthless is the treatment of the offender.

Third is the **compromising** tendency of those who in varying degrees reject inwardly but show outward signs of reasonable conformity. They take a middle course. They do not allow the inner feelings to rise to rebellion, neither do they permit outward action to show more than moderate tolerance. Each person finds the golden mean between the inner and the outer conflict which makes bearable the external pressure and protects the growing self.

These three tendencies to action spread into situations outside of the school to become life behavior. Their probability of becomingness is low. They restrict rather than release capacity toward self enhancement. They are a by-product of the abnormal teaching methods in the subject-centered school. The extent to which these tendencies affect life is determined by the opportunities each pupil has for resolving his needs by a normal process outside of the school. These are meager, for the home generally follows the same patterns of restriction and direction used in the school.

Learning or failing the subject matter required in the present school is not a definitive factor in becomingness. A high grade indicates only a reasonable probability for further successful study in the area. It has low predictive value for maturity. The pupil who learns the subject matter by the existing methods may have a greater arrested development than the pupil who fails it. The definitive factor in becomingness is the learning process which prevails in the classroom and is supported by the school. For the process by which a subject is learned or failed is the only sure school factor which every student spreads into all of his life activities. Accepted and incorporated by him as a tendency to behavior, this process affects unconsciously or consciously his whole subsequent life.

The evidence to support the failure of
past and present home and school curriculum to develop becoming people is everywhere present here and abroad. And the immaturity in high places is most crucial for the future. The use of war—hot or cold—to resolve group tensions, the movement toward chauvinistic nationalism in parts of the world, the use of the United Nations as a new weapon of power politics, the number of persons in our country who are isolationists, who are fearful of Sputniks, who advocate required science and mathematics for all pupils as a panacea for the inadequate past judgments of immature people, who are unwilling to try integration as offering a better chance for becomingness to everyone including themselves—but why continue, as each of you can document this failure in your own life or in that of others.

How can the probability of becomingness of the curriculum be increased? Evidence on this question has accumulated for over a century through the work of noneducators who were concerned with the growth of all living organisms including people: the biologists interested in life process, the sociologists studying group behavior, the psychologists experimenting with ways to repair badly damaged personalities, the psychotherapists trying to reactivate normal learning in immature selves—from these and many other sources there is some common agreement.

A Favorable Environment
To help every child discover, release and develop his inherited capacity into a normal self capable of high becomingness the school and home life should furnish the environment in which he can:

1. Study his own needs or disturbances or experiences in his everyday living to increase his perceptions, to clarify his meanings, to manage them thoughtfully with the help of others.

2. Work with others in cooperative groups constantly to increase his group quotient and to improve his understanding of interactive behavior. Intimate groups in face to face relations studying their own needs offer members security, belongingness, free interchange of meanings without authoritarian judgments, regard for different experiences, encouragement to self respect and acceptance. All of these conditions are essential to normal development.

3. Understand and use the common biological learning process by and with which he was born, since there are no exceptions for race, culture, color or religion. Every child must raise this process from the autonomic-impulsive to the conscious-deliberative level on which future becomingness depends.

4. Learn how to self-select and improve his value judgments which are the meanings constituting himself and directing his behavior. He and others must accept them at the moment as his best directions of action to be studied and modified without regret or guilt in subsequent and richer experiences. For the becoming person trusts himself and his normal process of improving his judgments in his experiences in interaction with others.

But audiences usually ask, "What does a teacher teach in this type of school?" The teacher is an expert in the normal process of learning through which each child develops a mature self and by which he (the teacher) increases his own becomingness. The school is the one existing social institution which should and can operate by this process. If a child does not respect and use it as his high school graduation present, his
hope for continuous self development is grim indeed. The subject matter is any aspect of the culture which matters to the learner or which he can use to raise his self-operating level. The test of the school is in the tendencies to action developed by the pupils. The educative quality lies in the probability of these tendencies for future becomingness. And all activities in which pupils and teachers engage—whether called subjects or experiences—should be reevaluated toward this end.

And the second question usually presented is, “What difference does it make whether or not the curriculum is changed?” Of course this depends upon the kind of world in which you want to live and which you wish to pass on to growing children. Restrictions on the development of children and adults seem to be increasing throughout the world. The United States is at the moment the only country with sufficient internal flexibility or freedom of movement to take the lead in making higher maturity possible for the coming generation. And this process of becomingness—once we have clarified and accepted it in action—may be our greatest export to other freedom-loving peoples and eventually to those behind the Iron Curtain, deeper in the gloom of autonomic response. For becomingness cannot be purchased with money, technical assistance, the instruments of war or the gadgets of civilization. And the old tendencies to action are totally inadequate for the future. New behaviors must be created by more mature people.

Becomingness is a faith in oneself, in other people, in a common life process and purpose, in the evolving intelligence of man to create a better world with a good life for all. This is the direction and the goal toward which all people strive. To help them achieve it is the present opportunity for the school.

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