

● Where Should Education Go?

Education and Social Reconstruction

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EDUCATORS are genuinely concerned about education's share of responsibility for the social reconstruction of our cities. We recognize the problems of inner-city schools—low academic achievement rates, high drop-out rates, truancy, delinquency, large classes, high teacher turnover, and all the rest. And we have arrived at some broad determinations about what should be done, particularly with younger children under such Federal programs as Head Start, Follow Through, and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Activities in the Nation's schools under these programs have brought new opportunities to millions of children even if all the problems have not been solved.

Among the unsolved problems remaining are those which afflict older children of school age. For an understanding of the complexity of these, I recommend the *Report on Juvenile Delinquency and Crime* by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. It is a distressing yet hopeful and, above all, compelling document. It concludes that

a direct relationship exists between the rapid rise in teen-age crime and the inability of the schools either to motivate these children to learn or to equip them with marketable skills. It makes a number of excellent recommendations, some of which call for expenditure of money, others asking only initiative of school administrators.

In the general context of renewing urban education, I would like to consider two Commission recommendations that I think go to the heart of the matter—job training and teacher reeducation.

The Commission proposes secondary vocational programs to equip *every* non-college-bound student with a marketable skill. This is a tall order, but a necessary one. We watch nearly a million youngsters drop out of school each year; another million graduate with few, if any, job skills. The Commission has documented their subsequent frustrations—repeated employment rejections, growing disillusionment, and rapid decline into delinquency and crime.

The answer lies in making education pertinent to the lives of children who

now feel rejected by it, in placing the emphasis on success rather than on failure by changing what we teach and the way we teach it to fit the children we have. As long as we expect the children to fit a school rather than a school to fit the children, we are in for continuing dropouts and failures. If we can think in these terms we may be able to make the comprehensive high school serve its true purpose and in doing so bring basic and essential literacy skills to a much higher proportion of young people along with appropriate vocational skills. I am convinced that we need a new mixing of vocational concerns with the learning and skills for which the high school is traditionally responsible. By bringing these elements together we can provide motivation and improve employment chances at the same time. They are as much a prerequisite as shopwork for the skilled occupations.

Instrument makers need a solid background in algebra and science as well as machine shop training; construction electricians should know basic mathematics and physics.

A Comprehensive Curriculum

A truly comprehensive curriculum which includes vocational components will give the individual student the academic *and* vocational credentials to compete in the skilled labor market. The schools must begin vocational programs at the junior high level, develop a high school curriculum suited to the student's vocational interests and aptitudes, as well as provide academic offerings.

Some vocational skills can realistically be taught in the school environment.

Yet for many specialties—plumbing, masonry, sheet metal work, even auto repair and others—I believe our vocational programs would benefit from new alliances with business and trade unions. Inner-city schools simply do not have the resources to offer practical training in the full range of occupational skills needed in commerce and industry. But they can develop cooperative arrangements that would enable teen-agers to study and work at the same time and to learn through well-planned work the essentials for a post-high school job while they complete the academic requirements for high school graduation. In fact, I see no reason why credits toward a diploma should not be given for apprenticeship training and other work planned by the school as part of the student's education.

For the typical school staff the Commission advises a vastly intensified program of reeducation with major emphasis on developing more positive attitudes toward the native abilities of disadvantaged children. Most of the problems of our inner-city schools have little to do with the innate intellectual equipment of teachers or students. We know youngsters tend to perform according to the expectations of their teachers, be they high or low.

In a California experiment, children in four elementary schools were given an ordinary intelligence test. Their teachers were deliberately misled into believing that the test would pinpoint students who could be expected to show great IQ growth. Researchers then picked—entirely at random—10 children in each class as “high growth” types. A year later their IQ's were indeed 10 to 15 points higher than those

of their classmates. Teachers expected more of them and made special efforts to see that the students lived up to their "potential"—a rather shadowy, difficult-to-measure element but evidently as easy to come by in the ghetto as anywhere else in America.

Reeducation for Teachers

Federal funds to support new types of reeducation programs for teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff will become available under the new Education Professions Development Act. I urge school administrators, in cooperation with local colleges and universities—or within their own systems—to think about training programs that can be funded under this legislation.

For the long pull, of course, the place to start rebuilding inner-city education is not the ghetto but the college or university department of education. In-service education of teachers now working in ghetto schools is certainly necessary. But we have a new generation of teachers coming whose values and viewpoints—if untempered by special training—may militate against a sympathetic understanding of the slum child and development of a deep personal commitment to his advancement.

For a variety of reasons—inadequate funds, outdated facilities, heavy faculty teaching loads, and some inertia—teacher education has not moved in this

direction as rapidly or as forcefully as it should. Courses in the cultural heritage and psychological orientation of minority groups are not yet standard in the undergraduate curriculum. Most student teaching is still done in schools where pupils pose few of the disciplinary and motivational problems encountered in the inner city.

True, there are encouraging experiments, and I would like to see more of them. New York University, Antioch College, and a few others are working directly with ghetto schools to broaden the educational experience of disadvantaged youngsters and student teachers alike. But, again, these are pilot projects and they do not add up to a broad change in the philosophy and practice of teacher education.

The report on Juvenile Delinquency and Crime must not be put on the library shelf and ignored. There are too many similar reports there already.

"To take what there is and use it," said Henry James, "without waiting forever in vain for the preconceived . . . this doubtless is the right way to live."

To use what we now know, without waiting for yet another study of over-studied problems, is the task confronting education in the ghetto.

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