

# The Importance of People

## Innovation and People

Alice Miel

AN UNUSUALLY large group had turned out for the meeting that evening. All were busy people—curriculum workers from the city and surrounding suburbs, professors of curriculum representing the many colleges and universities in the area. They had come expecting a lively discussion with a professional critic of education. They had hoped for a sophisticated probing of ideas, but instead they were treated to insults, some open, some covert.

The more the audience showed an intention to listen carefully and to find points of both agreement and disagreement, the more extravagant the speaker's attack became. According to him, teachers in the elementary school are and should remain mere baby-sitters. Since high school and college teachers do nothing but miseducate, their best contribution would be to stay out of the students' way. School administrators are hopelessly bad. The speaker left a strong impression that education is to be saved only by ignoring all persons specialized in that field.

### A Sobering Review

Those who insult others while promoting an innovation often do not intend to do so. They get carried away in their zeal to sell their particular road to salvation and they forget to show respect for other people in the process.

Alienation of others may be the in-

evitable and unenviable lot of the innovator, inside the profession or out. Yet it is possible that awareness of assumptions and behavior that appear insulting to others may help in minimizing alienation and in facilitating the process of change.

The guest at the meeting was speaking in a way familiar to educators. He typified a few of the kinds of insults frequently encountered, but it is possible to compile a somewhat longer list by searching the memory for other words and deeds in other times and places.

As the list is examined, it is sobering to review one's own behavior and that of colleagues while calling to mind treatment at the hands of certain lay citizens.

### *These Approaches Are Injurious . . .*

. . . the writing off of the educator's professional preparation and experience as of no value in bringing about change. The notion that no good ideas for innovation in education can be expected from educators themselves is insulting to an entire profession and denies the record.

. . . the assumption that others can always be counted on to turn a deaf ear to proposals for change and that therefore they must be bypassed and presented with a *fait accompli*. An individual or group might be given a chance to listen before being discounted.

. . . the assumption that any question

asked or objection raised in relation to a proposed change can be automatically dismissed as foot-dragging. The objector is not necessarily resistant to all kinds of change and may have a much more constructive purpose than preservation of a comfortable status quo.

... the assumption that those close to an operation have been entirely unaware of problems until such difficulties were pointed out by an onlooker.

... the assumption that those close to the operation have no ideas of their own for solving problems seen by themselves or pointed out by others. Why not provide a hearing for everyone's views?

... the typing of an entire group as performing at the level of the least competent among them or as performing like those encountered in one's own schooling a generation or two ago.

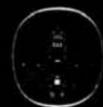
... the stereotyping of individuals, on the basis of age alone, as outdated and

useless, or the blaming of persons for not having acted in their earlier days in the profession on the knowledge only now available. Each individual deserves to be judged for himself alone.

... the placing of a premium on only one or a few types of competence, for example, specialization in mathematics or in research skills. All who are serving usefully in various capacities in an institution or a system have a right to assurance that their particular competence also is valued.

... the advising of knowledgeable individuals to return to an antiquated solution, long ago discarded for good and sufficient reason.

... being told that some simple, mechanical solution will suffice when the problem is extremely complex and perhaps perennial. One who thinks of education as an enterprise requiring the willing cooperation of intelligent human beings



## Blaisdell Publishing Company

We are pleased to announce the publication of **THE SECONDARY PHASE OF EDUCATION** by Lawrence W. Downey. This new book, which develops a conceptual system for ordering knowledge in the field of secondary education, serves as a guide for more *systematic* innovations in high schools and provides a basis for better communication among persons interested in effecting change and improvement in the field.

In his treatment of substantive, procedural, and environmental elements, the author moves systematically through several phases, including: an analysis of how each element relates to other elements in the process; a review of recent trends in practice insofar as these relate to the element under consideration; a summary of related research; and some speculation as to the shape of things to come. A number of "unproven hypotheses" is presented as an invitation to students of secondary education to reflect, debate, inquire, and test ideas in this field.

### **THE SECONDARY PHASE OF EDUCATION**

by Lawrence W. Downey, Head, Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta. 1965. 242 pages. \$5.00.

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rightly resents the implication that education is a machine to be repaired by some all-knowing tinkerer.

. . . being treated as a button to be pushed, as a body to be deployed, in short, as a *thing*. Only the individual with some measure of autonomy can maintain his human dignity.

### The Human Element in Change

The foregoing analysis is negative and distasteful, but the external and internal climate in education just now calls for a forceful reminder. We have lost much ground gained during an earlier period when there were sincere attempts to build a profession of self-confident, thinking people. In the general haste for reform in education, people in large numbers are being distrusted and ignored. Their potential contribution is being wasted. The motive power that comes from being considered important in decision making is going untapped.

Even though shortcuts appear to be achieved through disregarding the human element in change, a high price may be paid in later resistance at the critical point of putting an innovation into effect. Few worthwhile changes can be made in education without accompanying changes in the beliefs and capabilities of a number of people. Furthermore, changes of any moment require the most careful planning and preparation.

After the innovator has done the best he can in developing a logic for his proposal, working it out in major outline, and analyzing the requirements for implementation, he will do well to submit his complete prospectus to a wide assortment of people for a preview.

If something is to be tried out with six-year-olds in mathematics, for example, the specialist in that field may save time

for children, teachers, and himself by inviting the questions and cautions of those wise in the ways of young children. He also needs the help of those who will most likely think in terms of the total curriculum and schedule of the school.

If a school is to be reorganized, it will take many different persons to see all the angles, anticipate all the possible difficulties, and force the proposal maker to complete the meticulous planning warranted when such a large investment of human energy is to be demanded. Most appalling is a current argument for bringing about change by plunging teachers into a new situation to sink or swim. Equally appalling is the type of brainwashing which guarantees that teachers will profess to like any change foisted upon them.

If someone believes that a great deal of money should be invested, say to provide facilities for statewide broadcasting via closed circuit television, it is intelligent to secure the widest range of experience in evaluating the proposal in advance. Alternative ways of using such a sum, with the possible consequences of each, would be useful to consider.

Nothing appears so simple as an operation little understood. To the uninitiated or to the one somewhat removed, many things seem easily possible. It is the people on the scene of action—those who must carry out a new idea—who know certain questions to ask, who may have improvements to suggest at the planning stage, who can anticipate details to be thought through in advance, who realize some of the things it will take to do the job, who can advise on timing.

The one who is to implement a change needs a thorough understanding, a commitment to the importance and rightness of an attempted change, a view of what he himself will be doing under new cir-

circumstances, and the proper tools and training. Only the person who has an opportunity to use considerable judgment of his own in how he carries out his responsibilities—judgment as to the ways he will use time, energy and resources—can operate as the kind of professional person we need in the schools. Only such a person can, in turn, deal with each student as an individual whose dignity is to be maintained and advanced.

—ALICE MIEL, *Professor of Education and Chairman, Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York.*

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#### Economic Opportunity—Marburger

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their personnel represent the only organized institution. Further, the major emphasis of community action programs is educational.

It is imperative that the schools initiate the community action organization where none exists or catalyze the agencies and institutions with the potential for initiating the community action organization into forming a cooperative action team. To act otherwise—to be indecisive or obstructive—could possibly lead to a fragmentation of the educational programs among those agencies which recognize the need but are less equipped to perform the task.

There is no imperative that a comprehensive educational program need be initially proposed. Program development monies are available for those communities which are unable easily to assess their needs or lack the personnel resources. Programs can be built in stages. A modest preschool program might be the initial attempt with development funds requested to examine the next directions.

Technical assistance funds can also be made available to state educational agencies, colleges and universities and private nonprofit organizations for assistance to communities and school systems in need of such help.

#### Responsibility of the Schools

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 can provide to local school systems substantial assistance for the education of the disadvantaged youth of the community. It allows for preventive (pre-school, in-service education of staff, specialized personnel) as well as the range of remedial and rehabilitative services to adults and youth.

There is evidence from demonstration projects, pilot projects, and community action projects, to show us that the schools can make a significant impact on the education of the poor. Competent school administrators, teachers, and special personnel have demonstrated that planning and action, by both school and community, not only create success within the local area but mobilize the larger community for support of schools.

Mistakes have been made on both sides. Injudicious selection of personnel, over-zealousness of school or community persons, institutional as well as individual rigidity, will continue to frustrate the best efforts, but if schools are to meet the challenge of the sixties, and if communities and community leaders are to subordinate self-interest to the higher goal of superior education for all youth, then enlightened leadership, using all appropriate means, can show new responsibility and new vitality in an effective program of education for democracy. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 can be one means for demonstrating that responsibility.

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