

Educational Leadership in a Troubled World¹

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A DISCUSSION of educational leadership in these troublous times might concern itself with an attempt to review our social and economic ills, to show their relationship to education, and to propose the way out by means of economic and social reconstruction. I shall assume that all of you are familiar with current discussion concerning the maladjustments in our society. I shall take it for granted, as well, that you are conversant with the opposed points of view of those who see the need for complete reorganization of our economic life, our government, and indeed the whole social order, and those who believe that progress lies in the more gradual evolution of our society. I feel sure that you will agree with me that leaders in education and in all other walks of life will need to cooperate in finding and putting into effect those changes which will contribute to the common good. I take it, as well, that you would agree that those of us who work in the field of education must depend for guidance on experts in economics, in government, in psychology, in sociology, and in anthropology if we are to have a sound basis in fact for our thinking with respect to social change.

I find that among the most competent scholars in the social sciences there is no complete agreement concerning the way out. I am therefore persuaded that dogmatic statements concerning the pattern which society will take should not be accepted as a basis for the reorganization of our educational program. The discussion of the varying points of view held by competent students of economics, government, and politics will undoubtedly prove helpful in the development of a sane public opinion. Educational leaders along with all other groups in our society have an obligation to inquire concerning the validity of the theories proposed and, in the light of all evidence available, to reach the conclusions which will govern their thought and action.

While this period of discussion and change is going on, we can all agree that certain obligations rest in peculiar manner upon leaders in the field of education. There are many possibilities of improving the service of education and by this means contributing to the realization of the good life for all our citizens. We know better than we do. There are areas in which we need further investigation in order that we may do a better job.

AN ADEQUATE PROGRAM OF EDUCATION

One of the outstanding phenomena of the period through which we are passing has been the failure of our society to maintain schools at the level which they had attained before the depression. This situation is due in considerable measure to failure on the part of leaders in education to devote themselves to a study of the problems of educational finance. It is no answer to this indictment to propose that in times of prosperity we were adequately supporting public education. As a matter of fact, in our most prosperous period many children were not in school at all or went to school for very short terms. A considerable percentage of the teachers engaged in schools were poorly prepared and underpaid. Millions of children were housed in inadequate and insanitary school buildings with little of the equipment necessary for the development of a modern program of education. Our failure to finance public education adequately has been due in large measure to our dependence upon local taxation, chiefly the general property tax.

We knew before the depression hit us that the maintenance of an adequate program of education throughout any state was most certainly dependent upon the financing of schools on a state-wide basis. The techniques necessary for the measurement of the ability of each local administrative area to support education and the measurement of the need for support in each of these areas had been well established. In a few states a financial program, based upon a modern system of taxation acknowledging the responsibility of the state for the support of the fundamental program of education, had been carried into effect. But in the great majority of all the states no such adequate provision for the support of schools had been made.

This period of distress has driven home to us the necessity for the assumption of leadership by those responsible for the administration of education in the development of more scientifically devised programs of taxation and more equitable schemes of state school support. We shall, of course, be dependent upon tax specialists for guidance in the development of revenue systems in line with our current economic life. The tax experts in their turn must look to Mort2 and to others who have developed the technique for distributing moneys from the state treasury to the localities.

I would not have you believe, however, that the whole financial problem will be solved when state programs for the financing of education and state revenue systems have been developed. If we take seriously the promise of our democracy that there shall be equality of opportunity, then the financing of education must rest upon a national basis. Just as it has been found necessary in the past to enlarge the unit of support from the district to the township, to the county, and to the state in order that the opportunity for education and the burden to be borne by citizens in support of this enterprise may be equalized, just so the ultimate realization of our ideal will be dependent upon a program of support by the Federal Government.

FEDERAL SUPPORT OF EDUCATION

The action already taken by the national government in keeping open schools that would otherwise have been closed, in providing salaries for unemployed teachers who work in the field of adult education, in providing partial support for 100,000 college students, in developing an educational program in the Civilian Conservation Corps camps, and in the proposal that a part of the money from the public works program be used for the construction of school buildings amounts to an acknowledgment of the responsibility of the Federal Government for the maintenance of public education. Simple equity demands, however, that the contribution by the Federal Government be not sporadic and that it be made available only for the sake of averting a complete breakdown of the system of education. In a nation in which our economic life is organized on a national scale, the central government should act as an agency for the collection of revenue and its redistribution to the several states. This distribution should be on an objective basis. It should be based upon the ability of each of the states to support that fundamental program of education which is considered essential for all our people.

Early studies in the field of educational finance revealed great disparity in the ability of the several states to support schools when measured by wealth or income. It was discovered that one state was six times as able as another to provide education, if this service were made available for all children from six to fourteen years of age. More recent studies have demonstrated the fact that if a model tax plan were applied in each of the states of the Union, the disparity in ability to support the necessary fundamental program of education would still exist. Leslie L. Chism,³ in a study of the economic ability of the states, has found that the relative ability of the states to finance education under a model system of state and local taxation would vary by more than six to one. He calls attention to the fact that it would be necessary for the poorest state to spend for education more than its total tax collections under the model tax plan in order to support a defensible minimum program.

It seems reasonable to propose that it is the duty of educational leaders to bring to the attention of citizens throughout the United States the reforms in taxation and in the method of school support necessary for the maintenance and improvement of our public schools, Whatever resources we have available in national, state, and local organizations might well be used to conduct inquiries and to disseminate information among all the people. It is not true in the United States to-day that we cannot afford to support our schools, but it is true that we cannot keep our schools open or maintain them at any high degree of efficiency so long as our dependence is, as at the present time, so largely upon local support.

The changes in school support which have been made necessary by the development of our economic system can be brought about without interfering with the right and obligation of the several states to control and administer their schools. Our economic organization knows no state lines. Raw materials and manufactured products associated with particular regions and localities are distributed throughout the nation. Along with the development of interdependence of all sections of the country there has come a reorganization of the financing of all our economic enterprises. The outstanding characteristic of our economic life is found in the consolidation of industry into great national units. The financing of these enterprises and their ownership are quite commonly located in the larger centers of population. On this account the ability to pay taxes tends to be much greater in these centers of industry and finance than in other parts of the country. Incomes accruing from enterprises which are carried on in one section of the United States will very frequently be subject to taxation in another section of the country.

Added to these factors of interdependence and the segregation of wealth and income in the larger centers of population is the further factor of the mobility of our population. Boys and girls born and educated in rural communities move to the city. Those educated or denied this opportunity in one state move to other states after they reach adult life. It is therefore apparent that the well-being of each section of the country is dependent upon the provision for education that is made in each of the several states. Ignorance cannot be segregated in the United States.

During the first seventy-five years of our national history the Federal Government provided most generously for the support of schools without interfering in any way with the responsibility of the several states for the control and administration of their own school systems. There is a parallel situation in the support provided in the states for the localities. In those states in which the most generous provision is made by the state for the support of education it is still true that the administration and control of the schools is left primarily in the hands of local school boards. It is just as possible to have federal support without federal control.

The need of the hour is for leadership that will distinguish clearly between the desirable supervisory activities, research, and dissemination of information which may be conducted on a state-wide or even a nation-wide scale, and the detailed administration and development of curricula and methods of teaching which are the proper responsibility of the local school authorities and of the local professional personnel.

REDUCTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

In the great majority of the states of the Union there is a crying need for the reduction of the number of administrative units. In like manner, through consolidation of schools and transportation of pupils, the number of attendance units should be greatly diminished. There is no present prospect of efficiency or economy in the administration of schools except upon the basis of the organization of units of administration large enough to justify the employment of a chief executive officer supported by competent specialists in the field of administration and supervision. There is little real possibility of improving the curricula of elementary and secondary schools so long as a large percentage of children are enrolled in one- or two-teacher elementary schools or in the small high schools in which two or three teachers are asked to accept responsibility for all that is taught.

Dawson,⁴ in his *Satisfactory Local School Units*, proposes a desirable minimum of seven teachers for an elementary school and ten teachers for a six-year high school. He finds, as well, on the basis of an analysis of the situation in several states, that it is desirable to set up an administrative organization to include from 6,000 to 12,000 pupils, with a minimum administrative unit responsible for 1,750 pupils. These reforms he considers essential in order that there may be an efficient educational administration of the school system, competent supervision of instruction, adequate health supervision, and effective census and attendance service. Any proposal for the refinancing of education on a state and national basis may well take account of this necessity for

the reorganization of local units of attendance and administration. While it would not seem desirable to force the issue of consolidation upon the people locally, it has been found possible, upon the basis of careful surveys and by means of support for new buildings, to bring about the desired reorganization with the complete acceptance and goodwill of those involved.

THE FIELD OF REORGANIZATION

We have a professional obligation in this field of the reorganization of our school system which calls for extended inquiries and for the acquaintance of our public with the changes which are necessary in order that the service which we represent may be performed more effectively and more economically.

In a recent Research Bulletin of the National Education Association,⁵ dealing with the nation's school building needs, it is proposed, upon the basis of an inquiry that was instituted in several states, that approximately 1,392,000 pupils are housed in buildings that have been pronounced unsafe or insanitary. It is my judgment that this is an understatement rather than an exaggeration of the situation with respect to school buildings. From surveys made in more than fifty cities scattered throughout the United States and in three states, I estimate that at least twenty-five per cent of all school buildings now in use are little suited to the program of education which our current social situation demands. There are millions of children housed in school buildings which offer only the most meagre accommodation of a fixed seat, a dingy blackboard, a few textbooks, and a very minimum of sanitary facilities. In addition, I estimate that at least one-fourth of all the children enrolled in our schools have no adequate play facilities provided for them. If large units of attendance and of administration are to be set up, they will serve the communities in which they are placed only when more adequate buildings and more generous equipment are provided.

In a bulletin on Space Requirements for the Children's Playground,⁶ issued by the National Recreation Association, it is proposed that the minimum play space required to serve 300 elementary school children is two and one-half acres, and that a playground for 1,000 elementary school children would have to include as much as five and one-third acres in order to care for the play needs of this group. When one allows for the space occupied by the building and for landscaping, it would appear that the minimum desirable site for an elementary school would be five acres, and that correspondingly larger spaces of from ten to twenty acres would be required to accommodate the play needs of junior and senior high school groups. It is essential that these opportunities for play be provided for school children if we are to take account of their physical well-being and their social development. There are cities in the United States that have already met these standards in their more recent schoolhousing, but the job remains to be done for most urban and for most rural communities throughout the country.

The program of reconstruction of school buildings will involve the adaptation of the school plant to the needs of our current program of education. We can no longer rest satisfied with classrooms of the traditional sort. Modern elementary and secondary schools must be equipped with libraries, laboratories, shops, gardens, studios, auditoriums, and gymnasiums. Without these facilities it will be difficult, if not impossible, even for able teachers to render the service to children that is essential for their personal and social development. A billion or more of the \$4,800,000,000 proposed for public works could be spent to advantage on school buildings throughout the United States. There is no other area in which the need is more certainly indicated and one in which the return to our society would be more sure. It is the duty of educational leaders locally, in the state and in the nation, to call attention to these needs for better schoolhousing and to present the case to the local, the state, and the national governments for action. It is gratifying to know that the United States Commissioner of Education already has under consideration a survey of school building needs throughout the nation.

Some progress has been made during the period of the depression in raising the level for entrance to the profession. Much remains to be done in the revision of the curricula of teachers

colleges and of the graduate schools of education in our universities. One might even have the temerity to propose that this would be a good time to carry into effect throughout the United States provision for the certification of supervisory and administrative officers on the basis of that broad professional training which educational leadership implies.

COMPETENT EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Our profession has an obligation to work for the establishment, particularly in the state and county administrative offices, of the principle of selection of persons competent for these most important posts without reference to partisan politics. The highest type of educational leadership, as has been amply demonstrated in American cities, is dependent upon the selection of a professional executive by a board of education that is free to choose the man or woman best qualified without respect to the political affiliation, the religion, or the place of residence of the one selected. It is true that in many of the states it would be necessary to amend the Constitution in order to provide this better basis for the development of state and local leadership. It is the duty of our profession to seek the consent of the people to this change in the interest of the cause of public education.

The movement for the recognition of the professional executive is coming more and more to be acknowledged in government. The council-manager type of city government follows the pattern, established almost a hundred years ago, of the board of education employing a professional superintendent of schools. The professionalization of the state office has already been developed in fourteen of our states. Leaders in education have an obligation to work for the establishment of this better practice in state and county.

Competent leadership will express itself in the growth of the entire professional personnel of our schools. However high we may make the requirement for entrance to the profession of teaching, the real job of developing professional competence will be accomplished, if at all, during the period of professional service. The most satisfactory measure of the quality of leadership in any school system is to be found in the responsibility accepted by all members of the teaching staff for the improvement and development of the educational service. It is only in school systems in which the ideas and achievements of those who work with children are utilized in development of curricula, modification of school procedures, and organization and administration of the schools that true leadership exists.

A BETTER PROGRAM OF EDUCATION

All that has been proposed as the task of leadership in the fields of finance, better housing, larger units of administration, and better personnel has its meaning in the provision of a better program of education for children, for youth, and for adults. We face in the United States the necessity of providing for the education of young children in nursery schools and kindergartens, of older children in the elementary school, of practically all of our youth in junior and senior high schools, of an increasing percentage of the total population in higher education, and of all adults who need to be re-trained and whose intellectual and social life can be satisfied only by engaging in some form of creative endeavor.

We have known for more than a quarter of a century of the inadequacy of our traditional school program. The failure of education to take account of individual differences has been recorded in millions of failures in elementary and secondary schools. It is still possible to go into most school systems in the United States and to find from ten to twenty per cent of failure in the elementary school and from ten to thirty per cent in courses offered on the secondary school level. We have as a primary obligation the elimination of failure insofar as it is caused by factors under our control. There must be provided, in connection with our schools, services which will acquaint us more certainly with the needs and capacities of boys and girls as well as knowledge of their limitations. We have only begun to provide the service in physical examination and corrective treatment which furnishes the necessary foundation for any significant achievement for many

boys and girls. We still condemn children to failure because of a lack of the knowledge which the psychologist or psychiatrist should furnish. We still permit and encourage children to enroll in courses for which they have no aptitude and in which they must inevitably fail. We still ignore environmental conditions which contend against the influence of the school for a controlling position in the education of children. We still close school buildings at four o'clock in the afternoon and turn children loose in an environment which suggests and encourages anti-social conduct.

I would not propose that we have the final solution with respect to the organization of children in groups or classes for instruction or that our curricula or programs of work even in the most favored communities are fully adjusted to the demand which is now made upon the schools. But I do propose that it is of paramount importance that leaders in education devote themselves to the revision of the program insofar as it has been found inadequate. We may not all of us contribute in any large measure individually but we may encourage the allocation of whatever resources are available, either from the public treasury or from private sources, in order that the fundamental studies for the solution of this problem may be made. In the meantime in every school system in which there is real leadership the duty of the leader is to encourage experimentation and to seek the cooperation of the public in making available resources in personnel competent to deal with these fundamental educational problems.

Many of you find yourselves overwhelmed in these days with responsibilities that seem to lie outside the work of the schools. You have been drafted for that service which provides relief for the destitute. You have accepted an obligation to work with others in the development of a program of recreation. A new program of adult education, based upon the vocational, cultural, and broad social needs of the community, has challenged your best thought. The necessity for education which will result in the social rehabilitation of delinquents has been brought to your attention. These constitute only a part of the program of cooperation with other social agencies which leaders in education may reasonably be expected to accept.

The challenge which I have sought to bring to your attention has in it little of novelty. On the other hand, I contend without fear of contradiction that our schools cannot adequately serve our public except upon the basis of the solution of the major issues which I have presented. This is not the time to retreat in our campaign for the realization of the ideals of our democracy. At this time more certainly than at any other time in our history the call is for leadership that will utilize the professional knowledge which we already possess for the development of a more adequate educational service.

We must organize the friends of public education behind a program of more adequate support. We can, if we will, bring about a reorganization of attendance and administrative units which will make possible a higher degree of efficiency and a multiplication of educational opportunity for all our children. We must provide better housing, more generous playgrounds, more adequate facilities in libraries, shops, studios, auditoriums, gymnasiums, and gardens in order to make possible an adequate program of education. We can, if we have the qualities of leadership, increase in large degree the professional enthusiasm and competence of all who are engaged in the educational service. We must develop the kind of educational program which will provide experience for children, for youth, and for adults, related to their individual capacity and to the needs of our time. We can no longer rest satisfied with a situation in which schools operate out of relation to the environment in which they are placed, or the other social agencies which contribute to the achievement of the good life for all.

The demand of the hour is for the consolidation of our forces. If leadership is effective it will organize teachers and citizens locally, within the state, and on a national basis, in support of those measures which are necessary for the maintenance and improvement of our system of free public education. The funds of local, state, and national educational associations will be utilized for the promotion of research and the dissemination of information concerning the crisis which confronts our schools. A noteworthy contribution to the realization of this purpose has been made by the Joint Commission on the Emergency in Education. But the greater part of the job remains

to be done. Under the leadership of those within the sound of my voice there is the possibility of organizing a great movement which shall have as its aim the realization of our democratic ideal through education. The friends of democracy are the friends of public education. Their number is legion. They await the challenge which it is our duty to bring to their attention. I have confidence that the leadership represented in this audience is equal to the task.

1An address delivered February 27, 1935, at a general session of the meeting of the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association held in Atlantic City, N. J.

2See Mort, Paul R. State Support for Public Education. Report of the National Survey of School Finance. American Council on Education, Washington, D. C., 1933. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.

3Chism, Leslie L. "The Economic Ability of the States." A Doctor's Dissertation in progress at Teachers College, Columbia University, 1934-1935.

4Dawson, Howard A. Satisfactory Local School Units. Field Study No. 7. Division of Surveys and Field Studies, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tenn., 1934.

5"The Nation's School Building Needs." Research Bulletin of the National Education Association, Vol. XIII, Whole No. 1, January 1935.

6Space Requirements for the Children's Playground. National Recreation Association, 315 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y., 1934.