What Goes On Here?

***ROBERT H. WILLIAMS** **

TWO years ago, while doing a part of the reading which a professional person must do, I noticed that there were many statements of purpose for public schools. These statements could be found almost at will in literature of the educational field. Their variety aroused my curiosity and I started a collection of them. A sampling follows:

- To enable men to release, to nurture, to discipline . . . the human mind and spirit, . . . this most influential of all the varieties of energy has always been the task of education.[1]
- The oldest goal of education is to preserve what is already known.[2]
- . . . I would say that the object of all education is to prepare all students to participate in the Civilization of the Dialogue and that the particular object of the university is to exemplify the dialogue and carry it further.[3]
- Schools exist to help children succeed.[4]
- . . . Therefore, we would ask education to give us men with taste, respect for intelligence, and independence of judgment that will give them confidence to approach the public for what it is—a group of distinct individuals, not a lump of reflexes waiting to be conditioned.[5]
- The object of education assumed here is development of the individual.[6]

[1] John H. Fischer. "The Energies of Education." *Education Age*, November-December 1965. p. 42. © Visual Products Division, 3M Company, St. Paul, Minn.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[3] Robert M. Hutchins. "First Glimpses of a New World." *Saturday Review* 48(49): 35; December 4, 1965. Copyright © 1965 by Saturday Review, Inc.

[4] Gordon McCloskey. *Education and Public Understanding*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1959. p. 297.

[5] Monroe E. Spaght. *The Bright Key*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965. p. 10.

[6] American Association of School Administrators. *A Climate for Individuality*. Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1965. p. 16.

* *Robert H. Williams, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Spokane Public Schools, Spokane, Washington*

- The larger function of education is to realize the ideals of manhood and the kinds of relationship between men that it cherishes.[7]

- The distinctive function of education must inevitably involve the giving of direction to the social reconstruction that we so desperately need if we are going to solve our social problems and realize our ideals.[8]

- Education is that which increases our ability to enjoy more things more, to live more richly, more creatively, and in greater harmony with ourselves, our environment, and our fellow men.[9]

- The main objectives of general education should be twofold: first, to help the student develop those qualities and abilities that will serve him and the community well, no matter what his calling or status in life; and second, to foster in him those interests and abilities that will induce and enable him to continue to grow—to learn by himself and in whatever joint activity he may be engaged.[10]

- The central purpose of education should be to teach how to learn.[11]

- The primary purpose of the public schools is development of effective citizens—citizens who uphold American ideals and who act in accordance with the social and moral standards that characterize democracy.[12]

- The basic purpose of the school is to develop in all people the skills, understanding, beliefs, and commitments necessary for government of and by the people.[13]

- The goals of education for the disadvantaged are not different from those for other American children. The goals are to enable each child to play a constructive, respected role in society and to lead a life which to him will be satisfying.[14]

As an analysis of these statements is made, one is struck more perhaps by the omission of any reference to specific subject matter or to specific course content than by the variety of the statements. Are the persons who wrote them pointing a direction for the educational endeavor? Are they saying that we need a restructuring of the curriculum which fuses the subject matter fields and which leads students to larger or more relevant relationships than the present atomistic structure provides?

Jerome Bruner has stated that this very thing is needed in the individual disciplines, and that the structure of a discipline must be made known to learners. Are these men applying Bruner's idea to the educational field and pointing a direction as the writers of modern literature are said to do, or are they suggesting something beyond the possibility of accom-

[7] Hobert W. Burns. "Brameld's Reconstructionism Reviewed." *Phi Delta Kappan* 47(3): 148; November 1965.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[9] Theodore O. Yntema. *The Enrichment of Man, The Benjamin Fairless Memorial Lecture*, given at Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1965. p. 47.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

[11] Warren Weaver. "Confessions of a Scientist-Humanist." *Saturday Review* 49(22): 13; May 28, 1966. Copyright © 1966 by Saturday Review, Inc.

[12] American Association of School Administrators. *Imperatives in Education.* Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1966. p. 105.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[14] Educational Policies Commission. *American Education and the Search for Equal Opportunity.* Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1965. p. 7.

plishment when they suggest this for the complete spectrum of learning available?

Larger Needs of Mankind

These statements of educational purpose seem to allude to the larger needs of mankind, and they seem to support in a broad way the advocates of liberal education.

Is it possible that the purposes of the school systems of the United States have been too narrowly defined and that in the future a greater effort must be made to relate the lesser learnings to the more important ones? If so, there is a revolution coming in the educational field which will touch every level of education and the aspects within each level. This type of education would demand that the narrow subject matter preparation of our teachers give way to a relationship point of view, that tests be changed so students can relate their knowledge to the larger learnings, that instruction concentrate on the discovery and illumination of relationships between and among fields of knowledge, and that subjects be carried over a longer period of time so that functional relationships can be discovered.

There may be only a hint of coming changes in the statements listed here. If so, other statements will be written in the near future. As a beginning to this process I would submit the following: The purpose of education is to help humans develop the ability to function in the universe and the confidence to do so.

If this goal should be pursued, would education in America assume an importance commensurate with its consequences? □

Curriculum Decisions←→Social Realities

Addresses at the 23rd Annual Conference
Atlantic City, New Jersey
May 10-14, 1968

Papers by Muriel Crosby, William H. Schuman
A. Donald Bourgeois, Nicholas A. Masters
and Jack R. Frymier
Preface by J. Harlan Shores

$2.75 120 pp.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

Copyright © 1969 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.