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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Lucas, Christopher J.

Challenge and Choice in Contemporary Education

New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976. Pp. viii + 455.

For most of mankind, life is a dirty trick. For others it is lived, in Thoreau's term, in quiet desperation. The promise of education is that through knowledge of nature and knowledge of self, people can fashion a temporary habitat on this whirling planet that can cater with some felicity to the impertinent claims of their restless souls. We get seduced into narrow definitions of education's function These are, for the most part, measurable goals of education.

But the prime function of education is not measurable. The ultimate business of education is human freedom¹

This book identifies six major ideological perspectives from which educators work as they go about the "ultimate business" of schools and learners in America. While the main thesis is concerned with "challenges and choices" found within the six described categories, the purpose of the main author is not to stir readers to commitment to any one choice, but, rather, to supply informational background from which to make a more intelligent selection from among alternatives. Each of the six sections is preceded by the author's summarization of relevant historical antecedents, current patterns of development, and highlights of essential criticism and support of each perspective.

The six major categories, delineated arbitrarily by Lucas, include the liberal arts tradition, educational technologism, humanism, career education, social reconstruction, and education without schools. Most of the problems posed within the jurisdiction of any one school district in our country fit into one of these categories.

In the first section of the book, writers address themselves to a topic that is puzzling thoughtful persons on the contemporary scene just as it has plagued educators for centuries. What are the ingredients that define an educated person? Should leaders in professional schools be committed to utilitarian goals, or should they be dedicated to the nurture of human traits? Educational philosophy or cost accounting; humanities or a creed of advancement; social, moral, and aesthetic development or material advancement—where are the priorities of American educators and tax-paying citizens?

¹ Stephen K. Bailey. "Combating the Efficiency Cultists," in *Challenge and Choice in Contemporary Education*, p. 166.

In the second section, writers are concerned with varying thrusts in modern education evolving under the influence of the technocratic revolution: behaviorist methodology, applied to problems of teaching techniques and evaluation; electronically based data storage, processing, and retrieval, used to supplement conventional modes of instruction; and new technical tools, used to organize, administer, and manage teaching and learning. All of these deal with the process of learning from an objective approach. The effects of such an approach upon our educational system and their relationship to a developing professionalism, their threats to teacher autonomy, and their relevancy to true efficiency in securing for Americans their cherished freedoms are discussed in selected, pertinent writings.

Open education and the move toward more humanism in the schools are reviewed in the third section of this volume. Descriptions of their varying forms are given, along with characteristic, particular promises and problems of these programs as they have appeared in different communities and systems. Inherent, basic values and pedagogical practices of educational humanism are questioned, detailed, and placed in reference to our American system of universal, compulsory education. Can human rights survive in the classroom? Can education be both highly individualized and highly effective? Will programs expanded and geared toward acknowledgement and respect for the unique potential and individuality of each student be supported and maintained by today's reeling economy and reluctant tax-payers? If authentic movements toward opening issues and relationships are not increasingly undertaken in the classrooms, what will be the results for society, in terms of continued freedom and responsible actions? Articles in this section stir serious thinking about answers to these questions.

The significant area of career education engenders its own brands of enthusiasts and enemies. Questions are posed by writers on both sides. Few would argue against the thesis that work is important to society. Can the dichotomy between things academic and things vocational be replaced with a melding of human resources and life-fulfilling employment? Should a major goal of this same society's education, then, be the teaching dimension of the importance of work to all students? Has content-centered learning lost its social utility and, consequently, its validity? Is the time right for restructuring our school curriculums in terms of the model which encompasses all grade levels: "career awareness" in grades K-6, "career exploration" in grades 7-9, and "career preparation" in grades 10-12? The goal of dignified, satisfying work for everyone as a result of being educated in America's schools is temptingly displayed, but, on the other hand, challenged by some as revealing a persistent authoritarian social philosophy. It has been suggested here that evaluation and systematic review of funded programs and research in this area are indicated, and that the appropriate time is now.

Within the last several decades there has been an ever-increasing interest in ways to anticipate and to pre-shape the world of the future.

Throughout the history of the United States, social, political, and educational thinkers have believed in the process of education as an effective means of building and preparing for a better society. Today most educators still hold that they, and the institutions in which they live and work, have a major role to play in the arena of social reform, but there are differences in interpretation of that role. Should institutionalized education act as the vanguard of social change, or will it serve more effectively by apprising students of the best informed judgments about the future and helping them to respond intelligently and forthrightly to expected changing conditions? Will future generations be able to cope with social dilemmas through education implemented largely by coercion and regimentation, or through a more informal, random approach? Should teachers concentrate upon the teaching of skills, or upon teaching of attitudes, or should they be expected to do both? Should schooling serve individual needs, or societal needs, or are these one and the same thing? Answers to these questions involve the requisite paraphernalia of public education such as curricula, teacher training, and physical and governmental forms of school systems. The choices made as challenges are faced make all the difference.

Education today must affirm the promise of human life. It must help us see citizens and public officials not as instruments of survival or of mere security, but as possible instruments of human freedom—to see the good society as an arrangement of institutions and laws that help to free men from the bondage of fear, loneliness and injustice, and from the crushing impersonalities of life For freedom is the condition of nobility, and knowledge is the condition of freedom.²

² Stephen K. Bailey. *Op. cit.*, pp. 166-67.