

Children and Youth in the Space Age

A FEW years ago, the *New York Times* carried a report that each of the high schools of New York City was to be equipped at the beginning of that school year with a Geiger counter and an outline for conducting a series of 16 experiments in radioactivity. The hope expressed at that time was that this curricular addition would help dispel some of the mystery surrounding this particular phenomenon of the Atomic Age. With the advent of the Space Age, we hope that schools throughout the country will continue to adopt similar academic innovations. Children and young people need help as they attempt to assimilate facts and understandings upon which decisions involving the very survival of civilization may ultimately have to be made.

Although daring at first glance, such current endeavors seem less formidable when viewed against a backdrop of traditional educational philosophy and practice that have, from time immemorial, emphasized the teaching of facts and understandings for application in

decision-making and problem-solving situations no matter what the age. The scope of knowledge may have expanded enormously since the advent of the atomic bomb and Sputnik. Yet the need to know and understand various facets of the world has been basic to the development of every school aged child since Biblical times and will remain so for countless generations to come.

If we assume, then, that changing times will underscore the importance of perpetuating basic educational goals and objectives, what can be said of the school's responsibilities in preparing children and young people for the challenges of tomorrow's world?

Recognition of the Individual

In spite of the addition of newer and more daring innovations in both learning and teaching processes, schools in the Space Age will be expected to do what they they have always done—equip every child with as adequate an education as he is able to achieve. To do this, first of all, means continued recognition of the individuality of each student and of his right to be accorded a series of educational opportunities

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consistent with his needs, abilities and aspirations.

Student populations in the Space Age will not differ significantly from those of the recent or distant past. They will include the dull as well as the gifted, the pupils who eventually will repair machinery as well as those who will become surgeons and physicists, those who will sit in classrooms because of compulsory state laws and those whose basic attitudes toward school will be more hospitable. No matter what the capacities of this multivariied group, some academic experience, particularly at the high school level, must be evolved to meet the general and special needs of its members. This would seem particularly true for those students who for one reason or another, including problems of motivation, are unable to achieve a distinguished level of academic proficiency.

Apparently there is an increasing middle class emphasis on the notion that the only acceptable existence for any child lies in the realm of intellectual endeavors, especially those of a scientific bent, preceded by a long history of classroom distinction. In meeting this demand, however, the schools must prevent the less adequately endowed youngster from becoming a societal reject before he is barely into his teens. These students also will have to face the problems of citizenship in the Space Age and must be equipped to contribute whatever talents they possess to the development of a growing America. For schools to expect less of them or to slight their preparation for such civic responsibility is not only to ignore the basic rights of a large segment of our population but to invite a host of future social, economic and political problems as well.

Second, no matter what type of program is implemented for a student in

tomorrow's schools, standards must be set that will help him make the most of the opportunities presented to him. This viewpoint, although given wide lip-service and tacit acceptance in recent years, seems to have been slighted in implementation, perhaps because it has appeared so obvious a goal of the education process. The keynote of this philosophy currently needs to be sounded even more forcibly. Whether they are in the chemistry laboratory or the woodshop, students must come to realize that the wasting of time and energy will be ill-tolerated in the Space Age. Thoughts and actions in tomorrow's world must be organized so as to insure maximum efficiency, whatever the endeavor. Pedestrian standards may have been tolerated in the past, but a more stringent set of requirements will be asked of the citizens of tomorrow.

Setting of Standards

The setting of standards also has a beneficial psychological effect in that it lets students know that the school is concerned with their welfare and future development. Teachers who surrender standards or minimize them for one reason or another are actually adding to the confusion that many students, especially adolescents, feel concerning the adult world and their emerging roles in it. Children and young people may seem to enjoy a "catch-as-catch-can" classroom atmosphere for a while, but soon the easy freedom leads to feelings of uncertainty and confusion. Quickly comes the recognition that a lack of standards implies a lack of adult concern and interest. It would seem, then, that standards must be set and kept which are realistic, readily understood, and designed to maximize a student's poten-

tial level of performance. This responsibility of the school will be as necessary to meet in the Space Age as it has been in the past.

Commitment to Values

Standards, of course, imply values, and although some may undergo a thorough change in the Space Age there are others, more basic, which will persist. The child of tomorrow will need to incorporate the qualities of honesty, self-respect, responsibility, cooperation, perseverance, integrity and courage to no less a degree than his present-day peer, and schools must continue to play a major role in perpetuating these values. Evidence abounds that once these values are relaxed or denied the decline of constructive behavior is rapid. Recently a National Education Association study was reported as noting that a tendency to imitate the slum dweller has crept into the behavior of middle class youths, causing something "rougher" and more maladaptive to enter the misbehavior of the young. If this disturbing phenomenon of the Space Age is to be checked, the schools will be required, as perhaps never before, to endorse and demand a set of ethical and moral values that will insure the healthy personal development of every child. Not to do so will mean an abrogation of one of the more important obligations of the educational process.

Although basic standards and values must be set and perpetuated to prevent a breed of moral chameleons from developing in the Space Age, it is not inconsistent at the same time to teach our youth that they must be readily responsive to the changes that will be part of virtually every other aspect of their existence. They must learn the import-

ance of flexibility and the necessity of effecting easy readjustments when circumstances dictate. Schools can implement this process by extinguishing in students a heavy reliance on preconceived notions and reinforcing all attempts at viewing problems and situations in a variety of alternative ways. The lessons of the recent and distant past can also contribute to an attitude of pliancy by underscoring the knowledge that peoples of the world from earliest times have had to face change and adapt to it.

These, then, would seem to be the needs of children and young people in the Space Age: (a) recognition as individuals with differing talents and capabilities who require specially tailored programs to prepare them for civic responsibility; (b) standards which encourage maximum efficiency in all endeavors and contribute to feelings of security and well-being; (c) commitment to an unclouded value system transmitted by adults who are actively willing to endorse a positive stand on moral and ethical issues; and (d) practice in weighing and utilizing alternative pathways to the same goal so as to insure utmost flexibility and pliancy when circumstances dictate change.

It is to be recognized, of course, that the school must not be the only societal agent charged with the responsibility of meeting the needs of Space Age youth. All too frequently schools are credited with possessing a disproportionate influence over children and young people relative to other forces, with the consequent result that they serve as handy scapegoats when failings are evident for critics who have abdicated their own obligations in this area. There is no doubt in the writer's mind that the schools of America will address them-

selves effectively to the question of meeting the needs of our children as we enter the Space Age. But the great educational task lying ahead cannot be done by school people alone. It will require a mobilization of all societal forces which have the power to influence, for only through the combined efforts of a community's total resources can a concept of education be perpetuated that is dynamic enough to insure the survival of a democratic society in a free America.

Supervision Experiment—Downing

(Continued from page 435)

coordinator demonstration and intervention were frequent during the first months of the project, they have decreased steadily as teacher security and competence have grown. This writer believes that three factors have contributed to this success. First, there is no substitute for actual demonstration of methodology in its natural context and at an appropriate time. Second, it was found possible to provide this instruction in a manner which did not diminish the professional stature of the teacher. Finally, the relationship of the coordinator to the teachers was supportive rather than threatening, since she has an evaluative rather than a rating function. Her role, in large part, is one of leading the teacher to examine his own successes and failures and to strive for higher professional competence.

Observed Results

We have now passed the halfway mark of our project. Our teachers are no longer raw recruits, but are tried veterans of an exhausting campaign. They have shown impressive growth in their understanding of disadvantaged adolescents. They have become increasingly

proficient in teaching techniques, skilled at the adaptation of subject matter, and creative in finding and in developing materials of instruction. Because, in the inevitable moments of exhaustion and frustration, the members of the team have relied constantly upon each other for support and for understanding, group loyalty and solidarity have developed steadily. The long range relationship with our pupils and awareness of their tremendous needs have produced in our teachers a strong devotion to the children.

Of course, the true measure of our work will be made in the future. Only then will we learn whether, as a concomitant to building professional competence, we have succeeded in developing commitment to this vital teaching task.

Editorial—Drummond

(Continued from page 422)

What can we of this generation do to free the minds and capacities of the current crop of youngsters so that they will be more able and more willing to cope with the problems of their day than we seem to be with ours?

Now is not the time to turn our backs on the underlying basis of American education—local boards of education. Neither is it a time to worship ineffectual idols of a departed past, such as a nine-month school term. We need to continue in our land—through discussion and dialogue and action—the quest for better communities, including better schools, so that growing up in America will result in fewer casualties and many more successes.

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