

MODERN EDUCATIONAL THEORIES

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PREFACE

THE purpose of this volume is primarily to assist the reader in securing perspective with reference to the various movements and tendencies that are embodied in the educational thinking of the present time. We are in a period of exceptional educational activity, which makes orientation both more difficult and more important. Persons engaged in the work of education are naturally loath to admit that they do not understand what it is all about, just as an experienced woodsman is slow to admit that he has lost his way. Professor Charles McMurry relates that Daniel Boone, when questioned on this point, denied that he had ever actually been lost, but added that there once was a time when for three days he was "very much bewildered."

The task of orientation is peculiarly difficult at present for the reason that our whole social organization is in process of change. This change is due in part to the fact that occupations and modes of living have been profoundly affected by the applications of science. But what is even more significant is the change that is being wrought in our outlook on life. The democratic movement in society is refashioning our conceptions of the individual and of the social order, our standards

of conduct, and our political, industrial, and religious creeds. It goes without saying that a movement of this sort is intimately bound up with changes in the theory and practice of education.

The discussion in the present book takes this democratic movement as its point of departure. In Part II the attempt is made to show that the various attempts to reconstruct the curriculum are frequently out of close touch with the spirit of the democratic movement, with the result that "reforms" which are urged in the name of democracy and scientific methods of curriculum construction are in fact reactionary and not much more modern than Aristotle. Part III deals briefly with the application of the behavioristic movement in psychology to the learning process, for the purpose of showing that the learning process is artificially simplified in the interests of convenience, a simplification which is mistaken for rigorous application of scientific method and which is inimical to the cultivation of thinking. Part IV is concerned with the elaboration and application of the social ideal implied in the concept of democracy, and tries to show both that this ideal cannot be evolved by any process of scientific fact-finding, and that education should be regarded, first of all, as the expression of a social program.

As a matter of precaution it should perhaps be stated that the criticisms embodied in this volume are in no sense intended as an indorsement of conventional practices in education. To criticize a proposed remedy does

not imply that there are no faults to be remedied. On the contrary, the criticisms have been urged for the reason that the proposed reforms have taken the faults in present-day education too lightly. The reorganization of education that is demanded by the present democratic movement requires a more searching analysis and a keener appreciation of shortcomings than are usually accorded to it.

My sincere thanks are due to Mr. P. T. Orata for assistance in preparing this manuscript for the press, and also to the publishers of educational writings, whether in book form or in journals, for their invariable liberality in permitting (in the interest of free and unhampered discussion of vital questions) repeated and extensive quotation, even in cases in which the content is attacked. For courteous permission to use previously published material I am indebted to the following periodicals: *School and Society*, *School and Home Education*, *Engineering Education*, *American Review*, *Educational Administration and Supervision*, and *The Journal of Educational Research*. Leave to quote the more extended passages has been generously accorded. The selections from Bobbitt's *The Curriculum* and Snedden's *Educational Readjustment* are used by permission of, and by arrangement with, Houghton Mifflin Company, the authorized publishers.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

AN unusual activity in the realm of educational theory has characterized the past few years. This activity has been stimulated by several forces. The scientific movement in education has brought forth a vast number of facts and apparent facts which, in their demand for a satisfactory interpretation, suggest strongly the need of a new statement of basic principles. The wide extension of educational facilities, reflected especially in the growth of the high schools, has shown clearly enough that the concept of universal education must be greatly expanded and perhaps fundamentally revised. While the development of modern education has gone hand in hand with the development of democracy, the whole theory of democracy is now sharply challenged, not only by the results of the so-called intelligence tests, but also on the side of practical statecraft, by the apparently striking success of the Fascist programs in Italy and other European countries. As if all this did not provide work enough for the educational theorist, one is confronted (here in America at least) with the shift and flux of moral standards and the growing tendency to discredit authoritarian control of all sorts—accompanied, curiously enough, by the recrudescence of authoritarian

dogma which goes under the name of fundamentalism.

In one important respect, educational theory is well equipped to meet these new problems. Its status as a field of advanced study and research has been firmly established during the past thirty years. Scores of well-trained men and women are seeking and finding a career in this field. They are working industriously, and their contributions in the form of monographs, textbooks, and treatises are already so numerous that the conscientious student finds it hard to keep pace with them.

In another way, too, educational theory is in an advantageous position. Its contacts with school practice are intimate, numerous, and not long delayed. Not everyone who makes a new proposal can have it carried into immediate effect, and even the most plausible reforms almost never are adopted on anything approaching a nation-wide scale. It remains true, however, that school practice to-day is well disposed toward theoretical proposals that promise well.

Obviously the responsibilities of educational theory are coequal with its opportunities. To-day educational theory is in a position of real leadership. It will do well to "watch its step." No longer can it excuse half-matured or needlessly radical programs on the ground that "things are so bad that any change will be a change for the better," or on the charge that "education is so encrusted with tradition that a shock is necessary

to break the shell." Startling and bizarre proposals may not do much harm as long as no one pays the slightest attention to them. It is a quite different matter when change becomes a fashion and when the plaudits of the crowd are the loudest for proposals that break most completely with tradition. The present social situation is already sufficiently unstable. There can be no profit in compounding this instability by making fundamental educational changes unless it can be clearly shown that the ultimate result will abundantly justify the intervening confusion.

Needed, then, at the present juncture is just such a clear-cut and judicially-minded critique of current educational theories as Professor Bode gives us in this book. It is in this type of "theorizing" that educational theory in America has been hitherto lamentably deficient. Glaring inconsistencies among different "reform" proposals have gone unnoticed—and many an ambitious educational "leader" (fearful lest he be considered unprogressive) has given his indorsement impartially to them all! Nor are the inconsistencies within a single movement always clearly seen. More than one of our prophets has, in the first breath, vigorously denied the "transfer of training," and, in the second breath, set forth a proposal that swallows—hook, line, and sinker—the doctrine of formal discipline in its most naïve pattern.

It is not to the discredit of educational theory that its devotees have groped and sometimes stumbled in

their efforts to thread its mazes. To its great discredit would be the failure to recognize these gropings and stumblings as such. To its very great discredit would be the attitude that regards any doctrine or proposal as sacrosanct.

Criticism—keen, incisive, broadly informed, and well-considered—is probably as essential to educational progress at the present time as is research of a constructive character. Happily our author, like the competent philosopher that he is, does not rest content with criticism. We may agree or disagree with his own constructive proposals; but they are there as working hypotheses if we wish to test them.

WILLIAM C. BAGLEY

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PART I
INTRODUCTION

MODERN EDUCATIONAL THEORIES

CHAPTER I

THE AMERICAN TRADITION OF DEMOCRACY

WHEN I was a pupil in the public schools and a student in college, I had frequent opportunity to read and to hear rhapsodies on the greatness of man. What was chiefly emphasized was man's control over nature. The railroad and the telegraph had not yet become the commonplaces which they are at present; the telephone was still an object of mystery and of wonder; the self-binder was a thing to admire and to follow around the field; the electric lighting system was beginning to be introduced; and it was even said that electricity generated by water power could be transmitted over a wire and used to run the factories of distant cities. Still later came the triumphs of the automobile and the airplane; and the poet's dream of taking to himself the wings of the morning and flying to the uttermost parts of the earth seemed on the point of fulfillment. Every day brought its tale of wonders, and the future was rosy with the dawn of endless possibilities.

Perhaps the visions that I call up in retrospect are colored by the fact that I was then young and impressionable. But I have sometimes thought that there is an important difference between then and now. The fact that man could control nature still brought with it the shock of novelty and so made a powerful appeal to the imagination. The inventions that multiplied every day were more than labor-saving devices or ministers to comfort; they were a visible sign and symbol of man's superiority over his environment, of his escape from the limitations of space and time. They were a spiritual Declaration of Independence. They bore witness to the fact that man had at last escaped from the ancient bondage of nature; that he is free and the master of the planet. The story of achievement had an irresistible fascination, because it brought the world of song and story into the everyday affairs of life. It captured the imagination, because it suited the times and the conditions. It stimulated the genius and idealism of the American people to the great task of building for itself on this new continent a home and a civilization commensurate with its talents and its aspirations.

It was altogether natural that the idealism of America should embody itself in the history of its inventions. Here were endless stretches of wilderness, to be transformed into the home of a great nation. Here were limitless resources, to be exploited and converted into a common possession. To harness the forces of nature,

therefore, and put them into the service of man seemed a great and noble thing to do. We admired the inventor and we extolled the captain of industry, not because they made it possible for themselves and for others to heap up wealth, but because we felt, in some obscure way, that they had improved and ennobled human life. Their wealth was chiefly a symbol of achievement. We gloried in our efficiency, our initiative and resourcefulness, because the opportunity to express these qualities was what we meant by the doctrine that men have a natural right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Foreigners naturally did not understand. They said that Americans were money-mad; that the dollar sign was their only standard of value. As a matter of fact, there is no people on earth that cares less for money than Americans. Ordinarily an American and his money are soon parted. Who among us can hold on to the pennies with the grim determination of the canny Scot, or the thrifty French peasant, or the peasants of other lands, unless it be our dwindling group of Yankee New Englanders? The critic who sees nothing but materialism in America has not seen very far into the soul of the American people.

At the present time, however, if I am not mistaken, we have grown somewhat blasé in the presence of all these wonders of invention. Our youthful enthusiasm has given way to a more sober outlook. It seems possible to detect traces of disillusionment. It takes

more than invention to make a people great. We cannot make out a case for America by quoting statistics on the number of miles of railroads that we have, on the number of bushels of corn and wheat that we produce, or on the increase of our population; we don't prove anything by showing how high our skyscrapers are, or how fast we can turn out automobiles, or how Sears & Roebuck can supply anything, from darning needles to six-room cottages, by parcel post. Why should the foreigner be impressed by all this hurly-burly of physical activity? He senses a certain lack of spiritual background. We have no age-long traditions to nurture us in our childhood; we are all of us immigrants, at most a few generations removed. Our national heritage may easily seem poor in comparison with that of other nations. We do not have the sense of manifest destiny and of the white man's burden that is the heritage of the Englishman; we do not have a creed of national *Kultur*, like the Germans; we do not have the passionate race loyalty of the Japanese. We may not wholly approve of these other nations, but they undeniably have sources of inspiration which have it in them to give to life the dignity and nobility of consecration. The old Latinist who said, "I am a Roman," expressed in these simple words a whole program of life. He felt himself in the possession of a sustaining ideal, which made him superior to chance or circumstance. What has America to offer? What does it mean to be an American?

A question of this sort is apt to be embarrassing. What has America meant to the world anyway? What is her distinctive contribution to the spiritual wealth of the twentieth century? We have achieved no preëminence in the realm of science, or art, or literature, or diplomacy; almost everything that we do in these fields is done better abroad. Our politics are notorious, our lawlessness is a by-word, our illiteracy record is by no means creditable. It is a familiar saying that the Greeks gave to the world philosophy, art, and literature, that the Romans gave law and government, and that the Hebrews gave a sense for righteousness. Are we ready to invite comparisons by pointing out that we gave sewing machines and tin Lizzies? Are we willing that the minds and hearts of our children should be fashioned according to standards of production and efficiency?

Recent events have made it only too clear that the world cannot be saved by machinery alone. Power over nature does not in itself make men more human; it merely makes them more terrible. It might be argued with some plausibility that we know too many of the secrets of nature already. Science is too dangerous a tool for the sons of Adam. If we increase our knowledge of science, we do so at great risk. So far as we can see at present, the only thing that saved the world from utter annihilation in the recent war was ignorance. If science and invention had been fifty years farther along, the fighting nations would