The Unique Function of Education in American Democracy

Educational Policies Commission

National Education Association of the United States and the Department of Superintendence, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

Copyright, 1937
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES
Washington, D. C.

First printing, February 1937
Second printing, April 1937
Third printing, October 1937
Fourth printing, September 1939

Acknowledgment

IN presenting this statement to the profession of education and to the general public, the Educational Policies Commission wishes to acknowledge its very great indebtedness to DR. CHARLES A. BEARD. When approaching the problem, the Commission decided to seek assistance from the man best qualified for the task by scholarship, social insight, and devotion to democratic institutions. The Commission thereupon voted without difficulty and with complete unanimity that Dr. Beard was specially fitted for this task. After several exploratory conferences with a subcommittee and a meeting with the Commission as a whole in August 1936, Dr. Beard prepared the first draft of the report contained in this volume. This draft was distributed to members of the Commission and a revision was made in the light of their comments. A second draft was discussed, amended, and approved for publication by the Commission in December 1936.

The Educational Policies Commission

Appointed by the National Education Association of the United States and the Department of Superintendence

Appointed Members

ALEXANDER J. STODDARD, *Chairman*

CORNELIA S. ADAIR
LOTUS D. COFFMAN
GEORGE S. COUNTS
J. B. EDMONSON
FREDERICK M. HUNTER
CHARLES H. JUDD
JOHN K. NORTON
AGNES SAMUELSON
JOHN A. SEXSON
PAYSON SMITH
GEORGE D. STRAYER
WILLIS A. SUTTON

Ex-Officio Members

WILLARD E. GIVENS
ORVILLE C. PRATT
S. D. SHANKLAND
ALBERT M. SHAW
A. L. THRELKELD

Advisory Members

J. W. STUDEBAKER
GEORGE F. ZOOK

William G. Carr, *Secretary*
1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Table of Contents

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbook.com

The Unique Function of Education in American Democracy

I.

Circumstances Call upon Educational Leadership To Reconsider Its Position and Obligations in Society

THE mariner blown out of his course by adverse winds and sailing long under clouded heavens among dangerous reefs seizes the first opportunity to get his bearings and chart his way by fixed marks of sky or land. Likewise in the management of human affairs, although the analogy is not exact, it is often necessary for leaders of State, the professions, and callings, amid great disturbances, to take their reckonings—to recur to first principles. This applies to education as well as to other branches of national interest and activity. None is independent of the others. None occupies a position of impregnable security which permits it to escape the strains in domestic or foreign affairs.

The World War Profoundly Disturbed the Social Order of 1914.

Concerning the gravity of the disturbances that now call for reckonings there can be no doubt. Since the outbreak of the World War in 1914, American society has faced disconcerting issues of life at home and abroad, has experienced storms of passion, and encountered the vicissitudes of a profound economic dislocation. The human

and economic destruction of the war itself, the ensuing overthrow of governments and social systems in Europe, the collapse of prosperity in the United States, and the jars of the depression have shaken American thought and practice from center to circumference.

But the Origins of Many Difficulties Lie Deeper than Military and Depression Events.

The disarrangement of contemporary affairs, however, cannot be ascribed solely to the explosions of the World War or to the business depression. The war and the economic crisis accentuated the problems of the schools and added new cares to old burdens; but distracting issues had appeared in education before these disturbances arose. Their origins lie deeper than military events and economic stringency, and they will not be automatically settled by a guarantee of peace or a return of prosperity. Indeed, apart from immediate distresses, the chief effect of the financial shortage has been to make the teaching profession and the interested public acutely aware of challenges and claims that had been dimly discerned years before the war and the panic broke in upon "the normal course of history."

The Mechanization and Urbanization of Economy Had Already Raised Problems.

An illustration or two will suffice, at this point, to indicate the nature of these exigencies long in process of development. Perhaps most insistent of all has been the economic shift induced by the spread of science and machinery into every section of the country, into agriculture as well as manufacturing. This shift created a de-

mand for the most diversified technical training. It did more. By transforming the structure of the family, it rendered that ancient institution less able to discharge its historic obligations—intellectual, moral, and social. As the age limit for the employment of youth in industries was raised, millions of boys and girls were excluded by law from occupations once open to them. Likewise disruptive was the evident inability of industry to provide full employment for youth even at the legal age; as a result of many forces millions of young people ready and eager to enter upon a life work were denied the opportunity.

Society Had Begun To Shift Heavy Burdens to the Schools.

With the mechanization and urbanization of economy, the American people confronted social conditions foreign to their earlier experience, and they made new demands upon the schools. Whether it was a matter of moral unrest among youth, crime, disease, or inebriety, they turned to the schools for aid, and imposed upon them obligations once assumed by the family and business and agriculture. It is scarcely going beyond the mark to say that American adults, somewhat stunned and baffled by the difficulties which their own activities had created, began to shift to the public schools the burdens of coping with them. The war and the depression merely underlined these problems. And there is no ground in experience for believing that a return to what is called prosperity will automatically solve them or remove them from consideration. They had been long in development. They had long carried with them intellectual, moral, and social obligations of the most perplexing nature. Efforts to deal with them now call for great resources of mind and spirit. The

challenges they present are in truth so fundamental as to be startling. Their very urgency is appalling to educators who fearlessly and courageously face the realities of contemporary life.

Yet Education Operates Largely Within the Frame of Earlier Conceptions of Social Needs.

Although educational leadership has not been indifferent to the sharp thrusts of this revolution in American affairs, it has continued to operate largely within the conceptions of society which were formulated long before the close of the nineteenth century. For two generations that leadership has been assumed by professional educators, philosophers, and psychologists, and in the main it has taken for granted the security of the educational establishment and the very society which sustains it. Leaders have deepened, systematized, and implemented the thought of the pathbreakers, but they have not recast that thought in terms of the changed cultural setting. In this there is no special criticism of education, any more than of the other professions such as law and medicine. It is merely a fact that now invites thorough consideration.

So Adjustment to Contemporary Conditions and Opportunities Becomes Imperative.

Such, in brief, are the events of recent years that call for an exploration and restatement of educational purposes and obligations. The order of things prevailing in 1914 or 1900 or 1895 cannot be recovered, any more than old age can recover its youth. To proceed on the assumption that it can be restored or will be restored by nature or

some other mysterious process is to sacrifice knowledge to illusion or to the desire for an escape from responsibilities. It is in the living present, with things as they are, with time forever irreversible, that the bearings of education must be taken and its future charted.

This Adjustment Must Be Made in the Terms of Public Interest.

The answer of education to this summons cannot be made merely in the technical language of the profession, although the imperatives of the profession must be respected. It cannot be given simply in camera, in secret committee. It must be made in full public view and in the terms of the society which education serves, as well as in its own terms. Not for the thoughtless and heedless, to be sure, is the statement to be formulated; but for that large and influential body of citizens who can distinguish between the enduring values of life and the distempers of immediate difficulties, political and economic. Yet no citizens of the Republic can be left out of the reckoning, for the welfare of all is involved in both the program of education and its application.

The Center of Observation Is in Society, Not Merely in the Educational Profession.

It is not enough, therefore, to fix attention on professional conceptions of education alone. Observations must also be taken from the center of society, for education, government, economy, and culture are parts of the same thing. Hence a paradox. If educators are to make wide and real the reach of their theory and practice, they must step over the boundaries drawn by their profession and

consider the unity of things. By concentrating affections on their sphere of special interest, they will separate education from the living body of society. Important as are the methods and procedures of education, they are means, not ends; and the ends themselves are linked with the genius, spirit, and purposes of the society in which education functions, by which it is sustained, vitalized, and protected. Yet in stepping over the boundaries of their profession to find their bearings, educators are at the same time compelled, by the nature of their obligations, to hold fast to those values of education which endure amid the changes and exigencies of society.

Five Guiding Principles Control Our Exploration.

With the challenge of affairs, public and private, so urgent, what are the bearings by which to discover our position and chart our course? To what principles must we refer in discovering the task of education in American democracy? Five seem imperative.

1. Public education is anchored in the history of American civilization and at any given moment operates within the accumulated heritage of that civilization.

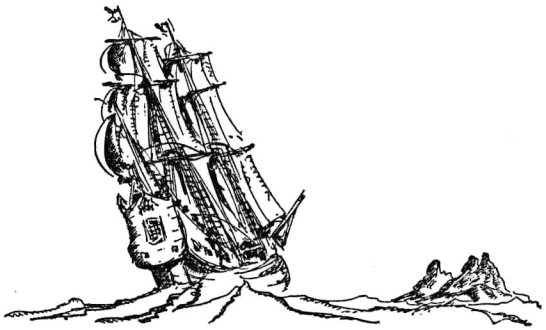
2. Every system of thought and practice in education is formulated with some reference to the ideas and interests dominant or widely cherished in society at the time of its formulation.

3. Once created and systematized, any program of educational thought and practice takes on professional and institutional stereotypes, and tends to outlast even profound changes in the society in which it assumed its original shape.

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbook.com

4. Any restatement of educational objectives and responsibilities which is rooted in reality takes into account the nature of professional obligations and makes adjustments to cope with the major changes wrought in society since the last general reckoning in education.

5. Any statement of educational objectives and responsibilities that is not merely theoretical involves a quest for the institutional forms and operating practices through which education can best attain its ends.



II.

The Founders of the Republic Exalted Education as a National Interest.

It is out of the historical development of American society that have come the ideas, aspirations, knowledge, and working rules which prevail today and set the task of education. There have been borrowings, of course. Beyond the founding of the Republic lies a vast background embracing the culture of antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and modern Europe. From this plenitude of resources American civilization has been enriched. But all that has been drawn from other times and places has been worked into the American heritage. Additional drafts may be made upon other nations in days to come. Research will bring new knowledge. Experiments may confirm new methods. Novel ideas may bid for favor. The spirit of inquiry and invention may be active. The aspirations of the living will be stirred by the eternal surge of the human heart. Even so, the past, distant and near, has given us our society, including all the material, intellectual, and moral manifestations with which education must work.

Its Development Falls into Three Broad Periods.

Judged by outstanding characteristics of policy and economy the history of this heritage in the United States falls into three general periods. The first extended from the establishment of the Republic to the advent of Jacksonian democracy. The second had a longer reach—from

the inauguration of Andrew Jackson in 1829 to the eve of the World War. The third covers the years since the coming of that cataclysm. To be sure, no sharp division separates these periods; the fixing of exact dates is an arbitrary action, and is accompanied by a warning against accepting them as more than conveniences. Nor were the features of the first age all destroyed in the second, or the features of the first and second in the third. There have been siftings and accumulations, borrowings and modifications, survivals and mergers, now incorporated in American society, the heritage with which we work today.

The Republic Was Founded in an Age of High Tension.

The independence of America was established by revolution and war, accompanied by inevitable concentration, storm, and stress. America had broken with the past in many respects and had founded government on a new base—social purpose as distinguished from the prescriptive rights of class. It was an infant republic in a world of warring monarchies. Its leaders were searching for ways and means of ensuring the perpetuity of government so conceived, developing natural resources, applying the technical arts, and realizing a better life for the free members of society.

Founders of the Republic Laid Stress on the Public Interest.

The founders of the American Republic were concerned with more than the material aspects of life—with more than the exploitation of natural resources, the pursuit of private interests, and the enrichment of individuals. They were public personages embued with a deep sense of social

responsibility. They had staked their lives and their fortunes on independence and the security of the Republic. They had devoted time, energies, and talents to the public interest, waging war against a foreign foe and against greed and passions in their own midst. With justice does a biographer of Washington say: "Excluding his boyhood, there were but seven years of his life in which he was not engaged in the public service."

The early leaders did not subscribe to the economic theory that the pursuit of private gain would automatically bring about the establishment of independence, the creation of a constitution, or the security and prosperity of the American nation. In fact, during the Revolution they had seen gambling in goods and securities almost wreck their cause. After victory had been won they saw emphasis on personal and sectional interests threaten the Union with dissolution. They knew from bitter experience that devotion to the public good and self-denial in private matters were necessary to the achievement of great social ends. Having risked their all in the creation of a nation, the ablest among them gave unremitting attention to the study of public affairs and the methods calculated to preserve and improve the independent society which their labors had brought forth.

The Idea of Government by a Fixed Special Interest Was Rejected.

It is true that many extremists relied heavily upon the ancient weapon of statecraft—force—for the assurance of social order, and looked upon government as an instrument of private advantage. They would have entrenched great wealth in politics by the establishment of high property qualifications on voting and office-holding. They would

have given life terms to Presidents and Senators, and restricted popular participation in public affairs to the smallest possible limits. They would have permanently established a class government—government by "the rich and well-born," and were largely indifferent to popular culture and education. But this faction, though influential, was challenged by events. The verdict of the majority finally ran against it. The verdict of history condemned it. In the course of years the government established by the founders of the Republic came to rest on a wide popular base; and with the passing of time that base was broadened by constitutional enactments and political practices.

The Democratic Idea Was Accepted.

In fact there was in the United States no aristocracy buttressed by special privileges in public law to provide support for a monarchy or an oligarchy. In the long run the fate of government and society had to be entrusted to the wisdom and knowledge of a widening mass of people. Some Americans accepted that fate with a wry face, but made the best of it. Others greeted it as a fulfilment of the principles proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, and as marking a humane departure from the despotisms of Europe. This document had asserted that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; and that the people have the right to alter or abolish any form of government which becomes destructive of these ends. Lifted up against the background of European societies founded on force and prescriptive privileges, these were revolu-

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbook.com