Education AND THE *New Realism*

EDUCATION AND THE NEW REALISM

FREDERICK S. BREED
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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To my wife,
and daughter, Margaret,

a tribute of affection while yet the tide of life flows strong; and for those other dear ones two, whose precious tide has ebbed away, there's rosemary in token of the sweetest of memories.

PREFACE

IN TIMES like these it is natural that education should be troubled with a spirit of unrest. Social bewilderment involves not only political and economic areas, but educational as well, for education is a social process. These are days when discontent is reflected in proposals for social reform, when the radical lifts up his voice in the land and is answered by the conservative in defense of the *status quo*. These are days, consequently, when, as never before, whatever intelligence educators possess should be marshaled to the task of examining the proposals of reformers and the principles they condemn. Indeed, it seems quite clear that educators are confronted with no more urgent task.

Particularly prominent and in need of examination at the present time are the various suggestions for change in educational policy that constitute the so-called Progressive movement. This movement consists of the application of a definite philosophy to education and is represented by numerous individuals and groups who accept and apply this philosophy with varying degrees of fidelity and completeness. But the central inspiration is always there—the adop-

tion, in some measure, of pragmatism as the guide in educational procedure.

It is not surprising that many teachers in recent years have inclined to the belief that the philosophy of the Progressive movement and the philosophy of education are one and the same. In the open forum of general discussion the adherents of pragmatism have been noisy and conspicuous; their opponents lax in meeting their challenge. This book represents an attempt to relieve the situation of some of its one-sidedness and to improve the present perspective of the pedagogic picture. Such an attempt requires no feat of extraordinary intelligence, for pragmatism, as a philosophy of education and of life, has grave difficulty in matching the appeal of a more realistic outlook. Two ways of viewing education, the realistic and the pragmatic, will be discussed as rival hypotheses, with no attempt on the part of the author to conceal his preference, much less to apologize therefor. The pragmatic hypothesis has been dinned into our ears by its champions with all the fervor and partiality of special pleaders. What more fitting, now, than a sympathetic account of the realistic alternative? And if one ask, Is it scientific to lend support to an educational theory of either type, the answer is that it is the constant practice of scientists to favor one hypothesis as against another. The realistic hypothesis is here supported primarily because it seems more congruent with our scientific knowledge of the world.

Education in America is now at the crossroads. It

has depended upon a tradition of thought that has come down from Grecian days, a tradition that continues in great force and is still sustained by most of the distinguished philosophers of our time. Fundamentals of thought that have been the inheritance of man from the great idealistic and realistic thinkers of the past, we are asked to throw aside for a way of thinking that began to take definite form at the beginning of the present century. The question of the adoption of this philosophic novelty as the basis of our educational procedure is before us. A radical change in the general orientation of the public schools of America is proposed. What potentialities for good and ill are wrapped up in this proposal? What would be the effect of this plan of education on the individual and the state? What of the new should be adopted, what of the old retained? If any more deeply significant questions await the answers of educators, the writer is not aware of them.

The method of the book may seem palatable to some, unpalatable and repetitive to others. The reigning themes may break upon the ear too frequently for those of trained intelligence, but the critic of this recurrence, it is to be hoped, will be prepared to make a concession to the young men and young women in college or university for whom our problem may still be something of a novelty. The repetition mentioned is, in part at least, the product of the organization of the book, which is educational in its logic. In the discussions of problems, it was found,

certain fundamental issues are encountered again and again, but these, not unfortunately, are precisely the issues that, it is hoped, the book will help to bring into the light of day.

Forgive us, also, if we seem at points didactic. With the student reader in mind, we have endeavored to reincarnate something of the genial pedagogic spirit of Josiah Royce. This famous old philosopher, as he approached one of his complex problems, used to tell his students what he was about to say; then, as he said it, he told them what he was saying; finally, after saying it, he told them what he had said.

The book is not designed to explore the whole range of important relationships between education and philosophy. Indeed, it is not confined to the milieu of such relationships. Its problems are found in the issues that have been precipitated by the Progressive [1] education movement, many of which, but not all, are predominantly philosophic in nature. Where philosophy is involved the author has attempted to do no more than reflect the general orientation of a growing group of modern thinkers who accept much in the Progressive theory but reject certain of its fundamental tenets. The task of working out the details in a more refined treatment where philoso-

[1] Throughout this book, the term, "Progressive," as designating a specific school of educational theory, is capitalized. This is justified if not necessitated in a word which as a general term conveys meanings which are confusing and sometimes deceptive when used with a distinctly limited connotation. Not all Democrats are truly democratic, and, if the contentions of the present volume are sound, not all Progressives in education are truly progressive.—EDITOR.

phy is involved is still waiting for technical experts in this subject who have familiarized themselves with the problems of education, or educators who are philosophically trained. The author will be content if perhaps he has indicated the need and possibility of showing more definitely the fundamental strength and weakness of the Progressive program in education.

The author is indebted to a number of journals for the privilege of using material that has appeared in advance of the book: To the *Elementary School Journal* for permission to use portions of the articles entitled "What Is Progressive Education?" and "Goodbye Laissez Faire in Education"; to *School and Society* for the use of material in the articles, "Progressive Education" and "On Changes in Method of Teaching"; to *Educational Administration and Supervision* for similar use of the content of articles entitled "A Realistic Conception of Intelligence" and "The Liberal Group in Education"; to the *Scientific Monthly* for the same privilege in the case of the article, "Is a Science of Education Possible?"; and finally, to the *Phi Delta Kappan* for permission to use excerpts from contributions under the titles, "Indoctrination at Atlantic City" and "Fundamental Assumptions in Educational Measurement."

As for other acknowledgments, our debt is far too great to be compassed in the space allotted here. To my former teacher, William James, my obligation is incalculable. From Ralph Barton Perry I first received the message of realism in clear and convincing

form. From Dewey, greatest of educational philosophers, has come the challenge of his pragmatic outlook and the inspiration of his liberal spirit. To Alfred North Whitehead all realists are under the profoundest obligation, for his intellect has probed deeply and confirmed their fundamental hypotheses. To Robert Maynard Hutchins I am indebted for the brilliant realistic insights that find expression in his destructive and constructive criticisms of contemporary education. And but for the encouragement of such friendly spirits as Herman H. Horne and William Chandler Bagley, the content of scattered periodical articles might never have achieved its present form.

F. S. B.

October 11, 1938.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In its development during the past forty years the theory and practice of American education have been profoundly influenced by two somewhat sharply divided types of leadership. On the one hand there have been the scientists who pin their faith to the search for facts; on the other hand there have been the philosophers whose primary concern is with values and evaluations.

The educational scientists as a group have reflected a tradition that is distinctly anti-philosophical. The scientific study of educational problems stems from the efforts to make psychology a positive and experimental science. The "new" psychology, which may be dated from the establishment of the first laboratory of experimental psychology in 1879, was a revolt against philosophy. It was an attempt to rescue the study of mind from the quagmire of metaphysics and to build anew upon the bedrock of observed fact and controlled experiment which had long provided what seemed to be a firm and enduring foundation for the physical sciences, and upon which, over a shorter but still considerable period, the biological sciences had been busily erecting their substantial structures. With

an enthusiasm natural enough under the circumstances, although perhaps not wholly "scientific," the protagonists of the "new" psychology renounced philosophy and all its works. They were not "arm-chair" psychologists, as they dubbed the philosophers, who, they maintained, had meddled and muddled long and fruitlessly enough with the mysteries of the mind. Psychology would become a science, experiments would replace speculation, the clicking apparatus of the laboratory would dispel the mysticism and clear up the mysteries.

It was in the spirit and techniques of the new experimental psychology that the pioneers in educational science found their inspiration and received their training. As a matter of course, most of them were indoctrinated from the outset against the philosophical disciplines, but this was not at the time important. They set resolutely to work, attacking with the vigor of youth many problems that had been matters of controversy in educational theory and practice; raising new problems which the schools had never recognized as such; developing and refining techniques of investigation and methods of measurement; upsetting beliefs long held sacrosanct; coining new terms to cover new concepts; and training younger educational scientists to carry on the good work. Milemarks of progress in the first decade of the century were the early experiments on the "transfer of training" and the resulting discreditment of formal discipline; the first serious studies of "retarda-

tion" and "elimination"; the concept of "intelligence" and the epoch-making efforts of Binet and Simon toward its measurement; and the first faint beginnings of standardized achievement tests. These movements were continued and greatly extended during the second decade and to them was added a new and needed attack on the curriculum problem through the objective determination of "minimal essentials" in the various school subjects. The third decade witnessed a vast expansion of the curriculum-revision movement, with the educational scientists, however, playing a somewhat diminishing role. This was perhaps more than balanced by a reconstruction of the concept of personality and a new recognition of its problems. Late in the decade the decline of the mechanistic psychologies necessitated new interpretations of mental life, which have combined with the personality studies to bring about the vigorous group of related movements known generically as "guidance."

Turning now to the philosophers, we may profitably go back again to the last decade of the nineteenth century. While the scientific movement in education had made a feeble start by the middle 'nineties, its impact was only barely perceptible in school practice. A spirited controversy, however, was dividing educational leadership into two antagonistic groups on a fundamental theoretical issue which had clear-cut practical implications. A half-dozen young Americans who had been prepared for the public-school service, chiefly at the Illinois State Normal University,

had gone to Germany in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties and had returned as ardent converts to the educational theories of Herbart and his followers. In books and school journals and teachers' meetings they preached persuasively the Herbartian gospel of interest. They were the Progressives of their day. They met stubborn opposition, not primarily from mere reactionaries and stand-patters, but from a group of leaders who had positive and progressive ideas of their own, derived from a philosophical system as least as well organized and as clearly thought through as that of the Herbartians. These Essentialists of their day were headed by William Torrey Harris, a thoroughgoing student of the philosophy of Hegel. It was the educational implications of Hegelian idealism which had guided Harris's highly successful administration of the St. Louis public schools.

The controversy between the Herbartians and the Hegelians, between the doctrine of interest and the doctrine of effort, turned out to be an episode of the first magnitude in the history of American education, for it was in a classic attempt to integrate these conflicting theories that John Dewey came to the forefront as an educational leader—a leadership which he has held now for more than forty years with increasing prestige, and which long since transcended national boundaries and became in a very real sense a world leadership in educational theory.

If the educational scientists have been responsible for tests and measurements, school surveys, the dis-

creditment of mental discipline, the recognition of individual differences, the objective determination of curriculum materials, and the initiation of the guidance movement, the philosophers, especially of the Dewey school, have been responsible for characteristics and tendencies of American education that are even more striking and perhaps more fundamental. The increasing emphasis upon the freedom of the individual; the condemnation of authority; the discreditment of systematic and sequential learning; the enthronement of the immediate and the local; the distrust of the past and the remote:—all these with far-reaching implications, corollaries, and amplifications are expressions of a philosophy of life that has been increasingly influential and of a correlative theory of education that is now well-nigh dominant.

Happily or unhappily, the educational scientists as a group do not see eye to eye at all points with this particular group of philosophers, and many of the points at which they disagree are fundamental. The result is confusion and uncertainty both in educational thought and in school practice. The attempts to resolve these conflicts have so far been disappointing; for example, Kilpatrick's early efforts to integrate the teachings of Thorndike and Dewey—an effort which Mr. Kilpatrick himself has now abandoned.

It is the belief of the author of the present volume that the problem can be better attacked by basing an educational theory upon a philosophical system that takes a different point of departure from that of the

pragmatism which lies at the basis of the Dewey school. Mr. Breed has consequently set forth the educational implications of the teachings of a rival group, the neo-realists.

From the point of view of the questions at issue, the new realism offers an advantage in that it is a philosophy which has its source in the methods and findings of scientific inquiry. It recognizes at the same time that objective science has its limitations and that the essential spirit of the philosophical disciplines must always play a fundamental role in human thought. Even physics has been compelled in certain of its frontier areas to return to metaphysics, and it has long been apparent that both the reflective and the objective methods must find a place in the mental and social sciences and in their applications to the solution of economic, political, and educational problems.

Mr. Breed is admirably equipped for the task that he has undertaken. He has a long-established record as a competent investigator in the field of educational science. He has been as well a keen student of philosophical systems. He has a wide knowledge and a sympathetic understanding of the difficult problems that the teacher meets in the daily work of the classroom. He writes with exceptional clarity and vigor. It is a distinct privilege to add his name to the list of scholars whose contributions to the Modern Teachers' Series in the field of educational theory have been so notable.

W. C. B.

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