

“. . . Into Today Walks Tomorrow”

NONE can deny that American education is today in the midst of unprecedented and almost revolutionary change. The change is unprecedented not only in terms of its scope and its far-reaching effects upon children and youth, but also in terms of the sources from which it springs. Generally speaking, in the past, major changes in both content and methodology have come from within the ranks of education. They have developed as the result of a striving on the part of educators to discharge more effectively the responsibilities assigned them by society.

Today, the major forces in change come from individuals and groups outside the area of professional education. With few exceptions, these outside forces are prompted by the same kind of motivation as that which has stimulated educators—the desire to improve the educational program by making it more responsive to the needs of children and to the needs of society. The sharp differences which exist arise out of the interpretation of needs.

At no time in our educational history, with the possible exception of the early Jeffersonian period, have instructional program and the national interest been as closely interrelated. Many of the changes which are now being made or which are proposed are directly related in one way or another to the achieve-

ment of national goals. As a consequence, we are seeing curriculum change being brought about not only through the normal and traditional processes of local community action, but also through statutory regulations enacted at the state and national level.

Gordon Mackenzie, in his excellent editorial in the December issue of *Educational Leadership*, made explicit the implications for curriculum leaders of these forces and factors which are influencing the school program. Our 1963 national conference in St. Louis served well in focusing attention on current pressures and in helping to clarify the role of professional leadership in this period of change.

In a dynamic society, change is both desirable and inevitable. The absence of change and a static society are the first signs of cultural decay. The educational system must be more than just aware of the changes; it must adapt both content and methods to the changing times and circumstances.

More than a century and a half ago, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote, “Oft the spirits of great events stride on before the events, and into today walks tomorrow.” How well those lines apply to any consideration of the pressures influencing curriculum change today and tomorrow! All around us we see the forward march of events—each presenting a fresh

challenge to the curriculum builder. And we work not in darkness because into today already walks tomorrow—we have many clues about the kind of world in which these children and youth for whose education we are responsible will live.

We know it will be a crowded world. The population of the United States will probably double by the time today's child is 40 years old. And some predict that within the life-span of youngsters now being born, the population of our country may approach the billion mark. The problems of population pressures include far more than the problem of subsistence. Food, clothing and shelter are important but not as important as the problems of human relations and of self-perception—in a crowd. Herein lies a challenge to the curriculum builder: what knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are needed if the individual is to survive as a person in a crowded world?

We know, too, that barring some great catastrophe such as an atomic war, it will be an increasingly prosperous world in terms both of goods and services. Economists tell us that our gross national product will probably increase four times by the year 2000. This is more than twice the rate of population increase. Increased productivity and per capita income can have great significance for us as individuals and as a nation. It can mean that we as a people will enjoy the highest standard of living in man's history. On the other hand, it can result in a soft and weakened society, robbed of its virility and initiative by the very prosperity which its ingenuity produced. Affluence will result in a truly higher standard of living for all only to the extent that we help children and youth develop basically sound values. And this involves much more than consumer education in the traditional terms. It involves the de-

velopment of self-direction, independence and, above all, a sense of personal responsibility.

A World of Change

Already we know that today's children and youth will reach maturity and spend their productive years in a world characterized by an ever-accelerating rate of technological development. Invention, like population, seems to increase in geometric ratio. So rapid is progress that today's machines are obsolete tomorrow. We recognize that the job definitions in industry, business and commerce will change almost completely within the working life of today's children. As Peter Drucker has said, we are confronted with the task of preparing youth to fill jobs which do not yet exist. We are also confronted with a situation in which most workers will have to be retrained two or three times during their productive years.

These are facts the curriculum worker cannot ignore. They mean that, as far as vocational competence is concerned, education is becoming increasingly a lifetime task. These facts suggest that perhaps a major task of education today is to help students learn how to learn and to develop a positive attitude toward learning. Are we as curriculum builders giving sufficient emphasis to this aspect of our responsibility?

Advances in technology are resulting in increased productivity per man-hour of labor. As man's productivity has multiplied during the past few decades, we have seen a shortening of the workday and the workweek. Man's leisure has steadily increased and there seems every likelihood that during the lifetime of today's children, leisure will continue to increase. This could well be one of the most significant trends confronting curriculum workers. The "Seven Cardinal

Principles," formulated by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, listed the worthy use of leisure as a basic purpose of education. But that statement was developed in 1918 when the 60-hour week was not uncommon. The problem of leisure with a 35- to 40-hour workweek is almost totally different from the problem 50 years ago. No longer is it sufficient to provide opportunities for children to develop recreational skills. Much more is needed. We must help children develop the skills needed for a wide range of productive activities during their ever-increasing leisure hours. Never before has a society had the opportunity for such widespread participation in community, cultural and political activities. But the realization of such a goal requires a radical departure from the traditional orientation to the problem of leisure.

We know, with considerable certainty, that the world of today's children will see new and changing patterns of social organization. It will be characterized by further urbanization and by the growth of the megapolis. Rural populations will continue to decline and our children will witness the development of an ever-expanding suburbia with all of its limitations of cultural homogeneity. As the proportion of children and youth and elderly people increases and as the number of married women who work outside the home rises, the form and functions of the family unit will continue to change. Is there not here a challenge to those charged with curriculum development? To what extent does today's instructional program reflect the needs of children and youth who will reach maturity and live out their lives in this ever-changing social structure?

Unfortunately, it seems likely that our children will know only a world of ten-

sion and conflict. None of us is so optimistic as to believe that the struggle between East and West will soon be resolved. The emergence of new nations in Africa, seeking their places in the family of nations, provides fertile ground for ideological conflict. The problems of Southeast Asia and the unrest in Latin America stand as presages of decades of turmoil. In a sense, the tension and conflict in today's world puts American education in a new perspective. It is related to the national scene as never before. The enactment of the National Defense Education Act was in a very real sense a national vote of confidence in our schools and in their ability to prepare our youth to meet the challenges we face.

How are we responding to this challenge? Are we assuming a leadership role in making our schools responsive to the national need as well as to the personal-social needs of children and youth? Are we strengthening programs which help develop an understanding of those basic American values upon which our free institutions are built? Are we seeking new and ever-better ways to help students develop skills in critical thinking and problem-solving? Or, are we weakening in the face of pressures and falling into the fatal trap of attempting to prepare young people for life by indoctrination and by propaganda techniques which leave them easy prey for the demagogue or the extremist, be he from the right or the left?

"... into today walks tomorrow." Many of the trends are already evident. Many of the problems are already with us. Our responsibility is to take a strong leadership role in channeling these changes into educationally sound procedures.

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