

PROJECT BASIC: A RESPONSE

Project Basic has identified a wide range of objectives and stimulated reexamination of the purpose of schooling.

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King's critique of Project Basic misses the point on several counts.

First, well over half of the objectives identified as essential in functioning as an adult are reading, writing, and mathematics objectives. They should be on everybody's list of prerequisites for graduation. I have never considered such emphasis as "the conservative element in schooling." We, along with employers, parents, and other citizens, see those objectives as rule one, page one of school responsibility. Beyond those essentials, we have identified objectives in work (job attitudes, career understanding, and others); citizenship (the importance of voting, respect for property, rights, and responsibilities between and among persons, and others); survival (parenting, health and hygiene, consumer awareness, and others); arts and physical education. I suggest that such scope is hardly minimal.

Second, rather than inhibiting reexamination of the mission and mode of schooling, Project Basic has provoked some compelling, even profound, questioning. For example, extensive community-based curriculums and practices have resulted. Considerable attention to handicapped and limited-English-speaking students is leading to new models of teaching and assessment. Mandated appropriate assistance leading to student success is forcing mind-bending questions and producing imaginative and diverse instructional approaches.

Third, Project Basic has established a process for and stimulated reevaluation of curriculum in mathematics, writing, social studies, science, the arts, and physical education. This review is K-12 and includes the set of Project Basic objectives, but is far more extensive (physics, calculus, computer literacy, dance forms). It is provoking important value-laden questions—consideration, for instance, of such diverse concerns as the Holocaust and the role of labor in our national development. These and other inquiries are pushing the many who are engaged in the processes up against edges of what we know about teaching and learning.

Fourth, it is worth noting our emphasis on providing opportunities for gifted and talented students. Within the last 18 months alone, the number of students participating in such programs has grown from 12,000 to 25,000. But the numbers are perhaps not as exciting as the progress in program quality and the burgeoning recognition of these students' needs.

Space limitations will not allow all to be said that should be said. We are seeking, successfully I think, to combine the best of Bobbitt's insight that there are some things children must be able to do when they become adults with King's obvious and equally valuable commitment to curriculum progress and change springing from critical analysis which is dependent in part on learning from the past. ■

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