

THE PHILOSOPHY
of
AMERICAN EDUCATION

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A volume of a
SERIES IN EDUCATION

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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY PARENTS

CHARLES JOHN WAHLQUIST

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PREFACE

The author has attempted to make this book unique in one respect: Many books expound the idealistic, the realistic, or the pragmatic viewpoint, or variations of them; for the first time in one volume, the present author elucidates the implications of the three major philosophies on the various levels of American education.

A genuine need exists for such a volume. Until all three major viewpoints in their various ramifications and often conflicting implications are brought within the compass of one volume, there is no suitable textbook for a course in Philosophy of American Education, Conflicting Philosophies of American Education, Theories and Practices in American Education, Trends in American Education, Principles of American Education, or similar courses. Prospective teachers, teachers in service, and graduate students in education need orientation in the basic philosophical viewpoints which influence American education. The intelligent layman wishes to know why American educators do not get on better with one another and why there are so many conflicting educational practices. This volume is a pioneer attempt to clarify conflicting assumptions and their implications. It is believed that a close student of the volume will be able to answer these questions.

American educators should understand the philosophical assumptions behind practices before they pass judgment upon them. With this position in mind, the author attempts to depict the various schools of thought and their implications for American education. In short, while giving a fair exposition of each, the author is deliberately skeptical of unwarranted claims to finality and omniscience which appear to characterize all major philosophic views to some degree.

Some deficiencies are inevitable in a work of this type. Many writers present one major educational philosophy in a single volume, but this book attempts a comparative treatment of the

entire field. It is doubtful if the followers of any one school of thought will feel that the book does that system justice. In making this attempt, the author has resorted to many quotations. Some may feel that there are too many such excerpts; others, that the quotations lose their value when lifted from the original context; and still others, that the best choice of selections was not made. And some leaders may feel slighted in not finding their works cited. But let the critics be disarmed; the author pleads guilty on all counts. Of necessity, he assumes responsibility for selecting representative expositions, indictments, criticisms, and refutations, recognizing all of the hazards involved. In selecting the quotations the author has had one idea uppermost in his mind: namely, enhancing the present treatment with a liberal number of representative excerpts from authoritative sources, thus greatly reducing the need for consulting other works and, at the same time, suggesting interesting sources for well-written expositions of the viewpoints described. In this manner, the present book serves a dual purpose; it may serve the purpose of a combined *textbook* and *source book*.

The reader is requested to keep one other point in mind. The author is primarily concerned with the American *public school system*. Consequently, idealism—more commonly associated with religious, fraternal beliefs, and political faiths—may appear to be somewhat neglected.

The author is especially indebted to Dean Ernest W. Tiegs and Professor Louis P. Thorpe of The University of Southern California, the editors, for their criticisms and suggestions. He is also indebted to the following persons who were kind enough to give criticisms on various chapters: Professors W. C. Bagley, E. S. Evenden, Ralph B. Spence, I. L. Kandel, and Bruce Raup, Teachers College, Columbia University; Provost W. C. Ruediger, the George Washington University; the late Dean M. L. Darsie, Teachers College, the University of California at Los Angeles, and Dean-emeritus Milton Bennion, School of Education, University of Utah. For his deep interest in philosophical matters, the author is deeply indebted to Dean E. E. Ericksen, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Utah, his former teacher. For encouragement and numerous courtesies, the author

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The author is especially obligated to his students of the last fifteen years at the University of Utah, the University of Cincinnati, the George Washington University, the University of Washington, San Francisco State College, and the University of California at Los Angeles. All have contributed in some measure to his orientation in American education.

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THE PHILOSOPHY
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A person privileged to visit a score or more American schools at any level—elementary, secondary, or higher (college and university)—is impressed with the variety of school practices. No two schools seem to be doing the same thing in the same manner. Very few schools seem to be teaching the same subject matter or employing similar methods. Some seem to ignore traditional subject matter; others seem to stress it. Some seem to have a variety of activities; others seem to have relatively few. For this state of affairs, there must be some explanation. Evidently there is no one underlying philosophy of education.

Conflicting Leadership.—If the investigator listens to professional addresses and reads professional literature, he will note the same discrepancies. The speakers seem to be at odds with one another; in fact, few speeches will be logically consistent. Articles in professional journals, theses in education, and theoretical books only add to the confusion. Some authors are consistent, but noticeably prejudiced, biased, and subjective in tone, and many conclusive statistical studies are at variance with one another.

Individual Confusion.—Very few American educators have demonstrated the possession of integrated philosophies. The right hand rarely knows what the left hand is doing. Dewey may be quoted in one breath, Thorndike in the next, and Horne in the third; although in fundamental premises these men are as far apart as the imagination of man can take them. Practices running in opposite directions may be found in almost any school system. In the presence of so much confusion, there may be some justification for eclecticism. However, the use of two extreme practices, growing out of two extreme philosophies,