EDUCATION FACES THE FUTURE

THIRD EDITION

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Preface

IN MY *Preface to an Educational Philosophy,* published in 1940, I sketched the outlines of an educational policy in relation to our emerging democratic society. In the present book I develop further the point of view there outlined, but the major emphasis is on the utilization of the ideas in the discussion of the problems of curriculum construction and methods of teaching. Since the book deals with the broader aspects of education and is related to current issues, it may have an interest for parents and the general reader, but it is mainly intended for students of education, for teachers, and for others concerned with school theory and practice.

The discussion has been organized around two major groups of issues: (1) those involved in the question of progressive education as a general conception of the educative process; (2) those involved in the problem of relating the school to social change and reconstruction. The former series of issues is treated in Part II under the caption "Progressive Education in Transition." Considerable attention is given to the pedagogical side, although the relation to the social aspects of education is constantly borne in mind. Part III, "School and Society in an Age of Reconstruction," deals more directly with the social function of the school. It comprises a short historical sketch of the relation of school and society as heretofore conceived by American statesmen and educators; a presentation of the "reconstructionist" position, i.e., of the view that the school has

a part to play in building a better society; and an analysis of the criticisms of opposing views of the "intellectualist," the "conservationist," and the "old-guard progressive." Part I is devoted to a statement on the changing pattern of liberal thought and the emerging idea of a planned democratic society.

The exposition is in the nature of a critical consideration of current issues in school theory and practice in the light of the ideas developed in the introductory part of the book. Each position has been presented from its own standpoint; comment and criticism are given separately. Most of the important books dealing with educational principles written during the last decade have been taken into consideration. In some respects, my conclusions have developed as a result of an endeavor to recognize the valid points of opposing views, but I have made no effort to work out a "middle way" compromise—as will be apparent to the reader.

The selection of material and the form of organization have been influenced by my experience in teaching at the School of Education of the College of the City of New York, where I lectured on "Contemporary Movements in Education" during the years 1936–1942. The classes were attended by public school teachers, and by college graduates intending to take up teaching in elementary or secondary schools. In writing the book, I have had in mind primarily the needs of students who have had some—but not necessarily a good deal—of previous work in education. Illustrations from practice, concrete proposals, quotations, and analysis of views of individual writers have been included for the purpose of providing the information needed for critical discussion, as well as for giving practical suggestions to teachers for the work in the school. Considerable material on historical background and the underlying social conceptions has been introduced. My experience has led me to believe that such material is indispensable for conveying a proper understanding of the new methods and conceptions.

I am greatly indebted to Professor Edward Hodnett, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Newark and advisory editor to Columbia University Press. His careful analysis of selected chapters of an earlier draft of the manuscript gave me the clue for rewriting and reorganizing the material. To President George N. Shuster, I am grateful for reading parts of the revised manuscript and for his encouragement to publish. I wish to express

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I. B. Berkson

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PART I

EDUCATION AND THE CHANGING LIBERAL PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Educational Controversy, Social Conflict and Contrasting Philosophies

From Experiment to Confusion

Not so many years ago, the diversity of educational practice and opinion in the United States was regarded as praiseworthy. In his report on American education of the beginning of the century, Sir Joshua Fitch concluded that "America may be regarded as a laboratory in which educational experiments are being tried out on a great scale, under conditions exceptionally favorable to the encouragement of inventiveness and fresh enthusiasm, and to the discovery of new methods and new truths." This statement is from a series of essays published in 1924 in honor of Paul Monroe,[1] describing the progress of education in the United States during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and is there commented on with approval as showing shrewd insight into the promising character of American experimental tendencies. Professor Kandel, who wrote the chapter in which the quotation appears, says: "Out of this variety of standards and experimentation based on local initiative and independence, leadership in education went from time to time to the most progressive and resulted in a search for and encouragement of a more scientific study of all phases of education." In another place he says: "Educational theory can no longer be based on authority and tradition; it must be related to practical needs

[1] I. L. Kandel (editor), *Twenty Five Years of American Education*, Macmillan, 1924, pp. 31–32, 41.

and must constantly be infused with a critical and inquiring attitude of mind." The whole mood of the chapter is characterized by an emphasis on the significance of freedom from traditional fixations, and the importance of an open-minded and scientific attitude toward education on the part of the school leaders and of the people at large.

But the times have changed! During the past decade we have been hearing a different—and less optimistic—account. The diverse ideas and activities are no longer regarded as fertile soil for educational experimentation or as a true product of democracy's initiative. They are more likely to be described as "a strife of tongues," a sign of "confusion," even as social and intellectual "disorder." [2] And by no means is the change of heart to be regarded as the inconsistency of an individual writer who may have grown more conservative with the passing of the years. The changed attitude appears to be characteristic of the times. Professor Bode, one of America's recognized liberals in education, opens a symposium [3] designed to break new ground with a chapter entitled "The Confusion in Present-Day Education." He tells how the curriculum of our schools has been crowded in the last quarter century by the introduction of all sorts of subjects, ranging from highly specialized vocational training, through social studies dealing with current economic problems, to generous enrichment from the fields of art and music. He remarks a bit ironically: "From the first grade to the graduate school, our educational system exhibits a hospitality to every form of human interest that is as broad as the Christian principle of charity." A similar criticism comes from that school of thought which would have us base our education on metaphysical principles. Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, began his attack on modern education a number of years ago with the following direct thrust: "The most striking fact about the higher learning in America is the confusion which besets it. This confusion begins in the high school and continues to the loftiest levels of the university." [4]

[2] Compare I. L. Kandel, *Conflicting Theories of Education,* Macmillan, 1938, Chap. I.

[3] W. H. Kilpatrick (editor), *The Educational Frontier,* D. Appleton-Century, 1933.

[4] R. M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America,* Yale University, 1936, p. 1.

Even today, not all the critics view the new programs or the experimental attitude as being without merit. On the contrary, with the exception of a relatively small group, American educators welcome the new tendencies: an enriched curriculum, better adjustment to individual needs of pupils, closer relevancy to contemporary civilization. The burden of the complaint presses against the lack of unifying principle. Even those who favor the changes deplore the way they have been made, i.e., by the simple process of adding new subjects to the existing course of study without reorganizing the curriculum as a whole in relation to guiding principles. The charge is made that we have developed a compartmentalized school, made up of a great many subjects taught by special teachers who have little contact with each other. Exaggerating, perhaps for the sake of impressing the point, Professor Bode says: "The net result of all this is that our conception of general education has become a collection of odds and ends for which it is impossible to have any profound respect."

At this point a demurrer may be interposed: there would be great practical difficulties in achieving a new unified type of education in a short time. Reorganization requires changes in equipment, new textbooks, and retraining of teachers, winning over public leaders, persuading the community, raising the funds needed for new programs which generally cost more than the old. Moreover, the decentralized character of the American educational system, to which some of its good features are due, presents obstacles to rapid reconstruction. Perhaps if the sharp critics of our educational system were more patient, they would find the educational system gradually resetting itself in a unified pattern, better adapted to the new situation.

However, with due allowance for practical difficulties and with reservation as to the acuteness of the disorder in our schools, there still seems ground for the belief that our school program lacks coherence and that a major difficulty lies in the field of educational theory. The reorganization needs a set of principles to serve as guide for reconstruction. It is this which is lacking. To call on Professor Bode again: "They undertake to provide a good education without any clear notion of what such an education would be like if it could be had." There is no consensus on fundamentals among the educational leaders. The "molders of the American mind"—to use the title

of a book describing the views of outstanding educators [5]—may be found on opposite sides with reference to the basic issues, in educational philosophy, in social outlook, as well as in questions of method.

Conflicting Educational Theories

There are a number of ways in which the major educational issues may be stated. Should the primary aims of education be defined in terms of the all-round development of the individual or in terms of intellectual training and mental discipline? Should everyone receive the same education at least till the college period, or should there be a definite provision for individual differences and needs? Shall we keep the individual, his interests and talents, in the focus of our attention, or is education basically a social function, with the demands of society coming first? Should education be "liberal" or should it, at the secondary level at least, be mainly directed toward vocational and professional preparation? If it is to be mainly liberal, should the classic tradition be the basis, or does the scientific emphasis better fulfill the requirements of contemporary humanism?

These problems are not mutually exclusive; rather, a full discussion of any would tend to involve the rest. In this book, we have chosen two major issues which in the elementary and secondary field are pivotal; and aspects of the other issues will, in varying degrees, come in for discussion.

Essentialist versus Progressive. The essentialist conceives of education as a process of conservation and transmission of the social heritage. His view is that society at any stage possesses a heritage of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values; that the main business of the school, as the agent of society, is to pass on these accumulations of culture to the younger generation. The young will thus be prepared for a good and useful life in society; and at the same time the invaluable social heritage will be preserved. The essentialist emphasizes the fundamentals of knowledge which all children should obtain, and regards the acquisition of fundamentals as more important for the child than the pleasurable satisfaction of his impulses

[5] Norman Woelfel, *Molders of the American Mind,* Columbia University, 1933.

or the enrichment of experience. He speaks of thorough mastery of essentials, of discipline, of respect for authority.

As a pedagogue, the essentialist may recognize the importance of the factor of interest in making the teaching processes more effective or in sweetening the bitter pill of learning, but he does not think that the question of what interests the immature child is of first importance. Children should know that going to school and learning are duties, and that one must become habituated to doing unpleasant duties—for life abounds in them. Freedom as a value is not rejected, although it is not made central; the conception is that true freedom can be achieved only through discipline and through mastery of the essentials of the social experience of the past.

As will become apparent in Part II, where the subject of progressive education is dealt with at length, there are, in reality, several kinds of "new education." Some conceptions are definitely "child centered," as the phrase goes: education is thought of as concerned with the release, development, cultivation of creative capacities and tendencies; with freeing latent potentialities and stimulating growth of the personality. Some of the more recent formulations are explicitly "community centered": social co-operation, mutual responsibility, development of better forms of community living are made the principal aims of the educational endeavor. The two views are by no means always sharply distinguishable; all progressives would insist that both "the individual" and "the social" are indissoluble parts of the educational purpose.

The several schools of progressive educational thought are united by their opposition to making transmission of the fixed curriculum the central element in the educational purpose. The progressive would not begin with a set course of study; he speaks about *building*, or *constructing*, a curriculum. The school program would be developed in relation to the interests, needs, activities of definite groups of children. The valuable elements of the social heritage, the skills, knowledge, standards, would be related to the needs of the child and of the present-day community. The new schools think more in terms of individual children—each with a distinct personality—co-operating in group activities rather than of homogeneous units composing a "class." Emphasis is upon constructive and creative activities, on freedom and mental independence, on self-discipline as against discipline imposed from above. Throughout

runs the idea that education is best conceived of as "living experience" and not as a preparation for life at some future period: the best preparation for adult life is living happily, effectively, and responsibly, as the child grows up.

Social Conservation versus Social Reconstruction. The other major division of opinion revolves around the question of the relation of education to social change. At the extreme right—perhaps, properly speaking, outside of it altogether since they do not believe that school education has a direct social function—are those who hold that education is essentially an intellectual process and ought to be "everywhere the same." Among these are the Hutchins group, who maintain that education is the transmission of universal and absolute truth. At the center are those who believe that the school has a major social function: the promotion of social stability and security. In this view, reproduction of the social type and conformity to the mores required for maintaining the special character of any society would be fundamentals of education. The fact that society is changing is all the more reason to emphasize the conservation of the well-established values. The opposing school of thought, also conceiving the school as social agent, believes that adaptation to change is a basic principle of educational philosophy. One wing of this group would go so far as to say that the school should help to envisage a social program for the future and participate in the task of building a new social order.

Those who oppose the idea that "the school must be based on change" are not necessarily conservative in their social views. There are some who, agreeing that society changes and that ideals are progressive, yet maintain that it is not a function of the school to introduce or help to introduce social changes. Society has other means for effecting its improvement; changes must first be accepted by adult society and only later introduced into the school. The school has an important, difficult enough task to bring the individual into harmony with current social purposes without undertaking the work of building a new society. They would say that any attempt on the part of the school to bring about a new society breaks down the individual's loyalty to existing society, and thus becomes a disruptive force. The opposing group would retort that a conception which emphasizes only conservation of the past tends, in a changing society, to make of the school an agent of reaction and

that the failure of the school to keep pace with social advance has created a cultural lag which is a major force in today's social tension, maladjustment, and crisis.

The two sets of views have been stated in terms of extreme opposition. Even this sketchy description, however, suggests that the differences are not contrasts of black and white. Defining the issues in terms of one position *versus* the other, while helping to throw the spotlight on real differences of orientation, obscures some of the major problems. Nevertheless, the opposing conceptions express a genuine conflict, and the application of the diverse principles leads to different types of schools. Also, there is a certain degree of affinity between the progressives and the reconstructionists, on the one hand, and the essentialists and the conservationists, on the other. This alignment is not absolute: only a minority of the essentialists would subscribe to the scholastic metaphysical formulation. Not all the progressives subscribe to the position that the school should lead society in bringing about a new social order. But, speaking broadly, there does seem to be a close relationship: those who emphasize the necessity of relating education to the needs of the child tend to be on the side of those who look with favor on the consideration of social change as a basic element in education. In fact, the two controversies are usually discussed under the one heading of *essentialism versus progressivism.* And the animus of the discussion in the recent literature makes it evident that the controversy goes beyond issues of method. The difference between essentialists and progressives is a difference in basic conceptions, in ideals, and in value judgments related to social life. The conflict of opinion on educational issues today goes deep into social and philosophic controversy.

The Social Crisis Behind the Conflict in Education

The "educational confusion" is mild when compared with the disorder in the life of society as a whole. During the decade when criticism of our educational system became rife, leading writers were characterizing our era as one of "crisis"—a word which gave a sense of portentous, foreboding change possibly bringing catastrophe in its train. Some discerning minds had realized that the severe depression beginning with the crash in October, 1929, was no mere recur-