
PAUL D. HOUSTON

Our children should learn to

- think
- communicate
- cooperate
- make reasoned and well-informed decisions.

These four simple and straightforward goals are not from a book on curriculum or from some educator's list. Rather, they were developed by a group of citizens serving on a Long-Range Planning Committee appointed by the board of education in Princeton, New Jersey. They constitute what the committee considers "functional literacy."

The Princeton group's definition of functional literacy is uncharacteristically broad. Specifically, it includes a

body of skills and knowledge that equips people for active, comprehending participation in our modern, complex, high technology, managerial, bureaucratic society. Beyond the skills necessary for having a constructive role in that society, functional literacy should convey some sense of how that society works as a whole, how the economy is structured, how political decisions are reached, how values are established, the nature and function of law, the role of individuals in groups of varying sizes in maintaining society and in fostering its growth. In short, functional literacy in the extended sense means knowing enough about one's own society to feel at home in it.

The committee's goals are made up of four main components: information, skills, appreciation, and attitudes. When the goals have been reached, there will be certain things that children

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The Washington Post

Planning for Learning in the World of Tomorrow

Deciding what students will need to know is a giant step toward planning for the future.

know, other things they will know how to do, judgments they will be able to make, and traits they will have acquired.

Planning a Program for the Future

Princeton, like other districts across the country, has faced the pressures of declining enrollment and limited resources. Finding ways to maintain the kind of system that had given Princeton's citizens so much pride for so long became a community priority. Also like other districts, Princeton's greatest resources are human. Thus, the board of education decided to name a blue ribbon citizens committee to identify priority objectives for the school system.

The committee's work was accomplished by 11 people who were selected for what they could bring to the process. They were creative, talented, thoughtful people who, while holding divergent philosophies, were capable of compromise and conciliation. Some were educators, others futurists, and some business people.

The school board's charge to the committee was to develop a plan for the future based on a clear concept of the world of tomorrow and the skills needed to survive and flourish in that world, an understanding of the current desires and expectations of the community, and a practical knowledge of the conditions imposed by limited financial and hu-

man resources. The board also supplied a series of questions to direct the committee in defining the district's constituency, resources, and educational program goals.

Committee members began by reading numerous articles and spending a day with three "futurists" outlining the sociological, technological, and economic implications of current trends. They then split into three subgroups on community values, educational program, and community resources.

The committee's 18 months of work produced a report that included an extensive description of the future, based on present trends. It included likely characteristics of the economy, new technologies, the work force, community values, and learning—specifically, literacy. One of the major recommendations was for continuous long-range planning, with yearly progress reports to the public.

What Next?

School staff members will attend a day-long symposium this fall to underline the themes of the committee's report. Inservice activities will follow so that teachers and administrators can explore the report's suggestions further and plan actions to carry them out. Clearly, since the heart of the report calls for changing *how* we teach, the job ahead is formidable. But I am confident that the commitment of our community and the competence of our staff will allow us to adjust.

At one point in the report, the committee advised that children should "know firsthand the pleasure and mysteries of poetry, where language struggles with the ineffable and our words give chase to our thoughts." The challenge to today's educational leaders is to struggle with the ineffable and to see that our actions give chase to our thoughts, words, and best intentions. Our task is to out-race the speeding hands of time. The future of our children depends upon it. □

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