

William Bagley (1874-1946) is one of the most renowned exponents of the essentialist movement. (See the Glossary for a brief definition of essentialism.) Although the roots of essentialism are with Bagley's work in the 1930s, this theory has enjoyed a renaissance since the school reform movement of the 1980s, much of which was characterized by an emphasis on educating students for the job market.

AN ESSENTIALIST'S PLATFORM FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

William C. Bagley

I. THE SITUATION

In spite of its vast extent and its heavy cost to society, public education in the United States is in many ways appallingly weak and ineffective. For the sake of brevity only a few outstanding evidences of this weakness will be set forth here:

1. Age for age, the average pupil of our elementary schools does not meet the standards of achievement in the fundamentals of education that are attained in the elementary schools of many other countries. In so far as English-speaking countries are concerned, this statement can be and has been substantiated by the scores made in the elementary schools of these countries on American achievement tests, the norms of which represent the average scores of large, unselected groups of American pupils. In the most extended investigation¹ of this type, the differences revealed are so wide as to justify no other inference than that American elementary-school achievement is far below what it could be and what it should be.

Source: William C. Bagley, "An Essentialist's Platform for the Advancement of American Education," *Educational Administration and Supervision* 24:241-36 (April 1938). Copyright 1938. Used by permission.

¹The study here referred to was published by the University of London Press in 1934 for the Scottish Council for Research in Education. (MacGregor, G.: *Achievement Tests in the Primary Schools: A Comparative Study with American Tests in Five*.) A battery of American achievement tests was given to every eleven-year-old child in the County of Fife—about seven thousand in all. Even mentally defective children were included. While the findings are somewhat difficult to evaluate because Scottish children enter school at five rather than six, the conclusion stated in the text is clearly

2. Similar comparisons relative to secondary education cannot be made because the secondary schools of practically all other countries are not intended for "all the children of the people" as are our high schools. It is generally agreed among competent students of the problem that our average 18-year-old high-school graduate is scholastically far behind the average 18-year-old graduates of the secondary schools of many other countries. This difference has been recognized in the practice of admitting the latter to junior-year standing in many American colleges. But even granting that secondary education elsewhere is in general selective, there is abundant evidence that in our laudable efforts to send everyone to and through high school standards have been unnecessarily lowered. Both the bright and the slow pupils are handicapped by weaknesses in the fundamentals that all except those hopelessly subnormal are able to master. Within the past decade the effectiveness of high school instruction has been weakened by increasing disabilities in so basic an accomplishment as reading. It is scarcely too much to say, indeed, that increasing proportions of pupils in the junior and senior high schools are essentially illiterate. Failures in such high-school studies as mathematics and natural science are in many cases traceable to the fact that pupils cannot read effectively. Classes in "remedial" reading are now necessary on the secondary level to bring pupils to a standard of literacy that primary- and intermediate-grade instruction could and should have insured. Equally lamentable weaknesses in basic arithmetic are reported. And it is now taken for granted by high-school teachers of Latin and modern languages that one of their chief duties is to teach their pupils the rudiments of English grammar.

3. In other and not at all exclusively scholastic accomplishments, American education is relatively ineffective. A recent study suggests that juvenile delinquency may be correlated in many cases with these reading disabilities which we contend are almost always unnecessary and easily avoidable by appropriate elementary education. And while no causal relationship is claimed, it is well to know that during the one hundred years in which universal elementary education has been increasingly the policy of

justified. The use of achievement tests in Canadian schools tells a similar story, for example in the province-wide survey of the schools of British Columbia conducted by Professor Peter Sandford. One of the writer's colleagues who has constructed many tests reports that when he has included significant numbers of Canadian pupils in "standardizing" the tests, the norms have been raised to a point where the tests could not be used equitably with American pupils.

all civilized countries, ours is apparently the only country in which the expansion of the universal school has not been paralleled by a significant and in some cases a remarkable decrease in the ratios of serious crime.

II. THE CAUSES: A. GENERAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS

4. American education has been confronted with uniquely difficult and complicated problems which have arisen from a rapid growth in population; from a constantly advancing frontier; from the increase in national wealth; from the arrival year after year and decade after decade of millions of immigrants of widely diverse national origins; from the complex social and political situations involved in racial differences; from the profound changes brought about by the transition from a predominantly agricultural to a predominantly industrial civilization; from the growth of cities; from an ever-increasing mobility of the population; and from a multitude of other factors which have operated here with a force unprecedented in history and unparalleled in any other part of the world.

The American public school has met some of these problems with a notable measure of success. Of outstanding significance is the fact that among the states which by any test would be rated as the most advanced in civilization are those which have had the heaviest burden of immigration from backward countries to assimilate. And it should be said that, in general, the states that have had the most substantial (but not necessarily the most "Progressive") school systems have by far the lowest ratios of serious crime. In a notable degree, too, these same states, many of which do not rank high in per capita wealth, are those that have been least dependent upon the federal government for "relief" during the depression years. Beyond all this, the schools can claim a very high degree of definitely measurable success for their programs of physical development and health education.

5. The upward expansion of mass-education first to the secondary and now to the college level, which is probably the chief cause of our educational ineffectiveness, has been an outcome, not alone of a pervasive faith in education, to the realization of which the material wealth of the country was fairly adequate, but also and perhaps more fundamentally of economic factors. Power-driven machinery, while in many cases reducing

occupational opportunities on the purely routine levels, quite as markedly opened new occupational opportunities in types of work that could not be done by machinery; work that involved deliberation and judgment; work for which a broad foundation in general education as well as specialized technical and vocational training was advantageous and often essential. That increasing numbers of young persons should seek the advantages of an extended education has been inevitable. Fortunately the wealth of the country has enabled the people of many sections to meet this demand. In opening the high schools and colleges to ever-increasing numbers, however, it was just as inevitable that scholastic standards should be relaxed, and when such a need arises it is only natural that those responsible for the administration of education should welcome any theory or philosophy which justifies or rationalizes such a policy—any theory of education which can make a virtue of necessity. Under such a condition, it is easy to understand why the relaxation of standards has been carried far beyond the actual needs of the case.

III. THE CAUSES: B. EDUCATIONAL THEORIES THAT ARE ESSENTIALLY ENFEEBLING

6. Throughout the long history of education—and organized education is practically as old as civilization—two opposing theories have been in evidence. Although over-simplification is always dangerous, one with this caution may contrast these two theories of education by certain conflicting concepts summed up in pairing such opposites as "individual vs. society," "freedom vs. discipline," "interest vs. effort," "play vs. work,"—or to use more recently current expressions, "immediate needs vs. remote goals," "personal experience vs. race experience," "psychological organization vs. logical organization," "pupil-initiative vs. teacher-initiative." The fundamental dualism suggested by these terms has persisted over the centuries. It came out sharply in Greek education during the Age of the Sophists. It was reflected in the educational changes brought about by the Italian Renaissance. It appeared in the 17th Century in a definite school of educational theory the adherents of which even at that time styled themselves the "Progressives." It was explicit in the successive educational reforms proposed by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Herbart. In American education it was reflected in the theories advocated and practiced by Bronson Alcott, in the work of Horace

Mann, and later in the work of E. A. Sheldon and Francis W. Parker; while the present outstanding leader, John Dewey, first came into prominence during the last decade of the 19th Century in an effort to resolve the dualism through an integration expressed in the title of his classic essay, now called "Interest and Effort in Education."

7. Under the necessity which confronted American education of rationalizing the loosening of standards and the relaxation of rigor if mass-education were to be expanded upward, the theories which emphasized interest, freedom, immediate needs, personal experience, psychological organization, and pupil-initiative, and which in so doing tended to discredit and even condemn their opposites—effort, discipline, remote goals, race-experience, logical sequence, and teacher-initiative—naturally made a powerful appeal. Over more than a generation these theories have increasingly influenced the lower schools.¹ They find specific expression today in a variety of definite movements so numerous that only the more outstanding can here be listed.

(a) *The complete abandonment in many school systems of rigorous standards of scholastic achievement as a condition of promotion from grade to grade and the passing of all pupils "on schedule."* This policy which found a strong initial support thirty years ago in the studies of "retardation and elimination" has of late been given even wider appeal by the teachings of mental hygiene regarding the possible effects of failure in disintegrating personality. The problem is extremely complicated as a later reference to it will show, but the movement has already resulted in at least one very important change. Instead of having "over-age" pupils piling up in the intermediate grades, we now have "overgraded"

¹Dr. H. C. Morrison (School and Commonwealth, Chicago, 1937, p. 11) states that an educational philosophy embodying such theories has been gradually taking form in American education during the past fifty or sixty years. The present writer has publicly called attention for more than thirty years to manifestations of this influence, and to its weakening tendencies. His charges, with evidence supporting them, are matters of published record, duly documented. They have been frequently denounced, but never answered. In addition to published articles, the following books by the present writer make references to the problem: *The Educative Process*, 1905; *Classroom Management*, 1907; *School Discipline*, 1914; *Determinism in Education*, 1923; *Education, Crime, and Social Progress*, 1932; *Education and Emergent Man*, 1934. The theories were influencing the schools long before the terms "activity program," "integrated curriculum," "child-centered school," and the like came into vogue or had even been coined. It should be noted, too, that these theories have had no comparable recognition in the school systems of other countries except the Soviet Union, where after twelve years of consistent application they were abandoned in 1933 as hopelessly weak and ineffective.

pupils handicapped in the work of the junior and senior high schools by their lack of thorough training in the fundamentals already referred to.

(b) *The disparagement of system and sequence in learning and a dogmatic denial of any value in, even of any possibility of learning through, the logical, chronological and causal relationships of learning materials.* This has led to an enthronement of the doctrine of incidental learning. Only as one becomes acquainted with facts and principles through applying them to vital problems that appeal to one as worth solving at the moment (so the theory holds) can one truly learn such facts and principles. And on the side of skills—such as the fundamental arts of language, measurement, and computation—mastery as far as possible should await an occasion when one of them is needed. As someone has said in effect, "These things are only tools, and when a workman needs a tool he goes to the shop and gets it." And yet this theory that "mind will not learn what is alien to its fundamental vital purposes," Thorndike has pronounced on the basis of extended experimentation, "to be attractive and plausible but definitely false."² The disparagement of systematic and sequential learning has also been criticized in no uncertain terms by John Dewey.³

(c) *The wide vogue of the so-called "activity movement."* This is an outgrowth of the so-called "project-method" which in its turn was an effort to find, or to encourage the learner to find, problems or vital purposes in the solution of which desirable learnings could be effected. The activity movement and the resulting "activity programs" and "activity curricula," like the project-method, have an important place—a central function in the primary school, and a very useful supplementary function on all educational levels. The tendency to make them a substitute for systematic and sequential learning and to go even further and regard activity as a sufficient end in itself irrespective of whether or not anything is learned through the activity is another matter. It is, however, an intriguing proposal. As one enthusiastic activist said, "Let us not use activities as pegs on which to hang subject-matter." If the schools only provide an abundance of "rich experiences" for the learner, it seems, other things will miraculously take care of themselves. This is not at all absurd if one accepts the premises; it is a thoroughly consistent result of the theory of incidental learning carried to its logical conclusion.

²Thorndike, E. L.: *Adult Interests*. New York, 1935, p. 32.

³Especially in an article in *The New Era* referred to below.

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(d) *The discrediting of the exact and exacting studies.* The most significant barrier to opening the high schools to the masses was at the outset the practically universal requirement of Latin, algebra, and geometry in the secondary program. Perhaps inherently and certainly as commonly taught, the difficulties in mastering these subjects were quite beyond a large proportion of pupils. At the same time the practical value of the subjects was difficult to defend. Their central place in the curriculum, however, was believed to be justified in a high degree by the mental discipline that their mastery involved. Anything that would tend to discredit this justification was seized upon by those responsible for the upward expansion of mass-education. Most fortunately for their purposes there appeared just at the turn of the century the report of the first careful psychological experiments testing the validity of the theory of mental discipline. These really classic experiments of Thorndike and Woodworth were followed by a long series of similar investigations that aimed to determine how far learnings acquired in one subject were, or could be, applied in other situations. The results in general indicated that such a "transfer" was far from inevitable and in some cases either quite negative or so slight as to bring the whole theory into question.

The proponents of the universal high school and of other educational movements that were impeded by the requirement of subjects inherently difficult to the average mind were not slow to capitalize these experimental findings. As is natural under conditions of this sort, the evidence was generalized to a far greater extent than the experiments warranted, and with far-reaching results in school practice. Although the absolute number enrolled in Latin classes has increased, only a small proportion of pupils graduating from the high schools during the past ten years have even been exposed to Latin. Increasing proportions, too, are quite innocent of any training in elementary mathematics beyond the increasingly ineffective modicum of arithmetic acquired in the elementary schools. But the important fact is that there has been a growing practice of discouraging even competent learners from undertaking the studies that are exact though exacting; hence the upward expansion of mass-education, while sincerely a democratic movement, is not guarding itself against the potentially most fatal pitfall of democracy. It has deliberately adopted the easy policy of leveling-down rather than facing resolutely the difficult task of leveling-up—and upon the possibility of leveling-up the future of democracy indisputably depends. As John Dewey has contended, the older curriculum of classics and mathematics does have a unique value to those competent to its

mastery—a value for which the so-called reform movements have not as yet, in his judgment, provided a substitute.*

(e) *An increasingly heavy emphasis upon the "social studies."* While the exact and exacting studies were in effect being discredited, the primrose path of least resistance was opened ever wider in the field known as the social studies. The argument here is plausible and appealing. "Education for citizenship" is a ringing slogan with limitless potentialities, especially in an age when high-sounding shibboleths, easily formulated, can masquerade as fundamental premises and postulates wrought through the agony of hard thinking.

Obviously no fundamental premise in educational thinking could fail to recognize the importance of a firm foundation in the history of human institutions, or of an acquaintance with present and pressing social problems especially in the light of their genesis, or of an acquaintance with such principles of economics, sociology, and political science as have been well established.

But just as obviously the social sciences, so called, are not in the same class with the natural sciences. Their generalizations permit trustworthy predictions only in a few cases and then only in a slight degree. When the human element enters, uncertainty enters—else the world could have anticipated and adjusted itself to Hitler and Mussolini and Stalin and the military oligarchy of Japan and would not be standing dazed and impotent as it stands today. And while to expect an educational pabulum of social studies in the lower schools essentially to overcome this inherent limitation of the social sciences is an alluring prospect, it is to expect nothing less than a miracle. It is, indeed, just as sensible as would be a brave and desperate effort to incite immature minds to square the circle.

(f) *Using the lower schools to establish a new social order.* The proposal definitely and deliberately to indoctrinate immature learners in the interest of a specific social order and one that involves wide departures from that which prevails in our country is to be questioned, if for no other reasons, upon the grounds set forth in the preceding paragraphs. With the growing ineffectiveness of the lower schools in failing to lay adequate foundations

*"Development . . . is a continuous process, and continuity signifies consecutiveness of action. Here was the strong point of traditional education at its best . . . The subject-matter of the classics and mathematics involved of necessity, for those who mastered it, a consecutive and orderly development along definite lines. Here lies, perhaps, the greatest problem of the newer efforts in education." Dewey, J.: "The Need of a Philosophy of Education." *The New Era*: London, November, 1934, pp. 214f.

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in fundamental and established learnings of unquestioned permanence and value, such efforts would necessarily be superficial in the last degree. It would be an extreme case of building what may be characterized for the sake of argument as a perfectly splendid edifice on shifting sands—in this case, quicksands would be the more appropriate metaphor. And here we might well study certain peoples that have actually achieved a social order which is pointed to by our idealists as exemplifying in many ways the realization of their dreams. Reference is made, of course, to such countries as Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and New Zealand. An outstanding fact of fundamental significance is that these countries have not achieved these laudable results by emasculating their educational systems. Their peoples indeed would stand aghast at the very suggestion.

(g) The "curriculum-revision" movement and its vagaries. The various reform proposals just discussed have culminated in the general movement known as curriculum-revision which has dominated the lower schools for nearly twenty years. A primary emphasis has been the alleged need of building the programs of instruction around the local community. As long ago as 1933 more than 30,000 different curricula were on file in the curriculum-laboratory of Teachers College, Columbia University. Most of these had been prepared during the preceding decade by committees of teachers in local school systems throughout the country. Sometimes the committees were personally directed by a "curriculum-expert"; in practically all cases a rapidly developing theory evolved by these specialists guided the work. In so far as we can learn, this theory has never explicitly recognized that the state or the nation has a stake in the content of school instruction. The need of common elements in the basic culture of all people, especially in a democracy, has in effect been denied. Furthermore, with the American people the most mobile in the world, with stability of residence over the period of school attendance the exception and not the rule in many sections of the country, and with a significantly higher average of school failure among pupils whose parents move from place to place than among those who remain in the same community, the curriculum theorists have been totally insensitive to the need of a certain measure of uniformity in school requirements and in the grade-placement of crucial topics. In addition to all this, the clear tendency of the curriculum-revision movement has been to minimize basic learnings, to magnify the superficial, to belittle sequence and system, and otherwise to aggravate the weakness and ineffectiveness of the lower schools.

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IV. THE PROBLEM AND THE PLATFORM

8. It is particularly unfortunate that American education should be unnecessarily weak at a time when the situation both at home and abroad is critical in the last degree.

The American people are facing an economic problem which both in nature and in magnitude is without an even remotely similar precedent in all history. In the richest country in the world, two-thirds of the world's unemployment is now concentrated. In the midst of potential abundance, the cogs in the wheels of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption have lamentably failed to mesh.

It is the indicated and imminent task of the present dominant generation to solve this problem under whatever expert guidance at the hands of the economist and the social engineer it may find and accept. The student of education must co-operate with all other citizens in this task. It is his own specific duty, however, to consider the problems in his field that are bound to arise in the changes that seem now to be inevitable, regardless of the form which the solution of the present desperate economic situation may take—this with one exception, for if in desperation the American people discard democracy and yield to a dictator the sincere student of education will have no function and consequently no duty. The yes-man and the rubber-stamp will take his place. He will be a luxury without a purpose; and the dictators have standardized a simple but effective technique for liquidating luxuries of this sort.

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9. We shall assume, however, that "it can't happen here" and that, whatever may be the new economic and social order, the political order based upon representative government and the Bill of Rights will persist. Hence a primary function of American education will be to safeguard and strengthen these ideals of American democracy with especial emphasis upon freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. It is clear enough now that whenever any one of these is permitted to collapse, the whole democratic structure will topple like a house of cards. These, then, are among the first essentials in the platform of the Essentialist.

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10. Democracy is now distinctly on trial. It is under criticism and suspicion. Every weakness will be watched for and welcomed by its enemies. Inevitably the future will bring competition if not clashes and conflicts with the now militantly anti-

democratic peoples. Democratic societies cannot survive either competition or conflict with totalitarian states unless there is a democratic discipline that will give strength and solidarity to the democratic purpose and ideal. If the theory of democracy finds no place for discipline, then, the theory will have before long only historical significance. French education, much closer to the danger, has recognized this imperative need. Still unswerving in fidelity to the ideals of democracy, and still giving its first emphasis to clarity of thought and independence in individual thinking as the time-honored objectives of French education, it recognizes no less the fundamental importance of social solidarity in the defense of democracy.

American educational theory long since dropped the term "discipline" from its vocabulary. Today its most vocal and influential spokesmen enthrone the right even of the immature learner, to choose what he shall learn. They condemn as "authoritarian" all learning tasks that are imposed by the teacher. They deny any value in the systematic and sequential mastery of the lessons that the race has learned at so great a cost. They condone and rationalize the refusal of the learner to attack a task that does not interest him. In effect they open wide the lines of least resistance and least effort. Obedience they stigmatize as a sign of weakness. All this they advocate in the magic names of "democracy" and "freedom."

Now, obviously, the freedom of the immature to choose what they shall learn is of negligible consequence compared with their later freedom from the want, fear, fraud, superstition, and error which may fetter the ignorant as cruelly as the chains of the slave-driver—and the price of this freedom is systematic and sustained effort often devoted to the mastery of materials the significance of which must at the time be taken on faith.

11. This problem is far more than merely personal or individual in its reference. A democratic society has a vital, collective stake in the informed intelligence of every individual citizen. That a literate electorate is absolutely indispensable not only to its welfare but to its very survival is clearly demonstrated by the sorry fate that so speedily overtook every unschooled and illiterate democracy founded as a result of the War that was to "Make the world safe for democracy."

And literacy in this sense means, of course, far more than

*See the concluding paragraphs of Bouglé, C.: "The French Conception of 'Culture Générale,'" a series of lectures at Teachers College, Columbia University, April, 1930. Published by the Teachers College Bureau of Publications.

the mere ability to translate printed letters into spoken words; it means the development and expansion of ideas; it means the basis for intelligent understanding and for the collective thought and judgment which are the essence of democratic institutions. These needs are so fundamental to an effective democracy that it would be folly to leave them to the whim or caprice of either learner or teacher.

Among the essentials of the Essentialist, then, is a recognition of the right of the immature learner to guidance and direction when these are needed either for his individual welfare or for the welfare and progress of the democratic group. The responsibility of the mature for the instruction and control of the immature is the biological meaning of the extended period of human immaturity and necessary dependence. It took the human race untold ages to recognize this responsibility. It is literally true that until this recognition dawned man remained a savage. Primitive societies, as numerous students have observed (and their testimony seems to be unanimous), pamper and indulge their young. Freedom of children from control, guidance, and discipline is with them a rule so nearly universal that its only brief but significant exception during the nearly universal savage ceremonies marking the adolescent onset of maturity is regarded as the first faint beginning of consciously directed human education.

It would be futile to deny that control and discipline may be stupid and brutal and used for unworthy ends. It would be futile to deny the need for the development of self-discipline and for the relaxation of external discipline with the growth of volitional maturity. But all this does not alter the fundamental truth that freedom must go hand in hand with responsibility, and that responsible freedom is always a conquest, never a gift.

12. An effective democracy demands a community of culture. Educationally this means that each generation be placed in possession of a common core of ideas, meanings, understandings, and ideals representing the most precious elements of the human heritage.

There can be little question as to the essentials. It is by no means a mere accident that the arts of recording, computing, and measuring have been among the first concerns of organized education. They are basic social arts. Every civilized society has been founded upon these arts, and when these arts have been lost, civilization has invariably and inevitably collapsed. Egypt, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia are strewn with the ruins of civilizations that forgot how to read and write. Contemporary civilization, for the first time in history has attempted to insure its con-

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tinuance by making these arts in so far as possible the prerogative of all.

Nor is it at all accidental that a knowledge of the world that lies beyond one's immediate experience has been among the recognized essentials of universal education, and that at least a speaking acquaintance with man's past and especially with the story of one's own country was early provided for in the program of the universal school. Widening the space horizon and extending the time perspective are essential if the citizen is to be protected from the fallacies of the local and the immediate.

Investigation, invention, and creative art have added to the heritage and the list of recognized essentials has been extended and will be further extended: Health instruction and the inculcation of health practices are now basic phases of the work of the lower schools. The elements of natural science have their place. Neither the fine arts nor the industrial arts are neglected.

We repeat that there can be little question as to the essentials of universal education. As Charles A. Beard has so well said: "While education constantly touches the practical affairs of the hour and day, and responds to political and economic exigencies, it has its own treasures heavy with the thought and sacrifice of the centuries. It possesses a heritage of knowledge and heroic examples—accepted values stamped with the seal of permanence."¹

13. A specific program of studies including these essentials should be the heart of a democratic system of education. In a country like ours with its highly mobile population there should be an agreement as to the order and grade-placement of subjects and especially of crucial topics.² There is no valid reason for the extreme localism that has come to characterize American education. There is no valid reason for the failure of the American elementary school to lay as firm a foundation in the fundamentals of education as do the elementary schools of other democracies. It is especially regrettable that contemporary educational theory should in effect condone and rationalize scamped work by ridiculing such traits as thoroughness, accuracy, persistence, and the ideal of good workmanship for its own sake. One may be very sure that democracy schooled to the easy way will have short shrift in competition or conflict with any social order dominated

¹The Unique Function of Education in American Democracy. Washington, D.C.: The Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association, 1937, p. 71.

²Fortunately the National Society for the Study of Education is sponsoring a Yearbook dealing with this problem. This will be published in 1939.

by objectives which, however reprehensible, are clear-cut and appealing, and are consequently embraced even by disenfranchised masses.

14. Generally speaking, the recognized essentials should be taught as such through a systematic program of studies and activities for the carrying out of which the teachers should be responsible. Informal learning through experiences initiated by the learners is important, and abundant opportunities should be provided for such experiences throughout the range of organized education. Beyond the primary grades, however, where as we have said it may well predominate, informal learning should be regarded as supplementary rather than central.

15. Failure in school is unpleasant and the repetition of a grade is costly and often not very effective. On the other hand, the lack of a stimulus that will keep the learner to his task is a serious injustice both to him and to the democratic group which, we repeat, has a fundamental stake in his effective education. Too severe a stigma has undoubtedly been placed upon school failure by implying that it is symptomatic of permanent weakness. By no means is this always the case. No less a genius than Pasteur did so poorly in his first year at the Higher Normal School of Paris that he had to go home for further preparation. One of the outstanding scientists of the present century had a hard time in meeting the requirements of the secondary school, failing, it is said, in the most elementary work of the field in which he later became world-famous. The list could be extended almost indefinitely.

Obviously not all learners can progress at the same rate. Some will go very, very slowly. Others will have trouble in getting started but will progress rapidly when they overcome the initial handicaps. Let us not stigmatize failure as we have done in the past. On the other hand, if education abandons rigorous standards and consequently provides no effective stimulus to the effort that learning requires, many persons will pass through twelve years of schooling only to find themselves in a world in which ignorance and lack of fundamental training are increasingly heavy handicaps. This in an all too literal sense is to throw the baby out with the bath.

16. The transition from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban life has laid increasing burdens upon American education. For four decades or more we have been told that the school must provide opportunities for types of education that the normal bringing-up of children once provided on the farm and in the home. Manual training and the household arts were among

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the first responses to this demand. The parallel development of physical training with its later ramifications into various forms of health education are traceable in part to the same causes. Playgrounds, gymnasiums, and swimming pools are material expressions of the effort to meet these recognized needs. School and college athletics are lusty by-products representing in a very real sense the importance of finding a substitute for the vigorous physical work that once developed of necessity upon the great majority of young people.

With the profound changes in the conditions of life already in progress, and with their clearly predictable extension and intensification in the immediate future, analogous substitutes must be sought for other educative experiences which the simpler conditions of life naturally and normally provided. Bread-winning employment is now postponed for vast numbers of young people. Willy-nilly they must remain dependent upon society, whether in attendance at school or college, or in such highly important educational enterprises as the Civilian Conservation Corps, or in "made work" of one variety or another.

The analogy of our civilization with the older civilizations based upon slavery is in no sense far-fetched. It has, indeed, a profound significance. Our slaves, it is true, are mechanical and not human. They are power-driven and increasingly they are being automatically controlled. They can do much more economically than human slaves the heavy work and the routine work. In some tasks they can perceive distinctions far too fine to be detected by the human senses, and they can respond far more quickly and far more accurately and dependably than can human nerves and muscles. Fortunately they can neither feel nor suffer, and so the grossest evils of the old slave civilizations are avoided. The fact remains, however, that the perils to those who are the supposed beneficiaries of a slave civilization are in no significant degree changed, whether the slaves be men or robots. Every slave civilization has within it the seeds of degeneration, decay, and ultimate extinction. Struggle and competition, selection and rejection, have often been cruel, but in both biological and social evolution they have been primary factors of progress. In societies that have lifted themselves above the plane of the brute and the savage, a most powerful steadying and civilizing force has been the ideal of personal economic responsibility for one's own survival and for one's old age and the care of one's dependents.

Generally speaking, then, "social security," like responsible freedom, has been a conquest, not a gift. Making it a gift involves some definite dangers. In our own country, few families have long

survived the social security that comes through inherited wealth. "Three generations from shirt-sleeves to shirt-sleeves" has usually told the story. But this rule has had its exceptions. Here, as in some other countries, social security has, with occasional families, remained secure over a much longer time—but under the condition that each generation has been rigorously disciplined to its responsibilities and made clearly aware of the pitfalls that await the spendthrift and the idler. These exceptions, and especially those among them that have exemplified the development in each generation of a vigorous and highly sensitized social conscience, warrant the hope that an economy of abundance with social security for all may be so organized that our machine-slave civilization can escape the fate of the slave civilizations that have gone before. Herein lies an educational problem of the first magnitude which our educational theorists seem not even dimly to have sensed—so busy have they been in condemning out of hand the economic system which has made possible an economy of abundance based upon a machine-slave civilization.

A clear and primary duty of organized education at the present time is to recognize the fundamental character of the changes that are already taking place, and to search diligently for means of counteracting their dangers. Let us repeat that an educational theory to meet these needs must be strong, virile, and positive; not feeble, effeminate, and vague. The theories that have increasingly dominated American education during the past generation are at basis distinctly of the latter type. The Essentialists have recognized and still recognize the contributions of real value that these theories have made to educational practice. They believe, however, that these positive elements can be preserved in an educational theory which finds its basis in the necessary dependence of the immature upon the mature for guidance, instruction, and discipline. This dependence is inherent in human nature. "What has been ordained among the prehistoric protozoa," said Huxley, "cannot be altered by act of Parliament"—nor, we may add, by the wishful thinking of educational theorists, however sincere their motives. "Authoritarianism" is an ugly word. But when those who detest it carry their laudable rebellion against certain of its implications so far as to reject the authority of plain facts, their arguments, while well adapted perhaps to the generation of heat, become lamentably lacking in light.