SECONDARY EDUCATION

FOR YOUTH IN MODERN AMERICA

HARL R. DOUGLASS

Secondary Education
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By

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A Report
to the
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of the
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FOREWORD

THE American Youth Commission was organized in September, 1935, by the American Council on Education, a non-governmental group that had spent more than a year considering possible means of studying the problems of youth. Sixteen men and women were selected for membership on the Commission, and were asked by the Council to:

(a) consider all the needs of American youth and appraise the facilities and resources for serving these needs;

(b) recommend eventually some procedures and programs which seem to be most effective in solving the problems of youth; and finally to

(c) popularize and promote desirable plans of action through conferences, publications, and demonstrations.

The membership of the Commission follows:

Newton D. Baker, Cleveland, *Chairman*
Owen D. Young, New York City, *Vice-Chairman*
Miriam Van Waters, Framingham, Mass., *Secretary*
Will W. Alexander, Atlanta, Washington
Ralph Budd, Chicago
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Robert M. Hutchins, Chicago
George Johnson, Washington
Chester H. Rowell, San Francisco
William F. Russell, New York City

Mrs. Edgar B. Stern, New Orleans
John W. Studebaker, Washington
Matthew Woll, New York City

Dr. George F. Zook, President of the Council, under whose leadership the Commission was formed, and Dr. C. S. Marsh, Vice-President, act in an advisory capacity.

Secondary Education for Youth in Modern America is a report to the Commission. While the Commission may be in sympathy with most of the suggestions herein, the report does not necessarily reflect the policy nor the opinions of the individual members. Nevertheless, the Commission believes that the information and suggestions presented by Professor Douglass should be made available to the public.

The Commission is grateful to the author for his work in preparing the report and to M. M. Chambers for assistance in gathering some of the statistical information, Arthur L. Brandon for help in the production of the book, and C. Coleridge Ertz and Mrs. George H. Hollister for editorial aid.

HOMER P. RAINEY
Director

PREFACE

THE aim of education is to affect beneficially the activities of life for which youth is educated. The approach, therefore, to a philosophy of secondary education must be on the basis of the relationship of the schools to the rest of society. Changes in social conditions and institutions necessarily affect the details of educational objectives, so these issues must be met with a knowledge also of the attitudes of youth, his problems and his capacities.

It has therefore seemed advantageous to prepare a résumé of what appear to be the more important facts and trends in these fields, thereby giving both meaning and support to a statement of the philosophy which seems most practical and effective in the light of our times and ideals. The major implications of that philosophy will be outlined with particular reference to the more promising means of implementing it.

This book does not assume professional training in education on the part of its readers. In the interest of brevity it avoids the specific and deals solely with a few generalizations which may be made to apply to various problems and particular cases. No one plan for the reorganization of the schools is suggested, but many adjustments may come from the procedures here presented. No one type of school is designated, but the plans tend to fall into types, such as part-time or cooperative secondary education, "life school" plans similar to the Civilian Conservation Corps idea, informal voluntary schools for older youth such as the Danish "Folk" or the "People's" high schools, types of junior colleges such as the Michigan and Chicago emergency or youth schools, and vocational schools of

junior college level such as those in the State of New York. The merits of the schools as well as of the types can be evaluated only in terms of generalized criteria or basic premises as used in this book to describe the philosophy of education.

The program of secondary education given here is not one upon which all experts in that field are agreed. It has cut loose from certain traditional views and practices, but it does not follow those variations from present views and practices which seem to offer only variety.

The author owes a heavy debt to authorities and investigators. In addition, he has had suggestions and ideas from many able men and women prominent in the field of education. The bulk of the statements to follow are therefore neither original nor merely speculative. To facilitate reading, the sources of his information have been omitted.

The reader should bear in mind that it has not been the writer's intention to prepare an original contribution, an involved technical or exhaustive treatise, or a popular volume, but to present to the American Youth Commission and to whomever they may recommend it, (1) a simple, concise statement of the major influences and conditions which must give direction to a re-adjustment of secondary education, and (2) an outline of attractive, concrete possibilities for experimentation, study, and demonstration.

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April 10, 1937

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INTRODUCTION— BASIC THEORY AND DEFINITIONS

THE most significant fact concerning human beings is that each individual, from birth to death, is subject to never ceasing change—physical and chemical, spiritual and mental. His bones and arteries change, his skin changes, all his organs undergo transformation. Mentally, his ideas and concepts alter and the levels of his specific abilities rise and fall.

Of great significance in this regard, therefore, is the fact that within limits the direction and nature of such change, particularly on the intellectual and spiritual side, may be controlled. Because human beings are peculiarly susceptible to environment, we have schools, churches, advertising, salesmen and other agencies, all for the purpose of controlling mental experience and influencing feeling and behavior.

It is the fact that human conduct can be so largely predetermined that gives meaning to education and stresses its potentialities. The school is one of the agencies developed for the purpose of controlling human behavior. Its *modus operandi* consists entirely in the selection or influencing of the experiences of those who attend it. Its aim is to produce in them habits, skills, knowledge, concepts and ideals deemed to be desirable. As these types of products arise from the experience of the individual, formal education then is the provision of special experiences for special purposes. This distinguishes it from informal education which is the influence upon future behavior of experience

arising incidentally from the normal and natural activities of life. The school, in brief, may be thought of as providing a somewhat artificial short cut to educational objectives.

The program of education should be planned in the light of these objectives. With the view of giving an individual the ability to perform effectively certain vocational processes, read certain types of literature, follow certain social conventions, properly employ his leisure time, or correctly discharge his responsibilities as father, mother, or citizen, education should attempt to give that individual the experiences which will result in the acquisition of information, habits, skills, interests, tastes, and prejudices most likely to ensure the desired behavior. The printed materials or other stimuli necessary for the accomplishment of these ends constitute the subject matter of education. Not only books, references, lectures, laboratory or shop experiments, but the radio, slides and films, excursions and work experience may be used as stimuli to experience. Those responsible for the control of education who think of materials of education as no more than teachers, lectures and planned books are woefully lacking in perspective.

The Nature of Secondary Education

A terminology has developed to identify certain areas, divisions, or types of education. Thus we have the terms —elementary, secondary, and higher education. While these are useful, they are difficult to define, for none has the same meaning to all individuals, even to all professional educators. In the United States they denote a sequence of somewhat different types of education and educational institutions. In most other countries the element of sequence is less prominent. In Germany, for example, elementary education, involving eight years, be-

gins at the age of six, while secondary education is begun at the age of nine or ten and therefrom parallels elementary education. Similarly, the first two years of so-called higher education in the United States correspond to the highest two years of secondary education as known in the more advanced European countries.

Attempts have been made to distinguish secondary from elementary education on various bases including the chronological and the physiological age of the pupils, the nature and functions of the subjects taught, and the training and assignment of the teacher. Even on these bases there is no agreement on the delimitations of secondary education. Thus to some, secondary education means the schooling of children from ages 14 to 18, to others it means the schooling of those from 12 to 20. It has also been defined as the education of adolescents, though adolescence is not a sharply defined period in the life of any person, and under no arrangement would all or nearly all children arrive at adolescence at any given age or period in their school career.

On the basis of subjects taught, elementary education is thought of as the period in which the tools or fundamentals of learning are taught, which in secondary education are utilized in exploring the fields of knowledge while at the same time further tools for higher education are acquired. Higher education is thought of as technological and professional training or advanced and specialized study in the field of liberal arts, science and letters. The crudeness of these distinctions must be obvious, and the inconsistency with the details of practice apparent.

In some minds secondary education means that part of the educational system in which the teachers are college trained and are assigned on the basis of specialized subject

matter, while elementary education connotes teachers trained at normal schools or teachers' colleges, assigned on the basis of a grade or year level of the school to teach a number of subjects.

In most European countries the distinctions are of still another nature. Secondary education is thought of as a step to higher education and therefore a period for the study of foreign languages, mathematics and science, and also as a type of education particularly appropriate to the upper social classes and therefore selective, while elementary education is looked upon as a finishing education, giving, with the possible exception of some vocational training, all the formal schooling those receiving it will get.

In spite of the difference of opinion as to what constitutes secondary education, it has certain characteristics upon which there is considerable agreement, and certain definite alternatives, each of which possesses some degree of precision. No informed person, for example, would classify a child in the third grade or a student in a medical school as a secondary school pupil, nor would an alien studying for citizenship be so classified. On the other hand, there is no agreement upon the proper classification of the eighth grade of an "elementary school" in which a junior high school curriculum is taught by college graduates assigned on a departmental basis. Likewise, to speak of a secondary school as a preparatory school arouses a protest on the part of many secondary school people who realize that preparation for college is but a small part of a complete program of secondary education.

Impossible as it is to formulate a definite description of secondary education, by common consent it can be said that: *Secondary education is that period in which the emphasis is shifted from the study of the simpler tools of*

learning and literacy to the use of these tools in acquiring knowledge, interests, skills, and appreciations in the various major fields of human life and thought. It corresponds roughly to the period of puberty and adolescence and to the ages of from eleven, twelve, or thirteen to nineteen, twenty, or twenty-one. While serving mainly as an effective institution for the education of the great mass of children and youth, it is also an agency in the selection and training of leaders in all walks of life, preparing them for advanced training.

The School as a Social Institution

Formal education may be regarded from two points of view. One deals with the relation of the school to society and the other with the relation of the school to the individual being educated. From the first point of view the school may be thought of as an institution existing primarily for social purposes, its aims and objects to be justified in terms of benefits to all society, with especial reference to its contributions to the success of group undertakings and objectives. If the individual educated is personally benefited over and above the advantages accruing to him as a member of society it is incidental.

From the other point of view, the school is an institution designed primarily to benefit the individual. If society also gains, that is incidental.

Many people are inconsistent and confuse these two considerations. On the one hand they assume that the school is a social enterprise deserving financial support from all society, including individuals not in school and therefore deriving no personal benefits. On the other hand, in considering the program of the school their thinking shifts to the individualistic. They evaluate methods and

materials in terms of the probable contribution to the interests of those being educated, and the school thus loses its social character.

Public schools appeal to many by virtue of the economy inherent in mass or group enterprise. By pooling expenditures for education and establishing schools for large groups of children who may be instructed in classes the cost per child-year of education is reduced, the quality and variety of offerings may be improved, or both these advantages may be realized. For these people the school is not a social institution, but rather a socialistic or cooperative enterprise.

There is some question whether or not public education and the private and denominational schooling should be thought of as different types of undertakings, each with objectives peculiar to its basis of control and support. The public school by reason of the sources of its establishment and maintenance is largely an agency for the furtherance of social objectives—a contributor to the general social interest.

The history of the American public school, including the high school, supports this view. Prominent men throughout the 18th and 19th centuries gave evidence in their writings that they considered public schools necessary and fundamental to the interests of a democratic government and an economic society. Samuel Knox, Pierre du Pont, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, Nathaniel Chipman, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Daniel Webster, Thaddeus Stevens, Abraham Lincoln and many others throughout our national history voiced their belief in the necessity of public education and of the social purpose of the schools.

When the battle for free public secondary schools was

being waged during the middle decades of the 19th century the benefits accruing to society were stressed more than were the benefits to the individuals educated. On no other basis did it seem logical to propose free education at public expense, taxing all, irrespective of whether or not they had children to be educated.

Authorities on the history of education in the United States agree that the pauper school idea—public schools as charitable providers of education for those unable to pay for it—has, since the middle of the 19th century, been characteristic of but a small and decreasing minority, though it grew more vocal during the hysteria of the depression of the early 1930's.

Universal public education is imperative. Universal suffrage demands it; vocational efficiency without it would be seriously curtailed; modern social conditions conducive to crime make it more necessary than formerly; public health in an urban civilization must be founded upon it; the preservation of American homes of high standard is conditioned by it. Without it, democracy would have to be abandoned, much scientific, technological and commercial progress given up, liberties sharply restricted, and standards of living and culture lowered.

The school, then, should be thought of as a social institution established, supported and maintained by society for its own purpose. While benefiting all individuals who attend it, its primary responsibility is to the interests of society. As Dr. Suzallo, formerly president of the University of Washington, said shortly before his death, "The fruits of the educative process ought to be more public than private."* In discharging this responsibility the

* Suzallo, Henry. "A Program for Tomorrow." *The Educational Record,* American Council on Education, Washington, D.C., April, 1932.