

Education in Revolution

J. NIEL ARMSTRONG *

SEVERAL significant lectures were delivered recently at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University at Greensboro. Implied in these lectures was sufficient unanimity of judgment to suggest several generalizations about the educational process and the direction of social change. This summary identifies some of the generalizations and provides some support that was given for these ideas.

The positions which were taken by the speakers were in support of the general theme, "Education in Revolution." The ideas which follow rest heavily upon the judgments expressed by the speakers, but no position or collection of facts is attributed to any individual or group of individuals involved in the lectures.

The first generalization concerned the future of America. It is stated simply as, "The greatness of America in the future depends upon educational change." As one speaker put it, there is hope for the future, but there is much to be done. There must be a restructuring of our priorities, and when these have been restructured we will learn things about education we never dreamed of before.

In a more direct approach to the idea, it was said that as we turn the century we will have solved most of the problems of this world. By the year 2000, equality of oppor-

tunity will be the way of life in America, for America will be an integrated society, and education must be the change agent.

In addition, it was noted that all aspects of the educational system are under attack, even though the indications are that the immediate future will be the most productive era known to man. Another speaker noted that change in education is inevitable. Education, viewed as adjusted living, must change in order to transmit knowledge and skills relevant to living, but not necessarily relevant to future greatness.

A second position which emerged may be expressed in this way: "Instruments and vehicles of progress often result from desperate events and circumstances." The current revolution in education must be viewed against a background of riots, hatred, and campus confrontations which have made the climate for social change explosive and threatening. Constructive use of dissent is not frowned upon, for it is the vehicle of change. This position obtains in the case of students in secondary schools, colleges, and universities and is equally applicable to teacher organizations and other professional groups.

* J. Niel Armstrong, Director of Summer School, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Greensboro

For the Creative Teacher—

TEACHING IN THE BRITISH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Edited by Vincent R. Rogers,
University of Connecticut

Thirteen chapters of this text have been written by noted British educators for Americans; the fourteenth, written by the editor, summarizes these programs and compares them with American programs. The model educational programs discussed in this book are based on a fusion of developmental psychological research done by Piaget and others with classroom practice. These models feature a great deal of freedom, responsibility, and individualization of instruction for and by the student in an informal atmosphere.

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In like manner, it was said that the riots of 1966-67 brought the Kerner Report and the television program "Julia." These vehicles have helped to produce in churches, chambers of commerce, and other institutions the dialogue necessary for understanding the problems of the poor and the minorities of America. Some degree of understanding is an essential element of the climate of change. The most acceptable method of fostering change in the democratic society is use of the ballot; but when the change of power cannot come through the use of the ballot, then it is taken to the streets. It may be noted that the civil rights movement did not come through a change of heart in the dominant population, but because of the mass migration of Negroes from the South to six major cities of other political regions. This change in population structure and in political behavior changed the political structure of the United States.

The dominant group, regardless of race or social status, does not willingly share

power. Power is shared only when it appears to be less painful than another alternative. It must be remembered that had our social institutions not been vulnerable, protest groups would never have survived in the streets.

• In the third place: "Communication media are vital to social change." The images created through the media influence tremendously the value systems of individuals and groups.

Expression is power, for this is the only way groups of people or different generations can communicate with one another. If adults are to help change what is wrong with the youth of today, they must listen to what youth has to say and be prepared to communicate with youth. The communication media have helped to create the belief that pills are the best relief for tension and the best way to produce the strength needed to cope with the problems of life. As for youth, they need up-to-date data and a defensible conceptual model in which to use the data. It is the responsibility of the adult society to supply these, and when either is not present, the adult society has failed its purpose.

Textbooks and the media of exchange have tarnished the image of the Negro in particular and minorities in general. With the same degree of effort, the same media of exchange can create a positive image of groups and institutions. The encouraging bit relates to the present effort, and with encouraging success, to recapture the Black Man's contribution to this country. Such efforts include integration of the Negro into American history, the inclusion of pictures and prose of dignity in textbooks, and finally specialization at the graduate level for preparation of persons who will have the competence to go into deprived and affluent areas alike and contribute to the movement aimed at legitimizing self-help and upgrading the self-concept.

Traditionally, the media of exchange have created negative images of powerless groups and influenced the rigidity of social institutions against change. As the communications media, an institution of our social

structure, change their focus, so will other institutions of our society change.

● Finally: "The educational institution, as a social institution, resists change." Most social institutions have been remarkably hostile to change. Many factors have influenced the slow pace at which the institution of education has changed. Foremost, perhaps, is lack of professional leadership in the policy-making roles. In addition, education is hindered in its effort to change by tradition, which reflects itself in textbooks, lecture approach to instruction, departmental organization, preparation of teachers in traditional techniques and values, and ambiguity of the language of the profession. The gap between what *should be* in our schools—the attainment ideal—and what *is* will widen unless schools, as an institution, adjust and direct some of their attention and forces toward the management of change.

One of man's greatest assets is his ability to conceptualize change, effect it, and adjust to it. This human quality gives functional reality to the aims of education. Man can adjust to change by changing his way of responding. If the educational institution is to keep pace with the demands of the times, it must move fast in discovering new and better ways of teaching more things faster. It, too, must learn and must be willing and able to adjust to change.

From the preceding generalizations and extractions there is no doubt that some institutions of the American social order are changing fast enough to be described as in revolution. This group of institutions regrettably does not include the schools as one of the major agencies in ferment. The one serious conclusion is that change in education must be accelerated to keep pace with changes taking place in other areas of society if education is to avoid more and deeper trouble.

It is clear that the total structure of the institution of education must change. There is adequate evidence to support the belief that change is a part of education, but traditionally it has occurred by piecemeal patterns and not nearly fast enough to meet the needs

of society. It is clear that there must be a mass attack upon problems involved in the institution of education. Such an approach would include: identification of objectives more relevant to the multiple differences in the abilities, interests, and long-range plans of its students; a different conceptual framework for defining objectives in terms more consistent with contemporary priorities of students and societal demands; identification and organization of new contents which reflect the truth about facts, about myths, about customs, and about cultures; more realistic ways of handling content as the avenue to experience; modification of instructional devices, techniques, and procedures; and development of evaluation schemes which will reveal what an individual can do and how the individual can be expected to behave under a given situation rather than what percentage of isolated facts he recalled at a given time from a well selected sample of a sort.

Changes of such dimensions are comprehensive, and they must be made at a revolutionary pace, for no less will satisfy the demands of the times. Currently policies and practices of the educational organization are being attacked from all directions. The choice is clear: either education itself will find the answers—and that with haste—or society will use other agencies which are developing rapidly the expertise for solving the problems which have been assigned to education.

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