

# How Do Schools Work on Adjustment?

Symposium Editor: Maurice R. Ahrens

## Introduction

SINCE the advent of Sputnik, the people of our country began to realize that we may have been surpassed by Russia in the creation and development of war materiel and in the exploration of space. Even though there is some question about the validity of this assumption, public education has been made the scapegoat and has been attacked with a barrage of emotionally charged, and in many cases, unjustified criticisms.

Among the many invectives against the instructional program are: that it is concerned primarily with life adjustment and secondarily, if at all, with intellectual growth and achievement. Conceptions of adjustment range from highlighting and vilifying the offering of certain courses such as driver training to the pronouncements of some critics that the schools are trying to take away from the home the responsibility for the growth and well-being of children and youth. Some would have us believe that education for effective living in our society is

completely divorced from intellectual growth—or at least that it should be. Still other critics perceive adjustment as a process of pouring all young people into a common mold or as forcing the adjustment of all students to a predetermined pattern of curriculum experiences. These are only a few of many erroneous conceptions of education for adjustment. Actually use of the term has been unfortunate because of the many misconceptions of its meaning.

## Meaning of Adjustment

In the planning meetings of those who participated in this symposium it was agreed that none of the interpretations of adjustment stated above is acceptable. To agree with these conceptions would mean believing that education for adjustment condones and breeds conformity, demands abiding by established norms, destroys creativeness and initiative and expects young people to adjust to an inflexible curriculum rather than a dynamic curriculum based upon the problems and concerns of children and youth and society.

Education for adjustment as perceived

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by the symposium panel is education for fulfillment; education which frees the learner so that he can be what he can best be; education which encourages creativity, initiative and democratic leadership; education which permits an individual or a minority group to disagree with the majority or with established norms; education which provides a flexible, dynamic curriculum so that recurring and ever-emerging problems of young people and society may be given continuous consideration and study; education which provides for self-realization and which helps students develop a self concept of adequacy; and education which has as its major goals those behaviors which foster, develop and improve democracy as a way of life. These are the tenets of adjustment upon which the symposium statements are based.

No attempt is made here to justify education for fulfillment. This has been done elsewhere in this issue of *Educational Leadership*. It should be said, however, that any person who believes that public education should be concerned only with the intellectual growth of students and not with their physical, emotional and social behavior is completely unrealistic and totally unfamiliar with the research in human growth and development and learning.

### Purpose of the Symposium

The primary purpose of this symposium is to discuss in some detail how and what can and should be done as we consider ways of improving the program. To facilitate consideration of this comprehensive problem, four areas or facets have been identified, each of which is explored and developed by a different

panel participant. Glen Hass gives consideration to ways through which administrative arrangements and practices have facilitated the development of the program of education for adjustment. He describes how administration, characterized by the democratic value system, cooperative use of the process of problem solving and constructive human relations has made many program improvements possible. Kimball Wiles shows how through program offerings the common and special needs, interests and concerns of children, youth and society are given prime consideration both at the elementary and secondary level. These kinds of program offerings are essential to an effective program design for education for fulfillment. Joyce Cooper places emphasis upon how schools have developed and improved their programs through discovering more effective ways of working with young people in the classroom. She also emphasizes the importance of cooperative planning carried on by teachers and administrators. Arthur Combs deals specifically with the purposes and significance of guidance and special services in a program which fosters fulfillment, actualization and realization of the best one can be. His analysis of the function of the teacher in guidance and the role of the guidance specialist in providing for the maximum development of each individual is worthy of thoughtful consideration.

The statements in this symposium combine theory, practice and projection into the future. Each panel participant has attempted to raise issues, to clarify some misconceptions about education for adjustment and to promote growth in understanding.

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