

# Developing Openness for New Experience

**Knowledge, abilities and attitudes conducive to openness for new experience are essential to men's confidence in the world of tomorrow and competence to live as constructive and responsible persons in that world.**

THE GREATEST certainty of this age is change. The speed and extent of change are increasing more rapidly each decade and each year. The "impossible" and the "unanticipated" of 1900 have become the "commonplace" in 1958. Man now takes for granted his ability to hear, via radio, voices from remote parts of his planet; by means of television he sees, even in color, persons and objects thousands of miles away; by jet-propelled plane he crosses continents and oceans in scant hours; he uses mechanical brains to speed up and perfect his computation; automation is being substituted for his brawn in handling countless tasks; and nuclear fusion and fission are sources of almost limitless energy now available to him.

The developments of the past half century will, however, in all probability be greatly overshadowed by those which will take place during the lives of boys and girls who are now pupils in our schools. Interplanetary travel, further conquest of disease, and great social advances are among the many changes which are anticipated; but there is no

way of predicting innumerable other, and possibly more dramatic, changes which may be achieved. Barring world war or some other catastrophe, the pace of change in the foreseeable future will continue to accelerate, and the extent of change will be magnified.

## Educating for an Age of Rapid Change

In such an age of rapid and far-reaching change, the function of education cannot consist merely of passing on the cultural heritage to each new generation. Nor can it consist only of teaching children and youth about the social and economic *status quo*. If these functions were sufficient, the job of the schools would be relatively easy. It would then be quite appropriate to be satisfied with an historical study of the past and an analytical study of the present as the curriculum for all pupils. Such studies will continue to be imperative, of course, but now they must be made in terms of perpetually changing conditions and in terms of an unforeseen future.

A continued emphasis on knowledge

must be supplemented by an increased emphasis on attitudes, values and skills for constructive living in a changing environment. The scientific attitudes, for example, must be stressed as never before, so that our youth will more than ever challenge so-called facts, withhold judgments until all new data are considered, and modify conclusions when data warrant doing so. Values, based on the Magna Carta, on the Declaration of Independence, on the Constitution of the United States, and on many other great political and religious documents, must be extended so that they may be applied to an ever-increasing number of human beings throughout the entire world. Improved skills of human relationship must be learned, enabling man to live with man and nation with nation in such a way as to elevate the standard of living for all men everywhere and in such a way as to eliminate war and all other indignities of one to another as means of coping with problems.

The curriculum of the schools today, then, must be such as to foster adaptability and to provide experiences in creativity on the part of all pupils. Each child must learn how to think critically and how to continue his further learning on a life-long basis. Among the most basic skills which he must develop are those involved in solving problems and in making rational decisions; memorized answers to past and present problems are not enough. He must learn to develop new generalizations and to see new Gestalts or configurations based on new data. He must learn how to use his creativity and his inventiveness not only to facilitate adaptation to change but also

to push the frontiers of change even farther in the interests of the welfare of mankind.

In a curriculum designed to help pupils achieve these goals, the learner should not be treated as a blotter absorbing that knowledge which is spilled thereon or as a vessel to be filled with information poured therein. He must be a dynamic participant in the learning process. He must be involved in the planning of his learning activities, so that he may know from successful experiences how to plan them in his living outside of school. He must carry on many of the learning activities in cooperation with other pupils, so that he will gain facility in working with his peers on matters of common interest. He must take part in evaluating his activities and their outcomes, so that he will develop the habit of continuous evaluation.

The curriculum for an age of rapid change must also help pupils learn to assume responsibility for the results of their actions. Not only must they learn how to make rational decisions, but also they must learn to be accountable for the outcomes of their decisions. The school must provide pupils with opportunities to become acquainted with known alternatives, and it should help them develop scientific attitudes toward seeking still other alternatives. It should help provide knowledge of the potential consequences of each alternative, and it should provide curricular experiences which will enable pupils to learn to make the most of those consequences which result from the alternative chosen. Such learnings cannot come alone from the reading of books or from the listening to lectures given by teachers and parents; they must be based on actual experiences in choice making and in assuming responsibility for results of actions.

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*CLARENCE FIELSTRA is assistant dean, School of Education, University of California at Los Angeles.*

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If "answers" to issues are imposed upon pupils and if choices between alternative actions are forced upon them, there can be little assurance that real learning has taken place—the kind of learning that is carried over into life outside of the influence of the "imposer" and the "enforcer." But if the pupil is genuinely involved as an active, thinking, responsible participant in finding best answers and in making wise choices and decisions—under the guidance and inspiration of a competent, mature teacher—the answers and choices will become his own, as will methodology for subsequent wise decision making on his part.

### **Keeping Balance in the Curriculum**

In order to educate pupils appropriately for an age of rapid change, a well-rounded and well-balanced curriculum must be provided. Every pupil should acquire as excellent a general education as his ability will permit, so that he may have a firm foundation not only for good everyday living and effective citizenship in a democracy but also for whatever specialization in the use of his talents he may be capable of in the sciences, the humanities, and the arts. In addition, each pupil should acquire specialized education in line with his particular abilities and probable future occupation.

On the secondary school level even the specialized education should, of course, be foundational in nature for those who go on to college to further specialization; but for pupils lacking the academic ability to benefit from college work, specialization to the point of employability upon termination of secondary education should be afforded. Care must be taken to avoid yielding to temptation to make the educational program for any

child one which is overly much concerned with specialization while neglecting the so-called common learnings requisite for satisfying and successful living. It would indeed be unfortunate if individuals were to be encouraged to know more and more about less and less until they knew almost everything about almost nothing and knew almost nothing about almost everything else.

In addition to a balance between general and specialized education and a balance among the sciences, the humanities, and the arts in the total school program, there must be a balance among the following elements of the over-all curricular goals: knowledges, skills, and attitudes. The development of any of these elements at the expense of the others may lead to serious difficulties. The person, for instance, who has much knowledge of facts and has highly developed skills without having a sound system of ethical values, may be a real menace to society. Similarly, a zealot who is dedicated, as was Hitler, to emotionalized values not based on scientifically substantiated facts may be instrumental in the destruction of mankind. And the highly competent "stinker" can be every bit as dangerous in the professions, for example, as the uninformed man of good will and integrity. What is needed, then, is the balanced development of these curricular goals to the greatest extent of each learner's ability to achieve them.

### **Developing Attitudes of Openness**

If children and youth in the schools today are to face intelligently and confidently the changes, some of which are just becoming evident to us but which will be the full realities of the world of tomorrow, they need not only the kinds of understandings and abilities mentioned earlier but also the kinds of at-

titudes which are conducive to openness for new experience. Since attitudes and values to a very large extent determine what one does with what one knows, the importance of these attitudes can hardly be overestimated.

Among the most influential factors in the development of these attitudes are the characteristics and behaviors of the teacher. The example set by the teacher is widely recognized as being of much influence on his pupils' attitudes. If he himself has an experimental approach to problems, evidences scientific attitudes, shows eagerness for further learning, and demonstrates confidence in facing a future of progressive change, his pupils will benefit from his inspiration and tend to reflect his attitudes regarding new experiences.

The teacher's conduct toward his pupils is another factor of tremendous influence on their attitudes. If he shows respect for their human dignity, interest in their progress, understanding and helpfulness regarding their difficulties, appreciation for their best efforts, enthusiasm for their creative endeavors, and sincere enjoyment of working with them, he is providing a learning environment in which pupils are most likely to develop wholesome self-concepts and to work, free from fear, to the best of their abilities in the pursuit of educational goals. As a result of faith developed in themselves, such boys and girls actually look forward to new experiences and genuinely enjoy them as they unfold.

Teaching techniques used by an instructor are similarly of immeasurable influence on the development of pupil attitudes toward new experiences. If the techniques are highly motivational and if pupils have purpose and meaning as an integral part of every learning experience, they are most likely to gain an

eagerness to learn new facts and to perfect new abilities. If diagnosis and evaluation are continuous, as learning activities are undertaken and carried on to successful completion, pupils are more certain to achieve a sense of direction and growth which is essential to high morale and to desire for further hard work on educational objectives; also through participating in such evaluation of their own work, they learn to benefit from mistakes as well as to capitalize on successes. If individualized pupil efforts are supplemented by effective group learning activities and by wise use of the community as a learning laboratory, pupils tend to develop an enthusiasm for democratic processes and for taking part in the enrichment of their society.

If free American democracy is to survive in the ever changing world of tomorrow, education must be designed to develop men who can perpetuate it under those conditions. Such men choose their own leadership and participate in policy decision-making. They are men who are able to express conflicting points of view and to examine them critically. To them frontiers appear as challenges rather than obstacles to further progress. They demand freedom to preserve their gains, to explore the unknown, to create a better world, to serve their fellow men, and thus also to achieve the full, good life for themselves. Education for this kind of freedom cannot be founded on a system which requires the mere acquisition of the facts and skills and concepts of yesteryear. Much more than that is needed.

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