

THE EVOLUTION OF A DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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The Evolution of a Democratic School System by Charles Hubbard Judd

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A DEMOCRATIC
SCHOOL SYSTEM**

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DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL
SYSTEM**

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is probable that at the close of the great emergency in which we now find ourselves this nation will undergo a notable reappraisal and a considerable reconstruction. A nation seldom makes large sacrifices for the maintenance of its ideals without becoming sensitive to practices which fall far short of them. Already we are deeply concerned to know just what qualities of personal character and precisely what kinds of human relationships are fundamental to the realization of a truly democratic life. We are asking whether or not we possess these in adequate degree, and how we are to overcome our discrepancies.

The American cannot long ask himself these questions without ultimately looking to the public school system for ways and means of rebuilding our national character and life. From the time of Thomas Jefferson it has been the habit of our national leaders to reassert the acute dependence of free government and free society upon

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

the organized system of popular education. Generally speaking, the people as a whole have accepted the doctrine that our schools are the most effective instruments we have for the conscious direction of our national life. It remains for the teachers to put this faith into practice more responsively and more scientifically than ever before.

The professional problem is one of more direct and effective social adjustment of school organization and teaching process to the ideals and conditions of our aspiring but somewhat chaotic American life. The philosophy of democracy needs an enlarged and more thoughtful use among school teachers. The traditional and the imitative tendencies of the teaching personnel must be supplemented by a newly acquired devotion to the checking of results. Long has an easy faith in our deductions of expected efficiency concealed our incompetencies in the achievement of both immediate pedagogical results and final social products. Some progress we have made, but it is quite inadequate to meet just criticisms which at the end of this war will

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

fall heavily upon the American school system. The educators must at once begin to prepare their minds for that new effective democratic service which the public will soon insistently require of them.

1 The first step is to know whither our present school system is taking us. What we have is the product of much indiscriminate borrowing from alien nations coupled with partial modifications forced on us by imperious influences native to our own life. But even these characteristically American influences have entered our school system in an isolated rather than a coördinated way. They operate in the presence of strange inconsistencies. Many factors in our national life which have a wide but subtle importance in our social scheme have failed to register upon our educational organization because public clamor has never imposed them upon professional attention.

2 The second step is to encourage an educational initiative and experimentation which will give to our American school teaching a more direct adaptiveness to our national social life. Amongst us, educational reform has operated with an air

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

of cock-sureness. If a new device could not promise perfection, it has not had strong proponents. This has been fatal to that openness of mind which gives experiment the large initial breadth which increases its chance of success. Vanity, both personal and professional, has attached to the origination of new plans of procedure and prevented the correction of errors in first thought. Moreover, we have been wasteful in our neglect of educational experience elsewhere than on our own trying ground. Our need is for more frank experimentation in education, one that is sensitive to the judgments of a comparative study of experience the world over.

The way to such a point of view and method is admirably suggested by the brilliant study of American education here presented. Its whole analysis is scientific in spirit and timely in method of statement. It ushers in the beginning of that new educational literature which the present large thoughtfulness of the profession must provide if American schools are to meet the huge American problems already staring us in the face.

PREFACE

THE changes which have been going on in recent years in the organization of American schools are not mere superficial readjustments dictated by the whims of communities or individual leaders. There are, to be sure, minor reforms and counter-reforms which are purely local or transient in character. But back of these there are fundamental tendencies toward change which aim at the adaptation of schools to community needs. The feeling has been steadily gaining strength that our generation must shake off the institutional traditions of a past age and organize a sound scheme of democratic education. ¹The present study is an effort to bring out explicitly some of the justifications for the reorganizations which are now under way. ²The book aims to bring to clearer consciousness the unique characteristics of our continuous educational system. ³ It aims to point the way by which much of the present waste of pupils' time and energy can be