

EIGHTH YEARBOOK OF THE JOHN DEWEY SOCIETY

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# THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL:

## Its Responsibility and Opportunity

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## PREFACE

Perhaps no phase of our national life presents so extreme a contrast as the status of American youth during the decade of the thirties and during the period of the war. From being one of the nation's most serious problems, youth became the very bulwark of our national existence. This sharp shift, however, far from lessening our concern, should accentuate it as peace comes. Young men and women have shown what they can do during the war. They have demonstrated their willingness and ability to accept and discharge large responsibility. Yet the peacetime prospect of meeting their challenge is not good; the basic problem has not been solved; the means are not at hand for appropriately educating all American youth and successfully inducting them into our adult community. It behooves every agency which deals with youth to do all in its power to meet the inevitable recurrence and possible intensification of the earlier problems.

Schools can provide only in part for the needs of our youth. Some of the most vital requirements—opportunity to achieve adult economic status, a chance to marry and make a home, and the like—depend upon our basic economic arrangements. Yet, because schools cannot do the whole job is no excuse for their not doing the best one within the range of their possibilities. Of all agencies outside the home, the schools have the greatest opportunity for a planned, comprehensive contribution to youth's development. The scope of their potential program has by no means been attained in practice. Certainly it will be a most significant step if they really come to grips with the basic issue of *education for all our youth* and move forward to provide the necessary program in the years ahead. There is no institution that has the resources and the potentialities for working creatively on the many problems involved the high school has.

It is the purpose of this yearbook to analyze the needs and status of American youth with particular attention to the contri-

bution which the high school can make to their education and successful transition into adult life. Chapters I to V deal largely with the broader social scene as it bears on youth and the high school. Conditions are indicated which must be taken into account if the high school program is to advance into new realms of service. Also there are pointed out basic issues of critical importance upon which positions must be taken. Chapters VI through X treat various matters which must be dealt with directly in developing a more adequate program, the need for which is revealed in the first five chapters. Desirable lines of development for the high school program are indicated. Chapters XI and XII treat the problems of administrative organization. Chapter XIII, in conclusion, considers briefly the problem of how actual change in the high school program and organization may be speeded.

The plan for the yearbook, developed by the committee in its first meeting, is based upon the general suggestions of the Board of the John Dewey Society in setting up the committee. Each committee member assumed responsibility for preparing certain chapters. Mr. Aubrey Williams and Mr. Paul B. Jacobson assisted the committee by preparing memorandums dealing with the relation of the school and community. The committee expresses its appreciation for their help.

The committee is in substantial agreement on the analysis and point of view presented in the yearbook. However, each member accepts specific responsibility for the chapter or chapters he prepared. At certain points, particularly as related to means of solving specific problems, differences of judgment exist. However, the committee is in such full agreement on the importance of youth in our society, the necessity for developing a realistic education for all youth of whatever ability, the importance of the resources of the high school in meeting this educational need, and the general line of attack required, that all chapters support one another and contribute to common purposes.

Authorship of the various chapters follows: Chapters I and VI, Mr. Mackenzie; Chapters II and IV, Mr. Leonard; Chapter III, Mr. Cottrell; Chapter V, Mr. Corey; Chapter VII, Mr. Spears; Chapters VIII, X, and XIII, Mr. Caswell; Chapter IX, Mr. Forkner; Chapters XI and XII, Mr. French.

THE EDITOR

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## Chapter I

### ISSUES THAT MUST BE FACED<sup>1</sup>

THE public high school in the United States is a great national achievement. It is unique among the youth-educating institutions of the world in both the extent of its popularization and the type of program it offers. Whereas in 1890 less than 4 per cent of the youth of secondary school age were enrolled, in 1940 well over 60 per cent of this group were in attendance. During this period of rapid growth, the program of the high school has undergone a marked modification and expansion. Despite this fact, however, there is urgent need for a re-examination of secondary education. Conditions accompanying and growing out of World War II, as well as the record of the schools in the ten years preceding the war, have resulted in many issues and problems. These must be clarified if the public high school is to fulfill the expectations of the people of the United States.

#### WARTIME CONDITIONS ALTER THE SCHOOLS' PROBLEMS

No social upheaval as tremendous as the war could leave the schools untouched. Already they have been affected, and for years to come they undoubtedly will be modified, directly or indirectly, by forces set in motion during this period of international turmoil. No attempt will be made here to catalogue or list all the potential influences. A few of the most immediate problems will be suggested to indicate why a re-examination of secondary education is appropriate at this time.

In the first place, secondary education will operate under a new set of arrangements. There are numerous indications that emerging political, economic, and social conditions will change many of its aspects. International relations will be conducted on a basis different

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was written by Gordon N. Mackenzie.

from that which we have known. The prospect of working with new allies creates the need for understandings which we have not thus far developed. The demand for leadership from this nation in world government is real, but the American people are hardly ready to exert the kind of intelligent influence which will be an essential for long-range success. The citizens of this country are not accustomed to thinking in world terms; we lack an understanding and knowledge of large groups of people, and of vast areas which may well be determining factors in world peace and security. Yet we are participating in relief administration on a world-wide basis, and in the management of monetary arrangements, oil resources, and air transportation.

In several ways the problems we face today are new and different. It is true that many involved national questions are remote from the voter, but eventually they come to affect his pocketbook or his stomach. As a result, the average citizen has gradually informed himself concerning the causes of his difficulties. Where this has not been possible he at least has complained vigorously against conditions which were restricting or narrowing his life. International arrangements operate just as surely as domestic conditions to modify the life of everyone, but it is more difficult in the former case to determine what conditions are creating the problems. War tends to build nationalism at a time when internationalism is needed. International thought and action are more important than they have ever been before. The secondary schools must discover how they can help meet this new demand.

Similarly, other changes will serve to modify the task of the schools. The expanding role of government requires new knowledge and new working techniques from the average citizen if the welfare of all is to be achieved. The proof that this country's productive capacity can be boosted beyond peacetime needs, for destructive purposes, will make citizens less willing to suffer physically and be denied the comforts which it is possible to have. Still, a way has not been found to obtain the kind of economic arrangements which will assure security for all. As full employment is sought in the postwar years, many conflicts and difficulties will be encountered. In all these problems, of long and short range, the schools



have a responsibility to discover ways of aiding in the transition to new social arrangements.

There are numerous other conditions which suggest a need for re-examining the high school programs. Advances in transportation and communication, discoveries in the field of electricity, and the issues arising from reconversion to peacetime activities indicate something of the problems to be encountered.

In the second place, the magnitude and character of military training programs will influence public education. The armed forces have established the largest short-time training program ever attempted in this country. It has been successfully publicized and stands as a great American achievement. Demands for use of the so-called G.I. techniques have already been made. Many service men and women, impressed by the directness and efficiency of the instruction which they received, are asking why the schools cannot use the same procedures as the army and navy. Many modern methods, talked about in civilian schools, but not applied there, have actually been put to use by the armed forces with great success. Visual aids have been developed beyond anything ever tried in civilian schools. Certainly those responsible for secondary education should analyze this great educational adventure with care, and re-examine many present practices.

In the third place, school programs modified by the war will require re-evaluation. Many informal curriculum experiments were underway in American high schools before this country entered the war. Several state, regional, and national studies were conducted to find ways of improving opportunities for youth. Just as some of these were being reported and evaluated, this country entered the war, and as a result, they have never received the attention they undoubtedly deserve. Experimentation which was underway in hundreds of schools, often on a modest basis, was discontinued or left incomplete because of a preoccupation with war activities or the inability to secure properly trained teachers to carry on the work. If these pioneering schools were moving in the right direction, how can they best go on from this point? Should they attempt to revive the experiments begun before the war, or should they consider new problems? These appear to be reasonable questions in any re-examination of secondary education.

Many schools modified their offering to meet the war situation. Summer schools were opened. Students were sent on to college at the end of the junior year of high school. Credit was given for work experience, and programs were arranged on the basis of four hours per day in school and four hours per day at work. Pre-induction courses of various kinds were introduced in thousands of schools. What is to become of these wartime changes? Are they all to be dropped? Which innovations have permanent values?

In the fourth place, secondary education has been further democratized. During the war, education has been popularized. Its values have been demonstrated. Forces have been set in motion which are likely to make it possible for an increasing proportion of the secondary-school-age group to remain in school. The support for education given by business and the greater concern for federal aid for education are symptomatic of this trend. The demonstrated loss to a nation, when hundreds of thousands of its male citizens cannot read and write sufficiently well to serve in the military forces, has been an influential factor.

Other factors also will be operating. It is probable that there will be no need for youth in the usual lines of employment. If production of goods and services can be maintained at a high level, conditions will be favorable for the education of many more than have attended secondary schools in the past.

It appears reasonable to suppose that approximately 90 per cent of the secondary-school-age youth, at least of those under eighteen, will attend school in the next decade. This assumes, of course, a program suited to their needs. If such a situation should develop, a group would be reached who have been regarded as incapable of doing school work. If the schools are to adjust to the needs of this segment of the population a fundamental readjustment will be necessary. It is now appropriate to reconsider the secondary school program to determine whether or not this situation can be met.

In the fifth place, the war has emphasized the social values of education. In the past, secondary education has been primarily individualistic in its emphasis. The curriculum, the grading system, and the general tone of the schools have centered on the success and progress of the individual. The war has served to lessen somewhat the concern for the individual and has shifted much



attention to group welfare. Individuals, too, have put aside their own conveniences and have given of their time and effort for the preservation of the group. This has been evidenced in many high schools with their wartime service programs. Those outside civilian schools have been affected, too. They have been educated at a great expense, not for personal gain but for service to their country.

The dangers which lie before this nation are of unusual magnitude. Internally and externally tremendous problems are yet to be dealt with—problems which will require sustained co-operative effort if they are to be solved democratically. Secondary schools must re-examine their programs to determine where the emphasis should be placed. It is important that the social outcomes and values be given greater attention.

#### PROGRAMS OF YOUTH EDUCATION WERE INADEQUATE BEFORE THE WAR

In spite of substantial achievements by the public high school and its significant contribution to many American youth, the depression years preceding the war revealed certain inadequacies in its program. The pressures and dislocations of this period sufficiently magnified and intensified former problems to arouse the American people to a realization that the high school was not adequately serving American boys and girls. As a nation we had prided ourselves on the attainment of free and universal education. Many citizens were shocked by the reports of youth studies which indicated that the high schools had never enrolled more than two-thirds of the youth of secondary school age. The thousands of boys and girls, unwanted by business and industry, who were completely unoccupied during the depression years emphasized the problem. The high school, society's principal youth-serving agency, had no program which could attract them or serve their needs. Studies such as those of the American Youth Commission and the New York State Regents' Inquiry presented conclusive evidence on the inadequacy of the high school in aiding a large segment of youth to meet the problems which they were actually encountering. Neither in preparation for citizenship nor in preparation for a vocation were the schools found to be doing

outstanding work. Guidance services were almost nonexistent. The problem of preparing the few for college seemed to dominate all activities of the schools. The federal government met the situation by creating a vigorous, large-scale youth program in the form of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration.

Among laymen and members of the teaching profession there was widespread disagreement concerning the success of the high school and the changes, if any, which should be made in its program. Some favored a drastic reorganization and modification of the program. Others were firm in their defence of the traditional pattern, recognizing that some slight modifications might be necessary. When the United States entered World War II many high-ranking officers in the armed forces decried the fact that American youth were not prepared for war, and they placed the blame on the schools. In spite of the later findings that much of this adverse comment was based on misinformation concerning both the preparation of youth and the needs of the armed services, the denunciations which were uttered in the opening days of the war left a deep impression upon American educators and other citizens. Thus as we entered the war there was a general feeling that secondary education was inadequate to meet the demands made upon it.

#### THE SITUATION WE FACE

Will the high school be replaced by some new youth agency in the postwar years? Many of the conditions leading to a youth problem in prewar America are likely to persist in a peacetime world. There has been no fundamental reconstruction of the high school to compensate for its inadequacies. As already indicated, many new situations resulting from the war and its attendant circumstances further complicate the task of the school. The severity of the problems relating to the education of youth is such as to justify a more careful reconsideration of the whole program of secondary education. The remaining sections of this chapter indicate some of the major issues to be faced in the years immediately ahead.

## EIGHT ISSUES IN THE REDIRECTION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Questions being raised concerning youth education are so fundamental and searching that nothing less than a complete re-examination of the total purpose, plan, and program of secondary education will suffice. Eight major issues in respect to secondary schooling are presented briefly in this section. These are not wholly new issues, but they now occur in a new setting. It is important that they be resolved. The future of our public high schools depends upon the way in which these issues are settled.

*Will Free Public Secondary Education Be Provided for All Youth?* American secondary education, in contrast with that in most countries, accepts almost all youth at ages twelve to fourteen. Theoretically we have a free school open to all youth. As indicated earlier, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of boys and girls of secondary school age in school. From less than 4 per cent in 1890 to well over 60 per cent in 1940, the growth has been both rapid and steady. This great increase in enrollment has brought together students with widely differing backgrounds and goals. As might be expected, many cities and some states have over 90 per cent of the secondary-school-age group in school. Other cities and states, and particularly some of the rural areas, have less favorable records.

The problem of providing free public secondary education is not solely one of non-entrance into school. Of those enrolling in the high schools at twelve to fourteen years of age, only about one-half go on to graduation from the twelfth grade at the age of seventeen or eighteen. The other half drop out along the way for various reasons. Only 15 to 20 per cent of the appropriate age group enter upon the thirteenth year of school work. Economic factors make attendance difficult, if not impossible, for many. Not only is the student prevented from contributing to the family income, but he has numerous fees and charges in addition to normal living expenses. Also, for many students the high school program lacks appeal and recognized values. The numbers that leave, as well as the large financial and social investment in those who remain until graduation, should cause serious questions to be raised. What does secondary schooling do for boys and girls? If ap-

proximately one-half of the students continue until the end of the twelfth year, should all of them do so? Should instruction be offered for all through the fourteenth year? Is society justified in supporting high schools for all?

Although numerous changes and modifications have been made in the curriculum, these have not been commensurate with the increased variability in both the background and the goals of great numbers of students. As a result, large segments of the present secondary-school-age group do not have programs suited to their needs. Some of those not being served are enrolled in school, others are not. The federal government recognized this situation during the depression years of the thirties by establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration as has already been noted. With the involvement of youth in war activities these agencies were discontinued. However, the high school has no better program for youth after the war than it had before. Inadequacies which have been evident in the program for years, and which have increased in seriousness as more and more youth have entered the high schools, will exist after the war. Changes are needed if all youth are to be served in our present institutions.

To equalize opportunity fully and provide adequately for all, modifications in the financing of schools have been proposed. Federal and state support has been widely recommended. It is probable that some form of scholarship or reimbursement will be needed, for at least the low income groups, before all American youth have equal access to an education. However, providing the same program for all does not constitute equality of opportunity. Educational programs must be varied and flexible to meet the needs of all youth. This naturally entails additional expense.

Whether or not free public education will be available for all youth is one of the major issues of the years ahead. If it is to be attained, modifications in the curriculum and basic policies of financial support will be essentials.

*Will High Schools Provide Education for the Common Life?* In theory, at least, the high school has prepared for democratic living. It has supposedly contributed to the development of literate, intelligent citizens able to play their part in the life of the com-



munity, state, and nation. This has been the major reason given for state support of public education. In the thinking of parents, however, this purpose has probably been lightly regarded.

Educators have generally stated a belief in education for the common life and have proposed varied programs for the attainment of this goal. Those who have been concerned primarily with transmitting the cultural heritage have sought to justify their work on the ground that it educated for the common life. Similar backgrounds of experience in literature and history have been claimed as necessities for social stability and cohesion. Language, history, and mathematics, and sometimes music and art, have also been justified on this basis. Another group of educators, however, have favored a more direct approach. They by no means deny the importance of the history and literature of the race, but instead of making it the object of direct and intensive study, they favor using it to help students develop a deeper understanding of themselves, and of current problems and situations. These educators urge a much greater emphasis on education through guided and direct experience in group living. The necessary habits, skills, and understandings for personal and group living in the school and the community are to be stressed. Boys and girls are given opportunities outside the classroom to try out, practice, and gain experience. The classroom functions more and more as a place to prepare and plan for these immediate experiences, to evaluate and criticize them, and to reflect and plan out new ways of proceeding and working. The inculcation of democratic values is stressed as a basis for judging the merits of various alternatives. Frequently a program is proposed which centers directly on the development of health and physical fitness, civic competence, effective home membership, an understanding of self, and personal adjustment.

There are many who believe that the continued success of our democratic way of life demands increased and more effective programs of education for democratic living in the areas which are common to all. This issue has two aspects. First, will schools accept as a major purpose the provision of education for the common life? Second, if they do provide education for the common life, what kind of program will be offered? Both aspects of this problem call for a re-examination of present educational efforts.

*Will Schools Provide Vocational Orientation and Preparation?*

The orientation of a large proportion of the high school students toward the professions has made it difficult to give serious and specific attention to occupational choices on the high school level. The decision having been made early by parents or students in favor of a profession and college training, careful consideration of frequently more appropriate alternatives becomes quite impossible. It is estimated that six times as many high school students are admitted to the college preparatory course as actually finish college work. The many disappointments result in serious criticism of secondary education. Those who look toward the professions but do not arrive are inclined to blame the school for not aiding them to prepare for their vocational fate. The New York State Regents' Inquiry and the American Youth Commission studies revealed that only a small proportion of the high school youth had vocational guidance, let alone vocational training. The increasingly favorable economic position of the skilled worker has attracted some attention away from the white-collar job. Students who eventually find a place in the trades, as well as those doing work requiring little skill or special knowledge, feel, however, that the school should have aided them in making a favorable vocational adjustment. The high schools enroll an increasing number destined to be employed in distributive service and unskilled occupations. Many will work at assembly-line tasks. The period of specific training for most of these occupations is short.

It has been proposed that many general problems in respect to vocational orientation and preparation be given attention in the school program. These include, for example, work habits, techniques of getting along with people, and responsibilities with regard to labor organizations and the welfare of the total social group. At the present time, programs of work experience are being advocated because of their potential contribution to occupational orientation, to common occupational understandings, to the development of good work habits, and to improved personal and social effectiveness.

Business has come to take a place beside labor in supporting education, and both look to its occupational values. Parents, too, give more and more thought to this outcome, especially when



economic conditions are bad. Choosing and preparing for an occupation is one of the important developmental tasks of the adolescent. Still, educators have resisted a move in the direction of serious and careful preparation of students for a vocation in the high school. The academic orientation of teachers and administrators has undoubtedly prevented them from fully appreciating the occupational needs of youth not going on to college.

What is the responsibility of the high school in the vocational area? What program modifications, if any, should be made?

*Will Secondary Education Provide Opportunity for Personal-Social Advancement?* In the opinion of the average citizen, possibly the greatest value of schooling is its potential contribution to financial security, social status, and a variety of privileges. The notion that all Americans can move from a log cabin to the presidency stirs the popular imagination. While probably not actually believed, this myth has enough illustrations to give it a tinge of reality. Before the turn of the century, a few used education to enter medicine, law, teaching, and the ministry. Many other opportunities were available without education. However, in the last fifty years training has been increasingly essential to upward social mobility. Engineering, chemistry, agriculture, and teaching have experienced tremendous growth. The school has come to be recognized as a means of raising one's position socially and financially.

Parents expect the high school to provide equal opportunity for all. This expectation of, and belief in, education operates as a serious deterrent to change in the program. As mentioned earlier, many parents are firm in demanding college preparatory work, which supposedly leads to a higher social position by way of the college. As a result, schools are hampered in aiding students to secure education for common life needs and to make intelligent vocational choices. The numbers of positions in the professions or in the high social and economic brackets are limited in our society as it is now organized. Many who seek the top are, therefore, certain to be disappointed. But the desire to excel and secure social preferment is strongly ingrained. Educators face a serious problem in harmonizing individual ambitions and the realistic possibilities of the present economic and social situation.

The goal of personal advancement through education has had a strong influence in modifying the cultural or liberal arts tradition of both the colleges and the high schools. While new standards for measuring success may emerge, it is probable that the possibility of social and economic gains through education will continue, as in the past, to be a powerful factor in shaping public attitudes toward education. Often there is conflict between these personal educational goals and the potential contribution of education to citizenship and democratic living. The resolution of conflicts in this area will demand a re-examination of the schools' program and methods of working.

*Should High Schools Become Custodial Agencies?* Schools, as well as other public agencies, have had in some measure a custodial function. During the depression of the thirties, programs were established to care for the unemployed. The 16- to 24-year-olds had a higher percentage who were unemployed than any other group of working age. As recorded previously, two special federal agencies were created to care for this group—the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration. These organizations were planned to provide a variety of opportunities for youth, and to some extent they offered custodial services. When most successful, however, they made it possible for youth to find satisfaction and status in doing socially useful work. The great increase in school enrollment since 1910 can be explained largely by the fact that children were not needed in the productive life of the nation and were not permitted to work. Many have argued, therefore, that with the increasing productivity of labor and decreasing need of youth in business and industry the school should serve as a protective agency and provide youth with a wholesome environment until they can find a place in the occupational community.

During the war years, the values of education have been recognized anew, and there is popular support for wider educational opportunity. Also the productivity of labor has increased tremendously under the pressures of a wartime economy. Youth will be even less necessary in business and industry than they were before the war. There will be strong pressure to place them in other activities where they will not compete for jobs. Undoubtedly

the occupational opportunities of youth will be limited to such an extent that society will be compelled to set up some means of keeping them occupied and profitably employed if the schools do not care for them.

At present there appear to be several alternatives, each of which might partially meet the situation. Two or more of these possible programs might supplement one another in providing for all youth. The federal prewar agencies could be revived. An extensive system of vocational schools might be established on an area or regional basis to care not only for the high-school-age group but for those who are two to four years beyond. This kind of development is receiving some attention in the plans being made in various parts of the country for technical institutes. In so far as these vocational schools draw upon the high-school-age group they would tend to reduce in size the many small high schools. This might force some fundamental reorganizations. The junior college is being extended in many areas to care for the increased number of post-high-school youth. Whether this will be a terminal vocational program, the first two years of a liberal arts program, the last two years of a program of general education, or all three will undoubtedly depend on the decisions made. The possibility of universal military training for all physically able male youth presents an alternative which might markedly influence the organization and development of secondary education. In addition to providing a program for young men which would keep them occupied and off the labor market, it might tend to discourage further formal education for this group, and thus limit the development of junior colleges and technical institutes. Any program of compulsory military service lasting for as long as one year would most certainly include a large amount of vocational training. Since much of this would be useful in civilian activities, it would tend to modify public vocational training programs. Some educators and lay citizens have urged a year of government service for all youth. This too would have profound implications for future educational programs. Still another alternative involves the fundamental reorganization of existing high schools so that they may better serve all youth. While these possible ways of providing for the education of youth are not mutually exclusive, there is a challenge to the high