

## The Importance of People

### The Answer Cannot Rise Above the Question

Arthur W. Foshay

THE headline in the French paper, spread all over page one, said, "More than 11 Million in School This Year." The story, based largely on materials from the Ministry of Education, called the figure "fantastic," and indicated that new classrooms had been built to take the numbers, more teachers had been employed, and so on. Most of the story, though, was about the progress of French school reform: the new multi-curricular secondary school, the change in the school-leaving examination at the end of formal secondary education (the hitherto untouched *bachot*) and other alterations in the substance of education that have characterized the French educational reform from its beginning.

One difference between the French and the Americans is that this was page one news in a paper devoted mainly to sports and entertainment. The editor evidently could assume that his readers take education seriously. Another difference is that the French see the problem in educational terms—as a problem having to do chiefly with the substance of education. We do not, at least in our press. We see the situation as a problem in economics. We ask an economic question, and the answers we get are therefore economic in form and content. The

French, whatever their faults, do not make this fundamental mistake; they have never failed to see schooling as an affair of the mind, the heart and the spirit of the individual man. In France, education's first function is to make a civilized Frenchman out of a child.

Ask a silly question, especially in education, and you get a silly answer. Ask the wrong question, or a question from the wrong point of view, or a question with blinders built in, and that is the kind of answer you will get. The answer cannot rise above the question in education; the field is too ill-defined to impose its own meaning on the questions put to it.

#### If You Were an Economist

If you were an economist, what would you look for in education? What would your training lead you to see? You would see, first of all, enormous numbers: numbers of people, of buildings, quantities of equipment, amounts of time—all huge. Next, you would see an enormous amount of human energy and money flowing through a system. You would see the system groaning and laboring to accommodate great increases in all the numbers.

If you saw the situation this way, what

would you say the problems are? Numbers, of course, first. If the numbers were not increasing at a staggering rate, the groaning and laboring would stop. But they are increasing at such a rate. As an economist, how would you seek to solve the problem? Why, you would do exactly what we in the United States have been trying to do for fifteen years. You would improve the system so that it could handle larger numbers. You would redeploy the teachers and the students. You would reorganize the time schedules. You would use the money differently. You would try new means of distributing knowledge. All of this you would do with enthusiasm; that is the way an economist brings about social improvement. The general purpose of your experimentation would be to make the schools more efficient—to improve their economy.

That is exactly where the trouble begins. You could think about education in economic terms from now until the next century without ever getting to the substance of education. The substance of education, being the school curriculum, has to be thought about directly and persistently, or nothing happens. We cannot organize our way out of our curriculum problems; we have to think our way out of them. And in doing so, we can borrow from the French experience, among other things. That is, we can take as the proper goal of education the making of a civilized man. We can take as the main problem of education all those matters of the mind and heart and spirit that make civilization possible. We can use these matters as the criteria to apply to the schools, thus bursting the limits placed upon us by the economist's way of knowing.

The economist's way of thinking about education produces one strange, even

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weird, consequence: since the problem begins with numbers, and the answer is given in numbers, and the system groans because of increased numbers, plainly the increase is to be regretted. What has increased? Children, of course. What is the problem? Children. What is to be regretted? Children. They come in hordes. If only they did not! Where, then, does the economist's way of thinking lead a teacher? Finally, it leads him to regret the children—his very reason for being a teacher. He seeks to classify them, to shunt them from one track to another, to get rid of them as soon as possible. Examinations exist not primarily as a means of instruction, so that the learner may have a constant flow of information on how well he is doing and what the teacher thinks is important. No. Examinations exist to cut down the number of children the system has to handle.

Examinations exist not to aid education, but to make the system more efficient.

The step from the fantastic consequence of having asked the wrong question in the first place, equating rigid selection with excellence in education, is short. Nearly everyone takes this step. You can't miss, of course. If your students are already good, then your teaching will surely be good, for they will succeed in tests. As Casey Stengel said once, "With Mickey Mantle in the outfield, I'm a hell of a manager."

No, the answer will not be better than the question. And the main educational questions all proceed from a consideration of what it means to be a human being. No lesser question will cope with the problem.

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#### District Leadership—

Pascoe

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pate to the extent their duties permit.

Several methods are used to give reality to the continuous leadership development concept. Each Tuesday, throughout the school year, all the principals gather in a planned in-service meeting. For example, a program may be presented on a new instructional technique in music. There is ample opportunity for exploration of all facets of this technique through discussion and questions. Interest may be stimulated to the extent that further research may be planned. Constructive criticism is invited.

There is also an extended type of workshop where the principals meet for a period of several days. A recent workshop of this nature was an "in depth"

presentation of new concepts in the mathematics curriculum. A third type of in-service meeting for principals is the field testing of a workshop presentation. Here, supervisors come in and try out new ideas on the principals rather than on the teachers. Principals, as a result, are better able to evaluate a new technique or tool to determine whether it satisfies a particular need of their staff. The principals also have a better understanding of the program or plan prior to its introduction to staff.

Another method of leadership training is through the district's summer school program. Teachers are appointed to serve as summer assistants under a director, giving aspiring faculty members an opportunity to learn administrative techniques. These assistants work closely with the director of the summer school, who makes recommendations to guide them in their administrative development. Along these same lines is the practice of providing an assistant to the principal in each district elementary school. This teacher is in charge when the principal is out of the building, and is also guided by the principal in learning to accept the responsibilities and other duties that face administration. Through these and other techniques the district has a continuing program for stimulating leadership training.

In this paper we have suggested three basic concepts that implement the philosophy of democratic leadership accepted by the administration of the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District. We do not feel that these concepts are necessarily new or unique. However, in this district, these concepts govern the administration's effort to practice, in the public schools, the democratic way of life.

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