

## Developing Our Full Human Potential

THE curriculum has been discovered by the American people. Different groups and individuals may have conflicting opinions as to what should be emphasized in education, but there is no mistaking the importance attached to what we do and do not do in our schools and colleges. On one side our survival is seen to depend on stepped-up production of scientists and mathematicians; on the other we are told that we shall be lost unless every elementary school child learns a foreign language. But every curriculum proposal in newspaper column or television program carries the tacit acknowledgment that education has power.

We can be gratified by this condition and at the same time awed by the responsibility it carries. It is our task to determine the kind of curriculum most likely to guarantee survival. The kind of survival in which we are interested is not merely an escape from being wiped out by a nuclear weapon but a chance to continue as a free, creative, proud people.

This first issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP in the fateful Fall of 1958 is dedicated to an exploration of the meaning of *curriculum for survival as a democracy*. Given the seriousness of the troubled times we are in, nothing less than the development of our full human potential will save us. Given our commitment to democracy, the development of our human potential must be guided by certain purposes and values, else *we*

shall not really have survived after all.

A common way of viewing the phrase "developing our full human potential" is to think of individuals prepared in sufficient numbers to fill the various specialized roles on which a modern industrial society depends. For example, there is an obvious need for the various kinds of specialists required to maintain and advance our complex technology. Production and invention would soon lag without research scientists to create new knowledge and without technicians capable of translating findings into useful processes. We recognize the need for other types of specialization also—the need for individuals skilled in distributing consumer goods and services, in helping their fellow men secure justice before the law, in discovering new cures for disease, in mapping urban development, in adding beauty and meaning to living, in teaching how to do these things and more. We also recognize the complexity of the problem of providing enough individuals with the right kinds of skill and understanding to fill our ever-changing manpower needs.

This is a large enough order, it would seem, but still it is not the whole job. Not only must we think of a total population possessing among its individual members the necessary skills for manning the various operations of the society, but our democratic values dictate that we consider the development of the full potential of *each individual*. Is he becoming well educated, well so-

cialized, and highly fulfilled as a person? It is not enough to secure all the physicians, chemists, teachers, garage mechanics, and nuclear physicists we need. Each of these and every other member of our society has a right to be a fully functioning person, enjoying the exercise of his unique, creative powers and sharing in the common joys, concerns and loyalties of other human beings.

We cannot afford experts in science who are not informed and concerned about the social implications of their productivity. We cannot afford political leaders who know only the art of the possible and have a cynical disregard for what ought to be. We cannot afford factory workers who do not know how to participate effectively in organizations intended to represent them. We cannot afford clerks or housewives or salesmen who do not know what it is to feel important.

In our attempts to develop our precious human resources, we sometimes go astray. In our zeal to meet a sudden need for certain specialized manpower, we may engage in talent searches in one specific area and may endow our discoveries with handsome scholarships, failing to consider what this may do to the prestige of other useful lines of work. Again, there may be a cry that the gifted are being neglected and we set up preferred treatment for a handful of arbitrarily selected young people, ignoring the fact that we are thus creating a large pool of "ungifted." We hear that a rival nation has a "tougher" curriculum than we do and there arises a clamor to require more courses, lengthen the school day and pile more homework *on someone else's children*. In such cases we seem willing to go a considerable distance toward using our resources as tools to serve our common purposes, although

seldom does anyone go so far as to propose that the individual should be compelled by the state to enter a certain vocation.

We have failed to develop our human potential for quite another reason also—our need to know more about the role of motivation. We need to understand more about the self-concept in relation to young people's use of educational opportunities in elementary school, secondary school and college, in relation to their general aspiration levels, and to their vocational choices.

Third, we as individuals and as a people have failed to become all we might become because we still have much to learn about the type of education that will help each individual to realize his potential in ways satisfying and useful to him as a member of his society. What might our human resources be like if we were to act on the principle that *all* persons have gifts worth cultivating?

If we are to provide learning opportunities in schools and colleges that will help us to survive as a democracy, we are required to make careful continuing studies of manpower needs; we are challenged to discover types of educational programs which develop the full scope of powers in all kinds of children and youth; and we are committed to help these young people make wise choices of specialization. Democracy's not-so-secret weapon is its view of the importance of people as resources which grow richer as individuals become what they need and want to become. Here indeed is a call for educational leadership this year and next.

—ALICE MIEL, professor of education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York; and chairman, ASCD Publications Committee.

Copyright © 1958 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.