

Impacts on Today's Schools

Muriel Crosby

THE rapid-fire eruption of racial riots, civil disturbances, campus protests, and teacher militancy during the past year marks the development of a new period in the great social revolution of the twentieth century. In all probability, conditions will worsen in the immediate future as solutions to human problems are sought.

Just a few springs ago, we were concerned with campus party raids as the chief expression of young liberals on college campuses. The progression from party raids to student riots, the appropriation of college buildings, and the holding of staff and trustees as hostages in the settlement of student demands reflects the traumatic acceleration of change. More significant, this situation reflects the revolutionary nature of the times. Without due regard for law and order, without recognition of the established processes of protest, this nation could well be faced with anarchy. And at the center of the vortex are the public schools of the country, charged with the function of becoming the instrument of social change by the U. S. Supreme Court decision on the desegregation of public schools in May 1954.

At a time when the public schools are fighting for survival in the midst of pressures from without, never has there been a greater threat to public education from within. In many school systems, teacher militancy has become a divisive force, separating teachers from principals and from supervisors. In some cities, principals are withdrawing from established state organizations to form their own separate "unions." Supervisors, who usually identify with teachers, find themselves looked upon as "management" and are bewildered about their role in the educational hierarchy. The role of educational leadership is crucial in the creation of a new world which must establish new strategies to meet the emergence of old problems with a "new look."

To Negotiate Curriculum

The most critical issue within the profession is centered in attempts by teacher organizations to negotiate curriculum. The most critical outside

pressure is the attempt of "poverty parents" to take over the administration of the schools.

Today the profession is reaping the wild wind produced on the one hand by failure to recognize teachers as real professionals having significant responsibility for curriculum development. On the other hand, much of the parent reaction against the schools is the result of the closed door policy maintained by many administrators in the involvement of parents in the schools in a significant way.

The problems we face are not new problems; they are the problems we have swept under the carpet for three hundred years. The temper of the times has provided the stimulus for their emergence; the cauldron has overflowed, spilling its combustible and volatile lava over the nation. The schools, as the change agent for a house divided, must accept the responsibility for directing social change or be replaced as the institution which, traditionally, has been the bulwark of a free society.

The problems posed by the minorities, the poor whites in Appalachia and the rural sections of the country, the Indian on the reservation, the Spanish surnamed of the southwest, the Negro of the ghetto, both rural and urban, are not the only problems challenging the public schools. The conflicts of value systems both within and outside middle-class America, the depersonalization of education resulting from mechanization and technology, are crucial in their implications for developing new strategies for a new era in education.

Since the 1920's, we in the teaching profession have been working on professionalization of teaching as a profession. The impacts on today's schools are putting us to the test. The immediate future will reveal the answer to a critical question: "Are we capable of doing the job?"

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