

What Do Americans Value?

AMERICAN citizens differ regarding the amount, kind and purpose of education desired or needed. However, the amount of money, time and effort expended for education by the American people seems to indicate that the vast majority of citizens want some kind of education for their children. The amount, kind and purpose of education desired by the individual or group are determined by values. The values, in practice, are translated into many influences which are exerted upon the schools.

Schools must have objectives which are compatible with the values of the individuals or groups which support them. Without valid objectives based upon articulated values schools would be chaotic and even useless. Without values there would be no purpose; without purpose there would be no direction for the educative process. In fact, there would be no meaningful definition of education. What do Americans value? What do Americans expect of the many faceted systems of education which they maintain? These questions must be answered with a reasonable degree of ac-

curacy if schools are to make needed contributions to the society which supports them.

What Are the Values?

It must be recognized that values rather than a *value* usually motivate individuals or groups; however, for the purpose of study and analysis some identification of single values can be justified. Some significant values which motivate educational efforts in America are the following:

1. *Utility*—The need to write a letter, read a recipe, or make a budget involves skills which, according to most Americans, can be developed best through a system of formal education. The belief that each individual should know or do something which has immediate and practical value is an integral part of American culture. Americans believe that an affluent society demands an educated populace.

2. *Distinction*—The organism becomes an individual and individuals become a group when some degree of distinction is manifest. Through the acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitudes or behavior, Americans are constantly trying to develop individual or group characteristics

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which make identification easy. Often these efforts have intellectual bases because of man's perceptive and thought processes. Hence, physics and dress design may easily become aspects of formal education.

3. *Accommodation*—The desire to be different and the need to belong approach the paradoxical in the American personality. The matron who buys expensive hats to be different becomes unhappy when left out of a group to which she wants to belong. Members of widely divergent political parties proclaim their devotion to common good and the belief that education should build citizenship. All claim the right to speak and to be heard.

4. *Mastery*—Man's desire to master himself and his environment has been an inextricable part of America's development. Physical fitness, psychology, chemistry, political science, and military tactics as curriculum offerings indicate a strong belief that knowledge is power. America's race for space may be determined in the classroom.

5. *Continuance*—Man's desire for personal and ideological continuance has given rise to an unprecedented degree of philanthropy. The study of American history as a way of preserving the American heritage goes almost undisputed. Thomas Jefferson greatly desired to be remembered as the founder of the University of Virginia. Chairs, pews and buildings bear men's names.

6. *Pursuit*—Americans have been diligent in their search for gold, oil and other substances for economic purposes; however, economic and material gain have not been the only reasons for pursuit. Curiosity and the desire to know have provided motivation for many pursuits in which pecuniary rewards have been insignificant. Classrooms and back-

yards have been used for the simple purpose of answering questions which arise in the human mind.

7. *Mobility*—America has been populated and developed by men motivated by a desire for physical and social mobility. Barriers to social, economic and political mobility have, through all the years, challenged the ingenuity and energy of Americans. Mountains, prejudice, outer space, and social classification have felt our constant thrust. Formal education has provided impetus and preparation for that thrust.

8. *Aesthetics*—In spite of what many believe about the American's lack of aesthetic development, there is much evidence of his concern for aesthetics as a part of educational experience. Franklin's statement regarding the utilitarian and ornamental aspects of education is one of the best known statements in the history of education.

9. *Stability*—With their desire for mobility and adventure, Americans also have a strong desire for stability. The typical American has more respect for "I know" than for "I think" or "I feel." To him, "I know" suggests truth ascertained by process; "I think" suggests only partial or uncertain mental inquiry; "I feel" indicates emotion. The scientific method was the twin of the industrial revolution; both fostered expansion of education as a search for applied truth.

10. *Virtue*—Although characterized by much brashness and uncontrollable enthusiasm, the American citizenry, individually and collectively, has the desire to be just, benevolent and honest. Virtue accompanied by some other qualities is considered necessary for the "good life."

Should schools relate to these values? Should American education promulgate

these values? These values *are* American education and the reason for the schools' existence. The significant question is: how can schools relate to these values by reacting to the influences which they motivate? Stated another way the question may be: what is the role of the school in the development and sustenance of values in a democratic society?

Sustaining Values

The role of the school in developing and sustaining values or value systems is complex with specifics which are constantly changing. In general, that role may be described as follows:

1. The inherent and developmental characteristics of values must be understood. This entails answers to such questions as: how has the demand for social mobility changed since 1607 or 1776? and, what basic characteristics of human beings create the need for social mobility?

2. The interpretative functions of the schools should be identified. The schools do not have a singular function of leading, following or keeping pace. The school is only one of the many institutions with societal functions. While following the dictates of one generation, the school may exert influences which will change the dictates of the next. In periods of rapid change, the school may invite more cautious appraisal of outcomes.

3. Curricula should be developed to secure the greatest possible benefits for the individual and the group. This demands that attention be given to the totality and results of experience rather than solely to the arrangement of courses. It must be recognized that the inclusion of courses *per se* does not ensure the

realization of values. Educators must realize the significance of their role in highly structured institutions. Just "keeping school" is not enough. Planning based upon careful assessment of individual and group needs must characterize the entire educational program.

4. Schools must develop more valid and effective techniques for maintaining positive relationships with groups outside the school. This involves such factors as communication and understanding. Educators must learn how to secure, interpret and use the ideas of other individuals and groups.

5. Schools can better relate to influences outside the schools when educators are prepared to deal with conflict. It is quite obvious that all individuals and groups do not have the same values or value systems. It is equally obvious that their differences will lead to continued conflict. Parents usually regard as "fads and frills" those things in which their children do not participate or those things in which they oppose their children's participation. Some want the best education that can be obtained. Some want to pay for as little education as possible; consequently, what is considered essential or desirable is determined by different criteria.

6. Schools should be operated by educators with values in harmony with democratic commitments. This involves doing, being, and projected purpose. It involves not so much negative freedom from vice and bad habits but rather a positive prior commitment to the best possible development and utilization of all human resources and opportunities. It is not enough to reduce prejudice and narrow-mindedness; schools must be manned by dynamic people who are cognizant of human potential and who possess an inner compulsion to develop

this potential. Education should be regarded as the development of capacity rather than the elimination of ignorance.

7. Schools should be based upon value judgments which have the highest possible degree of validity. It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine with finality what is best in the culture. This does not mean, however, that educators should not try to do so. Since what individuals do represents some value judgment, educators must make the best judgments possible. In making value judgments, research techniques should be used with a firm resolve to abide by results. Validity determined by careful experimentation is the safest method by which schools can exert desirable influences and resist undesirable ones. This is not to say that the school is the *arbiter elegantiae* of our culture; however, the size and importance of the educational enterprise does suggest considerable responsibility.

8. Schools must use better techniques in helping boys and girls to develop their own value systems if we assume that values are developed rather than imposed. The continued existence of complex systems of rules and regulations seems to support such an assumption. If mature human behavior is based upon values, then it would seem that assistance in the development of values may be the most important function of the school.

9. Schools must operate successfully in a society which is constantly changing. This change results in changed values and in variation in the way in which values are related to each other. The need for food does not influence decisions today in the same way as in 1700. It seems paradoxical that, as the school produces and facilitates change, it must deal with problems resulting

from change. The answer seems to be that if change is inevitable, the school should help to direct and validate the process, even if the school itself must change.

10. The school must effectively employ values in evaluating its own functions. Its purposes, processes and products must represent the successful translation of values into action. Stated simply, the school must determine whether it is doing well what it believes it should do.

Finally, we must ask whether dangerous influences are being exerted by individuals or groups outside the school because of different values which they hold? The very nature of a changing democratic society composed of human beings living in a complex world provides an affirmative answer. This does not testify to the sinister nature of man; rather, it is an inescapable result of complex civilization.

What Are the Dangers?

The dangers are not new; however, their degree and manifestations are related in unique ways to any specific time or set of circumstances. The present is no exception. There are influences with peculiar significance for education in the United States with unequal amounts and different kinds of pressure being brought to bear in the different parts of the nation. Among these seem to be influences which would:

1. Prevent curriculum balance by over-emphasis upon the technical and scientific.

2. Emphasize the needs of "gifted" pupils to the point that selectivity would violate the democratic tradition of our schools.

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added to his vision and his fund of answers. But, what is more fundamentally important, this is a book which will help us all to ask better questions.

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What Values

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3. Spread, under the labels of "liberalism," "conservatism," "Americanism" and others, ideas and concepts which are really in opposition to our democratic way of life.

4. Create dissension for the purpose of reducing educational efforts and expenditures.

5. Reduce the development of ethical character by opposing the teaching of everything which can be called religion or religious.

6. Emphasize the vocational and monetary values of education to the extent that liberal education with cultural values would be seriously impaired.

7. Machinate, mechanize or regiment education to the detriment of personality development and critical thinking.

8. Reduce pride in accomplishment and validity through superficial and vague programs designed for "adjustment" and "individual differences."

9. Provide programs which tend to develop pseudo-intellectuals and pseudo-sophisticates who have little real understanding of and appreciation for virtues and values which have made America great.

10. Ignore the need for balance between the local, state, regional and national functions of education, with the result that the need for stability and or mobility would not be served.

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Such possibilities as those listed here do not, in most cases, grow out of the sinister or evil nature of men. They usually grow out of the fallibility of human nature, the complexities of highly institutionalized society, and the difficulty of obtaining understanding and cooperation through comprehensive study and effective communication. In short, those who would operate the educational enterprise must ever be alert to the breezes and hurricanes which blow from every direction. School people must be able to set their sails to move with little assistance or to remain on course in troubled waters. Such alertness calls for man's full potential.

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