

Most of the Change

ROBERT R. LEEPER

*Most of the change we think we see in life
Is due to truths being in and out of favor.¹*

THIS issue focuses upon "the introduction of something new" (which is one definition of *innovation*) in education. We will look at change and at some of the effects of certain truths being in and others being out of favor. We will also be concerned with *why* the "something new" is introduced, and with the results of its introduction.

Education is a deliberate relating of people, usually younger or less experienced with older or more experienced, in a setting that is contrived to produce change. Here we are concerned with the origin and the content of the "something new," the innovation—whether it be an idea, a fact, a method, a system, a body of knowledge, an object, or a technology. We are also concerned with the conditions under which the "something new" is made available to persons in the educational setting, and with the effects and the direction of such relating.

In a sense, we are dealing with the process by which the cultural invention is introduced in the school, with the manner, the content, and the effects of its introduction. Innovations will be self-defeating and futile if their advocates fail to take into account the feelings, motivations, values, and needs of the people concerned.

We have come to a time, in the evolution of our democratic, industrial, scientific, and technological society, when we are becoming increasingly enriched by the creation of new inventions, especially in the realm of content, ideas, processes, products, and machines. We have for some time been in the early stages of seeking to comprehend what these new inventions are and what they mean and to apply these to people in the setting of the school. Many wise and well-

¹ Robert Frost. "The Black Cottage." *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1958. p. 77. Copyright © 1958 by Robert Frost. Copyright © 1967 by Lesley Frost Ballantine. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

informed persons have been involved in attempts to make this application in the school setting. Not always, however, have the attempts proved successful.

In several instances, the staffs of national projects, in updating the various content areas, have completed their massive endeavors, breathed a sigh of relief and leaned back, expecting the new materials, content, and approaches to transform practice. When such transformation did not begin at once to be apparent, staffs of these projects looked again at their implementation procedures. In some instances, the elements that needed most attention were those surrounding the point at which the innovative factor is brought into relation to the teacher and the learner in the school setting.

A Soil for Growth

Of prime importance in education are the factors which control the act of relating, the point at which teaching and learning take place in the setting of the school. Our society and culture have found it easier to provide the things and the content with which this educational setting is furnished than to influence and to enhance the intangible elements that surround this setting-for-learning. Some of these "intangible" elements that are so crucial to the success of education are psychological and social, while others are aesthetic, political, and value-based.

Perhaps it is easier to manage and to manipulate the tangible elements in the school setting than it is to provide a climate in which the intangible elements of teaching and learning will have a natural and responsive soil for growth.

Individuals—whether pupils, teachers, supervisors, principals, superintendents—cannot be manipulated into insight, into mastery, into wisdom, save at great cost, both to the manipulator and to the manipulated. And when such insight is achieved, it is likely to be infused with bitterness, or resentment, or other qualities so negative that society's cost for such a manipulative approach must be reckoned as too great.

One example of a very significant truth has been in favor at brief moments in certain schools in our nation and in other democratic lands. This truth is that innovation, the "introduction of something new," can best be accomplished in the schools of a democracy when the setting exemplifies the finest and best of respect for the individual, whether teacher or learner.

Not all innovation needs to derive from the "great thinkers" or the status leaders or the specialists or the executives of business or industry or government. When a teacher or principal or a supervisor gains insight and the confidence to introduce a change that he believes to be for the enhancement of the teaching-learning situation, this is innovation at the point of greatest need and significance. Such innovation should be supported and encouraged.

In an atmosphere reasonably free of threat, generally supportive, and confidently democratic, innovation is a continuing and expected process. In such a setting, innovation is not "new and different," it is the texture of each day's planning and working together for learning and for growth.

The innovative idea is not squelched because it is new and different—and

therefore disturbing to routine practice. Consciously and selectively, the novel idea or approach is noted, discussed, shaped, fashioned lovingly and insightfully so that it will have a fair chance to be tried in a supportive atmosphere.

This issue examines some of the approaches that have been tried in innovation. Experienced educators look at various aspects of theory and practice in innovation, at desirable objectives, at policy matters related to change, and at issues of public understanding and support.

As we think about innovation, its purpose and effect, let us not permit the glamour of the new and the novel and the manipulatable to blind our vision to some of the older truths that were dearly bought. Such truths might conceivably lend an invincible power to the "something new" that is being related by human beings to other human beings in an educational setting.

Above all, this setting must be contrived with, and be characterized by, intelligence and wisdom and love.

—ROBERT R. LEEPER, *Editor, Educational Leadership.*

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