

A Challenge to Leadership

Our times call for a clear affirmation of basic premises which can give us courage and confidence. Such a statement is this.

WHEN conditions and events threaten our way of life, and darken the outlook for the whole world, those who are socially mature and responsible must not only be alert, but must rise to the challenge of considered judgment. They must resolve, individually and collectively, to withstand and counteract the eroding impacts of anxiety, pressure, panic and hysteria and to advocate those social and cultural processes upon which the common good and the hopes for a better world depend.

In critical times there is need to realize that the general security of a free nation depends as much on courage to resist and resolve basic *internal* strains and tensions that make for disunity, as on the adequacy of military measures and resources, and of manpower for defense against *external threat* and attack. Freedom must ever be limited by responsibility—hence this statement of conviction:

As enlightened citizens of a free country, mature Americans have an urgent responsibility to join in social protest when the distinctive cultural values of their way of life are disregarded or set aside by irresponsible propaganda and by barrages of invidious comparison which skew judgment and confuse considered action.

As citizens they have responsibility to

protest when channels of public communication are clogged with the one-way transmission of slanted "news" on matters of general public concern. They have the responsibility to be critically aware when journalists and publicists assume the prerogatives of "experts" in special fields about which they are not well enough informed or fairly enough concerned to pass sound judgments or to propose courses of action.

Thoughtful citizens have reason to wonder whether education, as traditionally conceived, can be counted on to make Americans less gullible, more stable, less disposed to trust reactionary clamor, and more willing to face the social problems and challenges of their day realistically, with due reliance on the scientific approach as a general method for intelligent forward adjustment.

Firm Ground

The present is no time for regression. Never before has there been so much firm ground on which to take a stand in curricular advances designed to face youth forward. Never was there so great a challenge to the breadth and enrichment of learning and fullest development of the potentialities of every child. At no time have democratic values been so clearly implicated in the prospects for peace and security.

This is a time for building on the firm ground of new insights into the human sciences—a time for orienting the public to the advances which education can and must make on that basis—a time to face forward with courage instead of trusting panaceas or yielding to hysteria. It is no time for radical skews of emphasis projected in the confusion and hysteria occasioned by one minor setback in course of a glorious long record of scientific advance and dynamic world leadership.

Now is no time to make a scapegoat of the schools or to discredit the distinctive means of fostering and validating democratic values. Now is no time to abandon well founded hopes for human advance in favor of unrealistic regression. The future is in the making and the distinctive role of public education in this process calls for forward adjustments in the light of the unprecedented challenges of our day.

There is far more involved than the prestige of any profession. Progress has been made since scientists began to turn the light of inquiry on human problems. The social professions have risen and education is becoming an applied science, an informed art that can be soundly based and wisely guided.

There is much at stake in educational progress. Until now it has been validated as the best way of ensuring the optimum fulfillment of human potentialities—as the most productive means of raising the manpower of the nation to the level of social maturity, and maintaining the unity and solidarity on which security depends. Until now it has improved and developed. Its further advance and promise are predicated on the integra-

tive application of pertinent findings in the basic human sciences, and that would be disallowed by reliance on prescientific precedents and anachronistic practices.

Great harm has already come from the cynical attacks, the clamorous criticisms and heated controversies. Some persons have suggested that all this was necessary to arouse Americans to the need for fuller support and for firmer faith in education. It is certainly clear, however, that the cumulative effect of such negative appraisal has lowered the prestige of teaching, reduced the morale of teachers and eroded the very foundations of mutual understanding on which good will and good public relations depend. It is time to take a stand against further damage. It is time for high courage and for joined action which is based on considered judgments and balanced value concerns.

Resort to panaceas and faith in skews of emphasis are hazardous when the consequences work themselves out in the long perspective of individual lives and in the broad cumulative bearings of human interaction.

The unprecedented nature of the cultural and temporal setting of the problems of educational improvement and advance makes reliance on precedent hazardous and makes regression unthinkable, notwithstanding the nostalgic hopes and pleas of reactionaries.

Faith in a quick and simple solution of the complex problem with its multiple challenges is as unrealistic as an assumption that there is a one-to-one relationship between a single cause and its effect.

Procrastination becomes the more precarious day by day, when delay is complicated by the present accelerated social change, the expansion of knowledge, and the cumulative consequences of the widening cultural lag.

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The situation is critical! It calls for the pooled insights and creative efforts of qualified, inquiring minds, minds dedicated to the study of the human sciences. It calls for a quality of inquiry and interaction which examines assumptions and probes deeply to provide education with a firm foundation of basic premises and with a breadth and balance of value concerns on which to build. Then comes the constructing, the continuous evaluation, the responsibility for finding and combining and bringing to bear on developing lives that which engages their aspirations and challenges their personal and social potentialities.

This calls for a basic reorientation in terms of the emerging sciences of human nature and human development—the new insights into what it means to teach and what it means to learn developmentally.

The education of the “good old days” is not good enough or broad enough to make for optimum human fulfillment in the world of today. The humanities are not only college subjects, but are values to live and learn by through all the growing years. This does not imply a neglect of the Three R’s. It does indicate a need for a far more dynamic functional approach than that which still characterizes formal instruction in many lands. In Russia, for example, the piecemeal, memoriter induction into each special field of science not only wastes years and crowds out the developmental values of a broader approach, but necessitates reliance on pressures which reduce the pupils’ zest for living and learning.

With freedom and sound scientific premises as a resource we are not committed to continue in ways which once seemed good. With the challenge of our day and its new impacts on living and learning we can and must face forward.

Must we continue to assume that the situation will respond to nothing short of a series of drastic shock treatments, and let self-appointed “forces” work *on* the public? Let us rather realize that the recent evaluations of education were made in a hysterical moment when, for the first time, American supremacy in applied science was challenged by a spectacular Russian achievement.

There is need of a saner mood and a sounder diagnosis as a firmer basis for recovery, well being, and advance. Instead of working *on* the public it is time to work *with* the public, developing the *insights* and *concerns* which make for full-bodied integrative effort.

Public education in America is not something to be left to the state, or the profession, nor should it be at the mercy of any “force” or pressure group. It is not something to be perpetuated in terms of vested interests or maintained in terms of anachronistic precedents set under other conditions. If public education is to function as a dynamic resource for cultural integrity, continuity and advance, it must be responsive to scientific findings and to social change.

A projection of some of the transforming ideas in a tentative partial forecast may serve to start thinking, though the matter is not one for debate or argument. What follows the forecast, therefore, should be considered and held for reference while reading on, and while considering sources for further reading. It should be held for validation, verification and modification in planning for action and experimental advance.

A Forward Adaptation

The basic forward orientation of education will be a creative forward adaptation, scientifically based on tested values, insights and concerns. It will not be in-

itiated or achieved by directive, edict or by specifications and texts to be followed and covered. Subject matter specialists will contribute distinctively, but the approach to subjects will be life related, concrete and far more challenging and developmental for young learners than is the didactic process of beginning with unrelated abstract elements and proceeding with preorganized lessons.

Prescientific conceptions of learning emphasized more or less passive processes of assimilation, retention and recall, and relied on instruction, practice and drill for the "fixing" of knowledge, habits and skills. In contrast, the developmental approach will concern itself with a dynamic involvement of the young person in experiences which engage and release maturing powers of discrimination, conceptualization and abstraction, fostering initiative, inquiry and inference, insight, judgment and evaluation. These values will be integratively projected with a view to their internalization and creative use in further living and learning. Coercive control and conformity to imposed discipline have traditionally held learners down by regimentation, repression, and by recourse to devious restraining penalties and punitive measures. The developmental approach, on the contrary, challenges, guides and channels spontaneity, responsible judgment, self respect, self direction, personal aspiration; it fosters constructive social interaction, cooperative planning, free commitment and maturing life involvement, with continuous evaluation.

These are not "new fangled" methods or ideas to be curtly disposed of in favor of a return to the Three R's, or to be marked down by the shoddy device of controversialists as "fads" or "frills" or "soft pedagogy." Reputable anthropolo-

gists, sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists have provided education with the basic makings of the developmental approach. Pediatricians and scientific students of human nurture and development have contributed cumulatively to the new orientation.

Scholars from disciplines that have diverse implications for human advance have collaborated with educators in exploring the related bearings of their fields. Many of these scholars have been directly involved in constructive frontier endeavors in education. Their names have become familiar to teachers; their counsel has been sought by leaders in education. Physical and biological scientists, mathematicians and humanists of note, whose contributions in their own fields would seem to set them apart, have spoken and written to give expression to their concern lest science be pursued narrowly, and emphasized at the expense of human values and to the detriment of the scientific outlook on social problems. Some of these persons are both scientists and humanists, and their breadth leaves room for educational concern.

This statement needs to be expanded and supplemented with documentation to facilitate access to such sources and a study of these by all persons who realize that their own education needs forward extension if they are to participate or lead in the reorientation of teaching and learning.

A selective list of annotated references for this purpose would include few educational titles or authors. It would, however, include Julian Huxley's latest collection of essays, J. Bronowski's brief but illuminating integration of "Science and Human Values." It would include such authors as Agnes E. Meyer and Margaret Mead, Hadley V. Cantril and Gordon

(Continued on page 106)

Finally there is the discipline of *synthesis*. By it wholes are created out of the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsible action, out of desire and thought, and out of thought and action. Its use reports itself in balanced perspective which calls for discrimination among beliefs. Its function is to perpetuate the type and, to the degree possible, to educate beyond the type. These become the leaders. It provides the "growth-point of human experience."

Through it, education persists, even to the extent of one's learning alone. It is manifest in self-control and in the will, the skill, the knowledge and the courage

(Continued from page 74)

workers, and similar services to help youngsters with special problems and to assist educational workers in understanding the individual and social needs of human beings?

7. Is the educational situation "authoritarian," or is it genuinely democratic, with children, teachers, parents and others sharing in planning and carrying out the program?

(Continued from page 96)

Allport, Lawrence K. Frank and M. F. Ashley Montagu, as well as Oppenheimer, Ruesch, Riesman, Turner, Prescott, Havighurst, Davis, Chisholm, Menninger, Sullivan and Rogers. It would also include reports of interdisciplinary teams and groups such as that edited by Parsons and Shils. This is but a brief sampling, to substantiate what has been stated, to instigate initiative in independent study, and to hold the line for further advance.

There is much which can and should

to resist the attrition of everyday experience. It engenders faith in the self. The fullness of its expression is the crown of a truly general education. Its operational presence affirms the wisdom of Emerson's observation that "the only entrance so to know is so to be." Thus character is manifest in conduct.

In the measure that we teach these disciplines and *teach by them* we may devoutly hope that our students will, like the great ones of the earth, act out their dreams instead of merely dream of their action. But if they do, they, and we, their teachers, must believe quite as much in longings as in facts.

8. Do the community and the educational administration understand that "administration" is not something that exists for itself, but is justified only as an agency to facilitate the essentially *human* task involved in education?

9. Is our underlying philosophy such that we have faith in the possibilities of human beings—building on what they can do rather than on what they cannot?

be done without delay to dispel the present confusion and to challenge the hope and faith of those whose dedication to educational leadership is recognized in this statement.

Together we can plan soundly and project long-term programs of action and evaluation with vision and courage. Meanwhile we can and must carry on, for education cannot declare a moratorium on its current obligations. We can even carry on the more responsibly and courageously, as we glimpse fuller vision of what lies ahead.

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