

Goals For Educational Leadership¹

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IT HAS become a truism that we live in an age of rapid and profound change. The growth of freedom of thought, the use of the scientific method, the advance of the industrial revolution, the rise of political and economic democracy, and the ever-widening applications of technology—culminating in the atomic age—are recasting the thoughts and actions of men into strange new patterns.

Communism and fascism challenge democracy for world leadership. Isolationism and nationalism retreat before the conception of "one world." Opposing racial theories struggle for supremacy in both domestic and international affairs. Total and global warfare give way to atomic warfare. Mankind confronts a choice between the abolition of war or annihilation. Modern man is, indeed, obsolete!

In such periods social institutions either wax or wane. Like civilizations they do not stand still. They either adapt to new demands or they cease to exist.

In looking forward in American education, we may well take inspiration from our forebears in this field. Their creation of the free, common, non-sectarian public school was a social achievement which future historians will rank high in the accomplishments of the past century.

We who work in education today may well ask ourselves: Are there victories for democratic education to be won between 1946 and 2046 which are comparable in importance to those achieved in the preceding century? Undoubtedly the answer to this question is "Yes." Let us identify some of them.

First, we must extend the scope of our educational system to make it adequate to the needs of this century. We have not yet provided a range of educational facilities appropriate to the needs of Americans of all ages.

The facilities available at the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten level are inadequate in the typical American school system today. Less than one in four of our five-year-olds now attends kindergarten. Only one in sixty three-or four-year-olds is in a nursery school.

The great importance of the early years of childhood as revealed by psychological research, and the significant educational results which good schools can achieve at this level, urge the necessity of providing adequate nursery school-kindergarten education. One of the first goals of leadership in the decades just ahead should be the provision of adequate school services for young children.

The growth of junior colleges and technical institutes at the thirteenth-and fourteenth-grade level is the result of insistent needs in our society. These institutions, in conjunction with the upper years of high school, should provide for effective vocational and semi-professional education and for the extension of general education. They should be primarily terminal institutions rather than mere preparatory schools. Education at this level should be made available to the rank and file of American youth. Here is another major goal for educational leadership in the decades just ahead.

One of the notable shortcomings of American school systems today is the meager provision of adult educational facilities. The need for action in this field is great. The accelerated tempo of change which makes childhood schooling obsolete much faster than in previous times, the enormous increase in governmental activity calling for more and better action by citizens in general, the catapulting of the United States into the forefront of world leadership in an atomic age, the difficulty of individual and family adjustment in an age in which crises are the rule rather than the exception, the rapidly increasing amount of leisure—all call insistently for a program of adult education keyed to the needs of the day.

We should develop an adult education program involving everything from literacy and vocational training and retraining to general education concerned with leisure activities, the needs of individual and family life, and the difficult problems of national and world affairs. This would involve employment of the kinds of teachers and methods which are not dependent upon compulsory education laws for a clientele. Such a program could reclaim a portion of the American mind from the slavery of commercial amusement.

A second major goal for educational leadership in the years ahead should be the removal of the obstacles which prevent millions of Americans from taking advantage of educational facilities now in existence. Complete educational coverage of the whole population should be the objective.

The 1940 Federal Census listed nearly three million adults who had never attended any school. An additional seven million reported so little schooling that we know they are virtually illiterates. Nearly two million children six to fifteen years old were reported not in school—ages during which, by common agreement, all should be in school.

Of the seventeen million young men examined under the draft, some five million were rejected—nearly one in three. In those states which make least adequate provision for education more than half of the men examined were rejected. The high rate of rejections was pronounced a matter of national concern by Selective Service. It is a national disgrace that General Hershey should have had to say in one of his reports at a critical period in World War II, ". . . it is regrettable that we lose so many physically qualified who must be rejected because of illiteracy."

At the top of the educational ladder we find another example of denial of educational opportunity. The most regrettable educational casualties in the United States are among our talented youth. Numerous careful studies made in all sections of the country reveal that approximately half of our most capable youth, according to intelligence tests, school marks, and other

measures of capacity and diligence, find it impossible to finish high school or to go on to college. Our educational system is about 50 per cent efficient in developing our most valuable resource—youth of superior ability.

In the years ahead education should be made effectively free at all age levels. Every American youth with ability and willingness to study should be guaranteed a chance to realize the best that is in him. This would involve free tuition or scholarships at all levels, and provision of living costs of students in the upper years of high school and in college, in so far as may be necessary to keep every youth in school or college as long as he should be there.

Such a program need not weaken individual initiative; in fact, all youths who enjoy such privileges should, in addition to their school tasks, do some work which is clearly of social or economic value as part payment for their education.

This is essentially what we did during the recent war period when we were really serious about using all our resources. All youths came under selective service. All those who were accepted were given basic training for warfare. Those of superior ability and industry were given advanced training and education. All living costs during the training period were met from public funds. In addition, each youth received a small wage which began on the day of induction. Extra compensation was available to help in meeting family responsibilities.

It would have been utterly stupid to let family economic status determine how well a youth should be trained for warfare. We have not yet recognized that it is equally stupid to let economic barriers determine how well a youth will be prepared for peacetime service.

Equal opportunity, including free access to education for all, has been one of the guiding tenets of American life. The facts reveal, however, that the principle of equal opportunity is violated at every level of our educational system. One of the priorities for educational leadership in the years ahead is the correction of this indefensible situation.

A third major goal for educational leadership in the decades just ahead is the substantial improvement of the facilities of American public education. By facilities I mean teachers, school plant, instructional aids; in other words, all the provisions for personnel and materiel essential for the conduct of first-rate schools.

This presupposes an acceptable minimum of financial support for every classroom unit in the United States. We have no such minimum today.

In 1939-40 some five million children, nearly one in four of those in attendance, were in school systems spending less than \$1,000 a year per classroom unit.² More than one million children were in \$500 classrooms or worse. Children in such poverty-stricken school systems seldom get a decent educational opportunity.

It is about time for somebody to stick a pin into the colossal myth that education is generously supported in this country. The fact is that the United States is one of the few important nations of the world that still supports education at the level of semiskilled labor, rather than as a calling requiring professional preparation. We spend many billions more for non-essentials than we do for the schooling of our children and youth. We allow millions of talented youth to leave school too early because they cannot afford to remain. We tolerate vast educational slums in which the school facilities would be a disgrace to a third-rate nation.

Twenty per cent of the teachers in the United States now hold an emergency certificate, which is the euphemistic term for a certificate to teach granted to an unqualified teacher. The present alarming shortage of teachers at all levels is due to several factors, one of the most important being that teachers' salaries lagged far behind other incomes during the war period. Their power to obtain and hold good teachers has declined sharply since 1940.

Accordingly, a first priority in the years ahead is to restore the absolute and relative purchasing power of salaries to the place where teachers as good as those of 1940

can be obtained. We should then resolutely push ahead toward a professional wage for every one of the million teachers in the country.

The pittances traditionally doled out to American schools for instructional materials such as textbooks, libraries, and auditory and visual aids contrast sharply with the generous provision wisely made in connection with the recent training program in the military services. It is uneconomic, if not stupid, in an age when technology has made remarkable teaching devices available, to give a teacher only the instructional materials used in the nineteenth century. If we followed such a policy in other fields—warfare, business, agriculture, or medicine—we would soon become a second-rate nation.

School buildings represent another shortage. There has been little school-house construction for fifteen years, except hasty construction in war-industry communities. As we enter a new period of school building we should take advantage of the remarkable recent advances in lighting, heating, ventilating, and the development of new construction materials. Flexibility of plant should be achieved along with a sufficient degree of permanence to keep down costs of operation and maintenance. Each school site, and the buildings placed upon it, should be planned as a community center, ministering to the educational, cultural, and recreational needs of contemporary life at all ages.

A fourth area which educational leadership should vigorously deal with in the decades just ahead concerns the character and quality of our educational program. A first-rate education for those who attend our institutions of public education is, after all, the great objective. All else is merely a means to this end.

What are some of the major changes in emphasis and direction which should characterize the educational program of coming decades?

To begin with, we should complete the liberation of education from the discredited doctrine of faculty psychology. Forty years of

research have disproved the myth that the mind learns like a muscle. According to this faulty conception, various sections of the brain allegedly were strengthened by mental calisthenics, much as a gymnast strengthens the various muscles of his body. Therefore, any content was good for the mind so long as it was hard and heavy. Thus a defense was established for the retention of obsolete subject matter in the school program. Teachers were also mercifully spared the pain of changing their ways.

The trained mind is not one which has been forced through a series of distasteful mental gymnastics. This medieval doctrine has already driven tens of millions of children and youth prematurely from our public schools. It is responsible for the fact that many adults today look back upon the school-house as a place of boredom, if not of failure. The present-day curriculum should find its content primarily in current needs.

The educated mind today is one which has some preparation for dealing with the changing problems of individual and family life, some conception of the contemporary forces which are shaping the thoughts and action of men, some understanding of the alternatives from which we must choose in meeting strange new problems of politics and economics, great faith in the unfettered human mind as a guide to healthy social evolution, and, above all else, ethical standards which reflect themselves in terms of ethical action.

This does not mean that modern education should not take account of the lessons which may be drawn from the social heritage. To recognize the fact that one hundred so-called great books have something to contribute to modern education is easy. To say that their mastery is modern education is quite another matter. Such a policy would put public education into the museums alongside the mammoth and the dodo.

The modern curriculum should be founded in the needs of and problems of modern life. It should draw upon the heritage of the past only so far as this material clearly contributes to the good life of today.

Another clearly needed change in modern education involves the replacement of a false and undemocratic idea of what discipline is, by one which is consistent with the American way of life. Discipline in non-democratic societies means habitual and uncritical obedience to one's masters, conformity to official ways of thinking and acting, and heel-clicking obeisance to a Fuhrer and his henchmen. It should be crystal clear today where this type of discipline leads. It made Italy, Germany, and Japan menaces to world safety. It will do the same to any nation which succumbs to its evil influence.

All democracies, and ours especially, need discipline. Discipline must exist in every school if it is to be an instrument of democracy. What is democratic discipline? It is the habit of judging people by what they are rather than according to prejudices associated with the group they belong to. It is an attitude which makes citizens the masters rather than the victims of government and social institutions. It involves a very large element of self-control, and a feeling of responsibility which operates when the policeman, the teacher, or other outer controls are absent. It is the kind of education which makes an honest "why?" rather than a servile "Heil!" the mark of good citizenship.

Such discipline is more difficult to achieve than that of the totalitarian state, but it is discipline nonetheless, and the kind of discipline which a democracy, and a school for democracy, should be principally concerned with.

There are, to be sure, automatic elements of discipline even in a democracy. One should not have to think through whether he is to respond to each red light encountered in traffic. But these are the superficialities, rather than the fundamentals 'of life in a democracy.

Again, the school of the future should fully reject the cruel and unsound doctrine that chronic failure by children and youth is desirable education. Psychological research has taught us that few things add more to the growth of healthy personality than justly earned success and achievement.

In too many schoolrooms, even today, opportunity for accomplishment is largely confined to the area of abstract thinking. Those who are good at verbalization achieve success, and sometimes with too little effort. Others gain such recognition as they get from outside the classroom, or through misbehavior in the classroom, or after they leave school.

A primary purpose of school organization should be to offer a range of educational opportunities which will permit every child and youth to achieve enough success to justify respect for himself and to gain respect from others.

Thus far in this discussion we have considered the school system of the future from the viewpoints of needed extensions in scope, better diffusion of educational opportunity, improvement of personnel and materiel, and modernization of program or curriculum.

Many of you have doubtless been asking: Can we afford such a program? Where are we going to get the money?

Several estimates have recently been made of what it would cost the nation to provide genuine access for all to the kind of educational opportunities which have been described. Both the National Resources Planning Board and the National Education Association have estimated that it would cost approximately six billion dollars annually. This is approximately twice the prewar cost of public elementary, secondary, and higher education.

Assuming that the national income should stabilize at about one hundred and thirty billion dollars a year after reconversion, which is a reasonable expectation, six billion dollars for education would be 4.6 per cent of national income, as compared with 3.5 per cent expended in 1940.

Is an increase in the ratio of educational expenditures to national income feasible in an economy such as ours? An increase of this type may be not only possible, but also desirable. It appears likely that the maintenance of a high level of employment

and national income will require substantial increases in the proportion of workers and capital employed in service occupations and social welfare services, as opposed to those concerned with the production and distribution of tangible goods. Harold D. Smith, Director of the Budget, in a recent book dealing with the problem of maintaining a high level of income and employment after the war, writes as follows:

. . . Complementary to a greater production of things must be an expansion in services to the people. Our medical centers and hospitals, our schools, our churches, our youth organizations, our social centers, and our recreation programs illustrate some areas where expansion of services can better our standard of living and -promote full employment.³

There are, of course, a number of powerful and unpredictable factors in this whole situation. If the economy should slip back into the stagnation of the 1930's, our whole standard of living, including our standard of educating, would retrogress rather than improve. Also, if we let inflation get away from us it would retard private and public enterprise for an indefinite period.

But is it too much to expect that the American people will be able to work out of the morass of reconversion onto the high land where we will make reasonable use of our unequalled resources?

There is also the question of whether the Federal Government will adopt the fiscal policies which are requisite to the adequate financing of education. During the period since the "New Deal" came into existence, education has been the poor relation of the Federal Government. The national government has pre-empted much of the fiscal capacity of the states and localities. It has aided many other areas of public enterprise. Public education has not been aided except in dire necessity, and then on an emergency, piecemeal basis.

There are growing indications that the Federal Government will eventually take its proper place beside the states and localities in making its indispensable contribution to the financing of education in the United

States. The current battle for federal aid for education is in many ways a repetition of those won earlier in our educational history; first at the local and next at the state level of government.

The final decision, however, as to whether a first-rate educational program will be financed in the decades ahead will depend primarily upon whether our people gain new conceptions of the social value of this great public enterprise; whether they look upon it merely as a custodial function which keeps children and youth off the streets while they are taught a few skills and facts more or less pertinent to the real business of life; or whether they recognize education as an opportunity for a great social investment which, like all good investments, enhances rather than depletes the resources of the investor. At this point lies the greatest challenge to education of today.

Although the payments of the American people for schools in the past have been an excellent investment, our great industrial democracy has far from exhausted the full possibilities of education as an instrument of national progress. The provision of education right in amount and kind to every American would be an investment which would pay wonderful dividends in individual and general well-being—both tangible and intangible.

We still permit millions of American children to go virtually unschooled. Other millions of youths of proved talent and diligence are denied opportunities to prepare for leadership because economic barriers stand between them and the advanced education

which they should have. American civilization, therefore, operates at a lower level of skill and competence than it might achieve.

We soon discovered this fact when we were forced into the war and had to use our full resources, both material and human, in order to survive. We did not haggle about where we were going to get the money to train men for both war and civilian work. We got the money. We trained the men, even in wartime, literally by the millions. We lifted our productivity to a level above our most fabulous estimates.

A century ago Horace Mann and other far-visioned leaders challenged the imagination of a young nation with the possibilities of a free public school system for all. This was something new under the sun. The American people accepted the challenge. Their wisdom in establishing public education, after all debits and credits are balanced, has been abundantly justified. Education is undoubtedly one of the important reasons why that particular part of the new world known as the United States has become the most powerful nation in the world.

During the past generation the world has offered demonstrations of the enormous power of education. Too often, however, these demonstrations have been given by the modern despotisms which prostituted this great social instrument to evil ends. It remains for the United States to demonstrate the unparalleled potentialities of education when it is rightly and fully used in a free industrial democracy.

1 Address delivered at the convention of the American Association of School Administrators in Chicago, Illinois, Thursday, March 14, 1946.

2 John K. Norton and Eugene S. Lawler, *An Inventory of Public School Expenditures in the United States*. 2 vols. (mimeographed). Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1944.

3 Harold D. Smith, *The Management of Your Government*, pp. 155-156. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1945.