

*Riverside Educational Monographs*

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**CHANGING CONCEPTIONS  
OF EDUCATION**

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### III

## NEW CONCEPTIONS AND PRESENT TENDENCIES

THE Spanish-American War of 1898 and the recent Russo-Japanese War served alike to concentrate attention once more on the advantages of general education. It was "the man behind the gun" who won in each case. These wars, and other more or less related events, have served to bring out into new relief our position in the family of nations, and to reveal to us something of the part we shall probably be called upon to play in the world's affairs in the future. Our location, our resources, our capacity, and, not least, the high moral and humanitarian purposes which actuate us as a nation, are certain to make our influence felt in the affairs of the world in the future. We are slowly beginning to see, as well, that the great battles of the world in the future are to be commercial rather than military |

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or naval, and that it is our duty to get ready for them if we wish to continue to prosper as a nation. The trained artisan is to be the private; the trained leader the captain; and an educated, sober, capable, and industrious people the base of supplies for the national armies of the future. Whether we like it or not, we are beginning to see that we are pitted against the world in a gigantic battle of brains and skill, with the markets of the world, work for our people, and internal peace and contentment as the prizes at stake.

From 1897 to 1907, our country experienced an unprecedented period of industrial development and national prosperity. It was a period marked by the concentration of capital and business enterprises in all fields; undertakings on a scale heretofore unattempted were begun; capital changed from a national to an international basis; "trusts," combinations, and associations were formed in all lines of business; the specialization of labor and the introduction of labor-saving machinery took place to an extent before unknown; new inventions destroyed old trades

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and threw hundreds out of employment; the immigration of people racially further removed from our own stock reached a maximum; city conditions everywhere became even more complex and potentially more dangerous; villages became more urban, and a more cosmopolitan attitude began to pervade our whole life; the frontier practically disappeared; the national feeling was deepened and intensified, and the national government was called upon to do many things for the benefit of the people which it had become clearly evident that the states could not do.

Such periods of rapid development subject educational systems to increased strain. National progress outruns the possibility of education to keep pace with it. Many readjustments are called for, and readjustments are not easy to make, and cannot be made at once. The need of broad, general, and diversified training, adapted to the needs of the future rather than to the needs of the present or the past, becomes even more evident. The educational system is subjected to new and increased criticism. We hear this on all sides to-day. The practical man would make the school

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over: the conservative schoolmaster clings tenaciously to the past. Criticism and skepticism alike prevail. At last the tension becomes so great that something has to give way, and progress, often rapid progress, ensues. A new view-point is attained, a new inspiration directs our work, new means and methods are introduced, and often a new philosophy actuates the work of the school.

There are many reasons for thinking that our school system has entered on another such period of change and development now, and that we are standing on the threshold of a new era in educational progress. The period since 1900 has certainly been a remarkable one. The number of new educational societies and associations which have been formed, and the number of congresses which have been held to promote some one phase or another of educational work, is so large that one can scarcely remember their names. The great educational awakening which has taken place in the Southern states is only paralleled by that started by Horace Mann in Massachusetts seventy years ago. The large endowments for higher education, and the deep interest taken in popular

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education by many laymen, are certainly significant. The many state educational commissions which have been created within the past five years indicate a general dissatisfaction with existing conditions and a desire for change and improvement. The new interest in school hygiene and the physical welfare of the child indicates a new and a commendable desire to care for the bodies as well as the heads of our children. The great educational lessons to be learned from a study of the educational, political, and industrial progress of the German Empire during the past forty years are at last beginning to take root with us. Above all, the new and extensive interest in industrial and vocational training is especially significant of the changing conception of the function of the school and the classes in society which the school is in future expected to serve.

A right-about-face movement, too, is taking place in our educational theory. When the school first became conscious and critical of itself it turned to methods and class-room procedure for lines of improvement, and psychology became its fundamental science. Its gaze was turned inward

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upon itself. Many reforms and improvements in methods and in the teaching process were made, but the advances in organization and in the enrichment of the curriculum have nearly all been forced upon the school by practical men from without. The school now shows signs of becoming conscious of itself in a new and a truer direction; its gaze is now outward instead of inward, and the relation of the school to the world outside has now become a question of the first importance in educational procedure. The school is essentially a time and labor saving device, created — with us — by democracy to serve democracy's needs.

To convey to the next generation the knowledge and the accumulated experience of the past is not its only function. It must equally prepare the future citizen for the to-morrow of our complex life. The school must grasp the significance of its social connections and relations, and must come to realize that its real worth and its hope of adequate reward lies in its social efficiency. There are many reasons for believing that this change is taking place rapidly at present, and that an educational sociology, needed as much by teachers to-

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day as an educational psychology, is now in the process of being formulated for our use.

Child life is everywhere experiencing to-day a new lengthening of the period of dependence and training. In proportion as our social life becomes broader and more complex, a longer period of guidance becomes necessary to prepare the individual for active participation in it. As our industrial life becomes narrower and its processes more concealed, new and more extended training is called for to prepare the future worker for his task, to reveal to him something of the intricacy and interdependence of our modern, social, and industrial life, and to point out to him the necessity of each man's part. With the ever increasing subdivision and specialization of labor, the danger from class subdivision is constantly increasing, and the task is thrown more and more upon the school of instilling into all a social and a political consciousness that will lead to unity amid diversity, and to united action for the preservation and betterment of our democratic institutions. The great numbers of aliens who yearly come to our shores and at once become a part of our

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industrial classes, many of whom are illiterate and few of whom have any real conception of the meaning of democratic life, add new emphasis to this point of view. Five or six months of common school education each year for a few years are no longer enough, and on all sides the school year is being lengthened and the educational requirements increased. So marked has been the change in this direction within recent years, that sixteen years of age bids fair to be the earliest time at which we will, ultimately, permit children to entirely cease attendance at some form of the public school.

Our school curriculum bids fair, too, to experience many modifications during the next one or two decades, and chiefly along a line that will lead toward preparation for increased social efficiency. Much antiquated material, adapted largely to the needs of a society that has preceded us, will doubtless be eliminated. New subjects and new points of emphasis in old subjects, better adapting the school to our changed and changing social and industrial life, will probably be added. Our city schools will soon be forced to give up

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the exceedingly democratic idea that all are equal, and that our society is devoid of classes, as a few cities have already in large part done, and to begin a specialization of educational effort along many new lines in an attempt better to adapt the school to the needs of these many classes in the city life. City, town, and country schools alike have, in the past, directed most of their training to satisfying the needs of the children of the well-to-do classes, and those headed for business life or the professions. More recently, most of the larger cities have provided some form of work leading to preparation for the executive positions in technical pursuits. The common wage earners, those who enter the industries as workmen, and the country boy and girl have been forced to take what was provided for the others, or to do without.

The situation has been somewhat analogous to that of the old colleges, with their Latin, Greek, and Mathematics curriculum and their small student body and limited support. With the introduction of many new lines of work and the democratization of all instruction, the colleges have

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experienced a great increase in students and in popular favor and support. Our public schools are at present experiencing some such change, and it is one that is likely to increase rather than to diminish with time. Vocational schools and special type schools of many kinds are likely soon to find a place in our more important school systems. There is some reason to hope, too, that the aim and direction of the country school and the small town school will also change, and that in the future these will seriously turn their attention to the needs of rural life. Ever since the establishment of rural schools they have been giving instruction of a kind which has led to the city rather than to the farm. The introduction of manual training, domestic science, and agriculture would do much toward making the country school and the small town school a more useful social institution.

A very significant change has also taken place since 1900 in the attitude assumed toward the study of education by our higher institutions of learning. The study of education, rather than the old "pedagogy," has recently become an im-

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portant part of the work of most of our colleges and universities. Instead of a study of school methods and management only, the work has changed into a phase of political science, — that of a study of means of improving the state and of advancing the public welfare. Nearly all of our universities and colleges now have such chairs or departments, and the state universities and our more democratic private institutions are now organizing professional schools for the training of teachers and educational leaders for the state. Active, capable, and mature young men are studying the subject, and many are preparing themselves for leadership in the work which will soon have to be done. The work begins at last to offer a good career, and the opportunities for useful service are almost unparalleled. The instruction offered in a number of our normal schools has been revised recently to make it conform better to the new conception, and many indications point to education as a future high school subject of study, with ultimately a unit of credit for college entrance. Surely a study of the history, aims, purposes, and functions of public

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education in a democratic society such as our own ought to be as useful, either as a preparation for participation in active life, or for the thinking required of a college Freshman, as is the study of the History of Mediaeval Europe, or the reading of four books of Cæsar.

The administration of education each year becomes a more important and a more dignified piece of work. If we could only cast off the antiquated and unsatisfactory method of awarding the selection of state and county superintendents to the Republican and Democratic parties, and open up these places to the competition of the brains of the whole country, as we have done with the high school principalship and the city superintendency, these positions would become among the most important within the gift of the state. The office of superintendent of city schools has in many places become one of much dignity and importance, and the office is being completely divorced from partisan or personal politics by all progressive communities. State Superintendents of Public Instruction and State Boards of Education are being entrusted with new functions,

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and a marked tendency toward a centralization of power and responsibility is manifest in many states. There is even good reason to believe that at last Congress has been touched by the new spirit in education, and that it will, before long, perform the long-delayed task of raising the national Bureau of Education from a position inferior to that of the life-saving service, the bureau of fish and fisheries, or the meat-inspection service, to a position commensurate with the importance of education to us as a nation.

A people who express themselves as completely as we do in free political institutions, and whose whole life is experiencing such rapid changes and advances as our own, is increasingly dependent on education for guidance and progress. As a nation we have been slow to realize this. We have cared for higher or university education relatively well, and our secondary schools are in many places well provided for, but our elementary, supplementary, continuation, and vocational schools have been as yet but imperfectly developed. The recent German commission sent to this country to investigate our educational



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conditions mentioned this as one of our most vulnerable points.

The new period of advance which we now seem to be entering also bids fair to be very paternalistic, perhaps even socialistic, in the matter of education. The old principle, fought for so vigorously fifty or sixty years ago, that the wealth of the state must educate the children of the state, bids fair to be even further extended with a view to a greater equalization of both the burdens and the advantages of education. Poor and overburdened towns and districts will be supplied with sufficient means to enable them to provide a good school for their children, and the present great difference in tax rates, to provide practically the same educational advantages, will be in large part equalized by the state. There is, as yet, a small but a very significant tendency for the school to free itself from the financial control of the town board or city council, and to erect itself as an independent and a coordinate branch of the town or city government, responsible only to the people for its work and its expense. There are many signs of an increasing centralization of

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management which will ultimately lead to greater efficiency. Many options which communities have to-day will in time be changed into obligations. The state oversight of private and parochial education is likely to increase slowly, especially along the lines of uniformity in statistics and records, sanitary inspection, common standards of work, and the enforcement of the attendance laws. In particular, the attitude toward the control of the child is likely to change. Each year the child is coming to belong more and more to the state, and less and less to the parent. In all that relates to proper care, kindness, education, and advances, the child belongs to the parent; but when neglect, abuse, and the deprivation of the child of any natural right takes place, the child belongs to the state. The right to reasonably good treatment, proper care, an education, protection from vice, and protection from labor beyond his strength and years, the state will soon guarantee. The plea in defense that "the child is my child" will not be accepted much longer by society. Our future welfare is too thoroughly in the keeping of the child to permit of such a policy.

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The movement for general education for all of the people has been essentially a democratic movement. Everywhere west of the Alleghany Mountains the girl has shared equally with the boy in all of the advantages provided. The masses, who have been the voting strength of the movement, have seen in it a chance for their children to rise, and educators and statesmen have seen in it the safety of the republic. School systems with us are thoroughly democratic. An educational ladder for all who can afford it and have the mental capacity to use it extends from the kindergarten or primary school to and through the state university. Only in the states of the North Atlantic group, Maine alone excepted, has there been a failure to carry the system to its logical conclusion at the top.

The evils and shortcomings of democracy are many and call loudly for remedies and improvement. Whether we shall have remedies and improvement or not depends very largely on how the next generation is trained. The ideas taught in the school to-day become the actuating principles of democracy to-morrow. Because the school

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is so thoroughly a democratic institution and responds so quickly to democratic sentiment, the school has for long hesitated to touch, except in a very cautious manner, many of the evils and shortcomings of democracy. The greatest obstacle to intelligent educational and social progress is the lack of intelligence and grasp of democracy itself. It takes time and patience to educate and move the mass, yet in some way the school must touch these sores. Our state governments are weak and inefficient, we say; the school must then teach, and teach in some effective manner, the principles of strong and effective government. Our city governments are corrupt, we hear; fundamental moral and economic principles must then be taught to the masses, so that they may realize the importance of civic righteousness, and understand as well who ultimately pays the bills for all mismanagement. Our people waste their money and their leisure in idle and profligate ways, we say; a knowledge of values and of how to utilize leisure time must then be taught. The list might be prolonged over pages, with similar conclusions. Through all the complicated machinery of the

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school, some way must be found to awaken a social consciousness as opposed to class consciousness, to bring out the important social and civic lessons, to point out our social and civic needs, and to teach our young people how to live better and to make better use of their leisure time. Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, and History, the staples of the elementary curriculum, are really of little value except as they are closely related with the needs and problems of our social, civic, and industrial life.

This new conception shifts the emphasis in education from methods to men, and this new conception has underlain many of the better courses of study issued for our schools during recent years. It also underlies much of the discussion of the present time. Teachers as a body, though, are not thoroughly conscious of such a purpose or need, and courses of study alone cannot produce results. If our schools are to become more effective social institutions, our teachers must become more effective social workers. What teachers need, as much as anything else, is a knowledge of democracy's needs and problems, and of

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conditions to be met. Our teaching force is composed largely of women, and women are seldom interested by nature in this point of view. Their training for generations has been along different lines. Those teachers who enter the work wholly by examination have little opportunity ever to acquire this point of view, and the examination door should be closed as soon as financial conditions will permit. The time to impart ideals is during the training period, and an introduction to the social point of view and the social and industrial problems before us as a nation ought to be an essential part of the training of every normal school. A normal school which is essentially an apprentice school will inevitably turn out teachers with limited vision and little power of growth, while the call to-day for far-sighted teachers of large adaptability is greater than ever before in our history.

The work of public education is destined in the near future to be one of the most important lines of work which our republic has to do. Its importance in a government such as ours can scarcely be overestimated. Each man with us is the captain of his own fate and the carver of

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his own destiny. It is within his power to do great good or to do great harm. To decide righteously and to act wisely he must know. Knowledge and training, if of the right type, can hardly be provided too extensively. The overeducated man is scarcely possible if an education adapted to his needs and station in life is given him. The work of public education is with us, too, to a large degree, a piece of religious work. To engage in it is to enlist in the nation's service. Its call is for those who would dedicate themselves in a noble way. Those who would serve must be of the world, with red blood in their veins; they must know the world, its needs, and its problems; they must have largeness of vision, and the courage to do and to dare; and they must train the youth with whom they come in contact for useful and efficient action.