

How does commitment today differ from that in other periods?

Purpose and Program

THE question posed in the subtitle of this paper might well be changed to ask "How must commitment today differ from that in other periods?" The implication in either case is that commitment today should be and is different from that in other periods. Inherent in the question are the seeds of a dilemma. Entailed in the implication is the description of the horns of the dilemma, which is as follows:

On one hand we avow that purposes in education are now different from those of other periods. On the other hand, we have maintained *in essence* the educational machinery designed to achieve purposes which were current two to ten decades ago.

The next section of the paper gives the dimensions of the dilemma described in the foregoing paragraph. The final section offers suggestions which give some hope of removing us from the dilemma.

Purposes Change

That we subscribe to different purposes is attested to by many writers, for example, Ragan and Herrick *et al.* (1, 2). All these sources cite the shift from the original purpose of education in New England, which for religious reasons was designed to teach young people to read,

to the national purposes of the mid-nineteenth century, to the economic and then social purposes of the late 1800's and early 1900's. The overarching purpose in these periods was universal literacy.

Today educators are proclaiming new purposes for education which reflect the three major "explosions"—technological, knowledge, and population. These new purposes, in large measure because we can no longer hope to know all or even a significant fraction of what there is to know, center on helping individuals to make wise choices in a changing social context. Entailed in this major objective is the acquisition and ability to use the knowledge and tools necessary to make such wise choices. Because of the three explosions, learning cannot cease at the conclusion of formal schooling. Therefore, two other objectives of education are that students learn to learn independently and that students enjoy learning. In summary the purpose has changed from that of producing a *literate society* to that of producing a *learning society*.

The other horn of the dilemma relates to maintaining a program which was *in essence* designed to achieve those pur-

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poses which guided us in producing a literate society. One kind of evidence to support this contention is the number of studies done in the 1950's which set out to prove that children in 1952, 1951, 1957 were doing as well as children in 1921, 1932, and 1937, and which used as measures those tests developed to assess student progress toward purposes current in 1920-1931 (3, 4, 5). These studies are valuable for certain purposes; however, they do not reflect progress toward those purposes which we say we are now trying to achieve.

Reducing the Conflict

Furthermore, although we have made improvements in programs, there has been little or no change in the essential structure of schools or the programs offered therein. This writer conducted a study which revealed that in the sample under investigation the two factors which governed teachers' classroom practices were not objectives but textbooks and habit (6).

The problem in education today is, then, that while we are verbally committed to a new purpose, in practice we are providing education which was designed initially in 1850 to meet the purposes then sought (7). Purpose and program were then more representative of the same commitment. Today our commitment, though not intentionally so, is divided and a dilution of effort has resulted. It is in this respect that commitment today differs from that of other periods: then commitment and execution were related; today that relation is not so apparent. The lack of such relation is the heart of the problem.

There are steps which can be taken to reduce the conflict in commitment. First, we must clarify and determine

whether we *are* committed to new purposes for education, as many educators state. We must decide whether we can support the assertion that we have approached the goal of a literate society and that our goal must now become that of a learning society. This goal calls not only for better examples of old practices where these are warranted, but for new and in many cases yet undreamed of practices.

Second, we must recognize the discrepancy between what we assert as the purposes of education and the provisions we have made to achieve them. That is, we must identify specifically in what ways purpose and practice are not related and we must accept the fact of these discrepancies.

Third, we must be ready to examine practices with the intention of doing more than merely updating those we have followed for decades. We must formulate practices which reflect purpose.

Fourth, and closely related to the others, we must accept the possibility—even the strong probability—that there is *no one organization, method or approach to education which constitutes the best possible educational milieu for every student in American schools*. Barrett and DeVault have illustrated this point particularly in relation to reading (8).

The evidence which we have so painstakingly collected for some 30 years overwhelmingly supports the idea that each individual requires situations tailored to his needs. Yet we have persisted in maintaining for the most part one type of educational program in one type of educational structure for all.

Implementing Purposes

Two studies bear directly upon this question. Payne's study revealed two

major points. First, we do not use data which we systematically collect on individual students. Second, if we did use these data we could identify with alarming accuracy as early as the end of first grade, those children who will have major difficulties in sixth grade arithmetic *unless* significant changes are made in their instructional programs (9).

Thelen's work is a major step in the area of teachable groups. More and more it is possible to diagnose a learner's needs and to place him in the situation or situations which promise to provide him with the best possible learning milieu (10).

These studies, along with those related to sex differences in learning, effects of basal metabolism on learning styles, interaction analysis, and others have far-reaching implications for school organization, program development, and classroom practice. Yet to what extent have these data had any impact upon areas which they might be expected to affect?

Evidence indicates that textbooks, tests, and other such items are the major basis for program planning. Bloom, Herrick, Goodlad, Macdonald and Faix, among others, have proposed new approaches to program development (11, 12, 13, 14, 15). There have been few attempts to apply a rationale or theory in curriculum. Yet the conceptual tools and data are sufficiently sophisticated to be tried, modified and refined.

We have developed research techniques and experimental programs which show promise of success. Yet opportunities and attempts to demonstrate their usefulness are limited. Study and implementation of new practices which utilize current and relevant data are essential.

Circumstances permit us to move rapidly into implementing the purposes which we say we now hold. The commit-

ment to these purposes, we say, is firm. We must relinquish commitments which stand in our way of achievement of new purposes. We must clarify commitment so that purpose and program are demonstrably related. It is in this way that commitment must differ from that of other periods.

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getting very deeply into any. This book probably spreads itself thinner over more topics than most other texts. Like most other similar volumes, this work does not have a particular orientation to hold it together. The reader, therefore, is likely to be left with a disarray of information and the impression that we really know very little about adolescence. Since this impression is approximately true and since many students desire such a general introduction to adolescence, Powell's book will probably serve many persons usefully.

The book has chapters on the definition and study of adolescents, their physical development, intelligence and achievement, personality and culture, emotionality and adjustment, socialization, sexual development, the family, religion and values, attitudes and interests, vocational planning and guidance, the school curriculum, teaching adolescents, and juvenile delinquency. Throughout, the author attempts to bring current research to bear on the topics and to present the viewpoint of adolescents themselves. There is also a rather successful attempt to incorporate data from other countries into many of the sections.

Omitted from *The Psychology of Adolescence* are some authors noted for their insights into this age group, such as Erikson, Friedenberg, and Jersild. Also missing from the volume are detailed case studies of adolescents, which this reviewer finds most valuable for helping teachers understand these young people and the professional behavior appropriate for them.

One would guess that Powell's book, and many books like it, will help students of adolescence pass final examinations on the topic. Yet one wonders what such collections of ideas and details contribute to professional behavior. Taking

a hint from Bruner's *Process of Education*, one might ask why such college texts could not more effectively get at the big ideas, the processes of the discipline, and the skills necessary to put learnings to actual professional use.

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Purpose—Ammons

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"Committed" Teacher—Fox

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nificantly to the educational growth and well being of his students.

In other words, his greatest reward is the realization that his role in life is an important one and that he is fulfilling his purposes. Shakespeare said it another way: "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

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