



## **PERSPECTIVE IN EDUCATION**

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THE past year or two may be characterized by historians of the future as that period when the government of the United States "discovered" education as an instrument for achieving national goals. For the first time in our nation's history, huge sums of money have been expended on education, much of it on a "crash program" basis, in an attempt to achieve within a few years what man has never before been able to do—eliminate the injustices of poverty, ignorance and apathy.

That some noble first steps have been taken cannot be denied. That mistakes have been made, that money has at times been wasted, and that questionable practices have been supported in the haste to spend appropriations can also be documented.

Perhaps now is a good time not only to look backward critically but also forward hopefully to an era when more rational decisions are made at all levels of the educational enterprise. If the millennium is to become reality soon, it becomes increasingly apparent that we shall need not only to obtain more information about the current state of American education (usually discussed in terms of national assessment), but also to cast such obtained information against values held. We need, in other words, to bring perspective into the process of making judgments about what to do. That is the heart of the *evaluation* process.

No one would question the fact that our capacity for obtaining and utilizing data is vastly different today from what it was even ten years ago. Computers and computer technology make possible the collation of information and the anal-

ysis of data at speeds conceived as possible only in "wild dreams" a few years ago. But decisions still have to be made about *what* data are collected and used. Computers cannot control what is fed into them. Nor can they truly make decisions concerning the relative worth or value of accepted goals such as developing respect for human personality, fostering creativity, and developing the capacity to do critical thinking. These are *values* held—developed through the long history of human association on this planet and in this nation—and they are values worthy of continued support.

Evaluation, then, is more than data collection and analysis. Evaluation is at least a four-step process:

(1) Stating values and purposes in terms of the needs of individuals and the group, the community, and an ever-changing society; (2) securing evidences that these values and purposes are being realized; (3) interpreting the evidences gathered; (4) redefining values, setting up new purposes, and planning new practices in terms of the modified purposes.<sup>1</sup>

Evaluation is more than national assessment—as important as that may be for Congress in determining whether appropriated funds are being wisely spent and in making judgments about changes in spending emphasis that appear to be needed. Evaluation includes a focus on the *individual*, on the particular *school*, on the *community* in which the school is located, on the *state* and its particular problems, as well as on national and wider goals.

### Consensus on Goals

As we look to the future and recognize the necessity for change, we shall need to work especially hard to develop consensus on goals at all levels of education. We shall also need to hold fast to some of the purposes for education which our predecessors developed as they worked to create our school system. Although such goals are relative, and our conception of their worth may change in the light of circumstances, they have become widely accepted.

These goals have been tested in successive generations, and the accumulated testing has proven their worth. You may question the wording of some of the following goals, but I suspect that you and almost every other adult American would like youngsters as they attend our schools to become:

- Literate, and effective in using rational thought processes
- Loyal to country and to mankind
- Creatively imaginative
- Healthy in mind and body
- Courageous and committed to values held
- Effective in solving problems of living
- Fully functioning individuals.

<sup>1</sup> Southern Association's Cooperative Study in Elementary Education. *Evaluating the Elementary School, A Guide for Cooperative Study*. Atlanta, Georgia: Commission on Research and Service, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1951. p. 1.

We shall need also, as our culture and its institutions become increasingly complex, to hold fast to some values which were more characteristic of our land when we were a rural nation. Then, teachers knew the names of the pupils—and their interests—and their aspirations. Such personal interest and involvement in the lives and hopes of young people are still important, and especially so in urban settings. Then, success in school was not measured in terms of some externally set national standard or norm, but was determined quite subjectively by concerned human beings interested more in *progress* than in *status*.

If our concern is with growing—with becoming—then progress made is of much greater significance than measured performance at any point in time. Then, good teachers were interested in all aspects of development—with total growth—not merely with those aspects which can be easily quantified and punched into a card marked by those words signifying the capstone of our civilization: "Do not fold, staple, or mutilate."

### Confidence in Tomorrow

In our zeal to hold fast to proven values and accepted goals, however, we should not fall into the tempting trap of resisting change simply because we are so comfortable. As the Committee preparing the 1962 Yearbook of ASCD stated so clearly:

Perhaps the one over-all implication for education drawn from the discussion of fully functioning people . . . is that education must value change. As people are ever-moving and ever-becoming, education needs to move into the future with them. We need to de-emphasize tradition and the past and devote more energy to the present and the future. Schools should be places where students can grow and change as total personalities. . . . Educators can no longer afford to deplore and resist change. Too many teachers are still insisting that things must be done the "right" way. In such an atmosphere, goodness becomes synonymous with conformity. Messiness, noise, confusion and mistakes, out of which may come originality, creativity and genius, are suppressed in favor of neatness, quiet, order and "being right," out of which can come conservatism, cowardice, rigidity, and smugness.

Change will only occur in an atmosphere where change is valued, difference is warmly appreciated and mistakes, which are the inevitable concomitant of trying, are accepted as a normal part of the price of growing.<sup>2</sup>

Too much of what we have done in the past has been based on inept hunches—not on data carefully secured and rigorously analyzed. Too much of what we have done in the past has been merely the accumulated folklore of predecessors who developed their ways of proceeding without a research base. Too much of what we are still doing is based upon inadequate understandings about human motivation, about human perception, and about the essential role of the self-concept in achievement.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur W. Combs, Chairman. *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming: A New Focus for Education*. 1962 Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1962. p. 207.

So, let us face the future, and be confidently a part of it, as Carl Sandburg suggests in the closing lines of *Prairie*:<sup>3</sup>

O prairie mother, I am one of your boys.  
I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full of pain over love.  
Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise  
or a sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water.

. . .

I speak of new cities and new people.  
I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.  
I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down,  
a sun dropped in the west.  
I tell you there is nothing in the world  
only an ocean of tomorrows,  
a sky of tomorrows.

I am a brother of the cornhuskers who say  
at sundown:

To-morrow is a day.

—HAROLD D. DRUMMOND, *Chairman, Department of Elementary Education, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.*

<sup>3</sup>From "Prairie" from *Cornhuskers* by Carl Sandburg. Copyright 1918 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. Copyright 1946 by Carl Sandburg. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.



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