

Chapter 1

Traditional vs. Progressive Education

MANKIND likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of *Either-Ors*, between which it recognizes **no** intermediate possibilities. When forced to recognize that the extremes cannot be acted **upon**, it **is** still inclined to hold that they are **all** right in theory but that when it comes to practical matters circumstances compel **us** to compromise. Educational philosophy is **no** exception. The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; that it is based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure.

At present, **the** opposition, **so far as** practical affairs of the school **are** concerned, tends to take the form of contrast between traditional and progressive education. **If** the underlying ideas of the former are formulated broadly, without the qualifications required for accurate statement, they are found to be about **as follows**: "the subject-matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have **been** worked **out** in the past; therefore, the **chief** business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation. In the past, there have **also been** developed standards **and** rules of conduct; moral training **consists** in forming habits of action in **conformity** with these **rules** and standards. Finally, the general pattern of school

organization (by which I mean the relations of pupils to one another and to the teachers) constitutes the school a kind of institution sharply marked **off** from other social institutions. Call up in imagination the ordinary school-room, its time-schedules, schemes of classification, of examination and promotion, of rules of order, and I think you will grasp what is meant by "pattern of organization." If then you contrast **this** scene with what goes on in the family, for example, you will appreciate what is meant by the school being a kind of institution sharply marked **off** from any other form of social organization.

The three characteristics just mentioned fix the aims and methods of instruction and discipline. The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instruction. Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective connection with the material. Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced.

I have not made this brief summary for the purpose of criticizing the underlying philosophy. The rise of what is called new education and progressive schools is of itself a product of discontent with traditional education. In effect it is a criticism of the latter. When the implied criticism is made explicit it reads somewhat as follows: The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards,

subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity. The gap is **so** great that the required subject-matter, the methods **of** learning and of behaving are foreign to the existing capacities of the young. They are beyond the reach of the experience the young learners already possess. Consequently, they must be imposed; even though good teachers **will** use devices of **art** to cover up the imposition **so as** to relieve it of obviously brutal features.

But the **gulf** between the mature or adult products and the experience and abilities of the young is **so** wide that the very situation forbids much active participation by pupils in the development of what is taught. Theirs is to do—and learn, **as** it was the part of the **six** hundred to do and die. **Learning** here means acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is taught **as** a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future. It is to a large extent the cultural product of societies that assumed the future would be much like the past, and yet it is used as educational food in **a** society where change is the rule, not the exception.

If one attempts to formulate the philosophy of education implicit in the practices of the new education, we may, I think, discover certain common principles amid the variety of progressive schools **now** existing. To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through **ex**-perience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them **as** means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making

the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is **opposed** acquaintance with a changing world.

Now, **all** principles **by** themselves are abstract. They become concrete **only** in the consequences which result from their application. Just because the principles set forth are **so** fundamental and far-reaching, **everything** depends upon the interpretation given them **as** they are put into practice in the school and the home. It is at **this** point that the reference made earlier to *Either-Or* philosophies becomes peculiarly pertinent. The general philosophy of the new education may be sound, and yet the difference in abstract principles will not decide the way in which the moral and intellectual preference involved shall be worked out in practice. There is always the danger in a new movement that in rejecting the **aims** and methods of that which it would supplant, it may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively. Then it takes its clew in practice from that which is rejected instead of from the constructive development of its **own** philosophy.

I take it that the fundamental **unity** of the newer philosophy is found in the idea that there is an intimate and **necessary** relation between the processes of actual experience and education. **If this** be true, then a positive and constructive development of its **own** basic idea depends upon having a correct idea of experience. Take, for example, the question of organized subject-matter—which will be **discussed** in some detail later. The problem for progressive education is: What is the place and meaning of subject-matter and of organization within experience? How does subject-matter **function**? Is there anything inherent in experience which tends towards progressive organization of its **contents**? What results follow when the materials of experience are not progressively organ-

ized? A philosophy which proceeds **on the** basis of rejection, of sheer opposition, will neglect these **questions**. It will tend to suppose that because the old education **was** based **on** ready-made organization, therefore it **suffices to** reject the principle of organization in *toto*, instead of striving to discover what it means and how it is **to** be attained **on** the basis of experience. We might go through **all** the points of difference between the new and the old education and reach similar conclusions. When external control is rejected, the problem becomes that of finding the factors of control that are inherent within experience. When external authority is rejected, it does not follow that all authority should be rejected, but rather that there is need to search for a more effective source of authority. Because the older education imposed the knowledge, methods, and the rules of conduct of the mature person **upon** the young, it does not follow, except **upon** the basis of the extreme *Either-Or* philosophy, that the knowledge and skill of the mature person has **no** directive value for the experience of the immature. On the contrary, basing education upon personal experience may mean more multiplied and more intimate contacts between the mature and the immature than ever existed in the traditional school, and consequently more, rather than less, guidance by others. The problem, then, is: how these contacts can be established without violating the principle of **learning** through personal experience. The solution of **this** problem requires a well thought-out philosophy of the social factors that operate in the constitution of **individual** experience.

What is indicated in the foregoing remarks is that the general principles of the new education do not of themselves solve any of the problems of the actual or practical conduct and management of progressive schools. Rather, they set new problems which have to be worked out **on**

the basis of a new philosophy of experience. The problems are not even recognized, to say **nothing** of being solved, when it is assumed that it suffices to reject the ideas and practices of the old education and then go to the opposite extreme. Yet I am sure that you will appreciate what is meant when I say that many of the newer schools tend **to make** little or **nothing** of organized subject-matter of study; to proceed **as** if any form of direction and guidance by adults were an invasion of individual freedom, and as if the idea that education should be concerned **with** the present and future meant that acquaintance with the past has little or no role **to** play in education. Without pressing these defects to the point of exaggeration, they at least illustrate what is meant by **a** theory and practice of education which proceeds negatively or **by** reaction against what has been current in education rather than by a positive and constructive development of purposes, methods, and subject-matter **on** the foundation of a theory of experience **and** its educational potentialities.

It is not too much to say that an educational philosophy which professes to be based **on** the idea of freedom may become **as** dogmatic as ever was the traditional education which is reacted against. For any theory and set of practices is dogmatic which is not based upon critical **exami-** nation of its **own** underlying principles. Let us say that the new education emphasizes the freedom of the learner. Very well. A problem is now set. What does freedom mean and what are the conditions under which it is capable of realization? Let **us** say that the kind of external imposition which was **so** common in the traditional school limited rather than promoted the intellectual and moral development of the young. Again, very well. Recognition of this serious defect sets a problem. Just what is the role of the teacher and of books in promoting the educational development of the immature? Admit that traditional education

employed as the subject-matter for study facts and ideas **so** bound up with the past **as** to give little help in dealing **with** the issues of the present and future, Very well. Now we have the problem of discovering the connection which actually exists **within** experience between the achievements of the past and the issues of the present. We have the problem of ascertaining how acquaintance with the past may be translated into a potent instrumentality for dealing effectively with the future. We may reject knowledge of the past as the **end** of education and thereby only **empha-** size its importance **as** a means. When we do that we have a problem that is new in the story of education: How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the **living** present?

Chapter 2

The Need of a Theory of Experience

IN **SHORT**, the point I **am** making is **that** rejection of the philosophy and practice of traditional education sets a new **type** of difficult educational problem for those **who** believe in the new **type** of education. We shall operate blindly and in confusion until we recognize this fact; until **we thoroughly** appreciate that departure from the old solves no problems. What is said in the following pages is, accordingly, intended to indicate some of the **main** problems with which the newer education is **confronted** and to suggest the main lines **along** which their solution is **to** be sought. I assume that amid **all** uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education **and** personal experience; **or**, **that** the **new** philosophy of education is committed **to** some kind of empirical **and** experimental philosophy. But experience and experiment are not self-explanatory ideas. Rather, their meaning is part of the problem to **be explored**. **To** know the meaning of empiricism we need **to** understand what experience is.

The belief that **all** genuine education **comes** about through experience does not **mean** that **all** experiences **are** genuinely or **equally** educative. Experience **and** education cannot be directly equated to each other. For **some** experiences are mis-educative. **Any** experience is mis-educative that **has** the effect of **arresting or** distorting **the growth** of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender **callousness**; it may produce lack of sensitivity

and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience. An experience may be immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude; this attitude then operates to modify the quality of subsequent experiences **so** as to prevent a person from getting out of them what they have to give. Again, experiences may be **so** disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked cumulatively to one another. Energy is then dissipated and a person becomes scatter-brained. Each experience may be lively, vivid, and "interesting," and yet their disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits. The consequence of formation of such habits is inability to control future experiences. They are then taken, either by way of enjoyment or of discontent and revolt, just as they come. Under such circumstances, it is idle to talk of self-control.

Traditional education offers a plethora of examples of experiences of the kinds just mentioned. It is a great mistake to suppose, even tacitly, that the traditional schoolroom was not a place in which pupils had experiences. Yet this is tacitly assumed when progressive education **as a** plan of learning by experience is placed in sharp opposition to the old. The proper line of attack is that the experiences which were had, by pupils and teachers alike, were largely of a wrong kind. How many students, for example, **were** rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them? How many

acquired special skills by means of automatic drill **so** that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? How **many came to associate** the learning process with ennui and boredom? How many found what they did learn **so** foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them **no** power of control over the latter? How many came to associate books with dull drudgery, **so** that they were "conditioned" to **all** but flashy reading matter?

If I ask these questions, it is not for the sake of wholesale condemnation of the old education. It is for quite another purpose. It is to emphasize the fact, first, that young people in traditional schools do have experiences; and, secondly, that the trouble is not the absence of experiences, but their defective and wrong character—wrong and defective from the standpoint of connection **with** further experience. The positive side of this point is even more important in connection with progressive education. It is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience. Everything depends upon the **quality** of the experience which is had. The quality of **any** experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. **The** first is obvious and easy to judge. The *effect* of an experience is not borne on its face. It sets a problem to the educator. It is **his** business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage **his** activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences. Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience **lives** and dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further experiences. Hence **the** central problem of an

education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences.

Later, I shall discuss in more detail the principle of the continuity of experience or what may be called the experiential continuum. Here I wish simply to emphasize the importance of **this** principle for the philosophy of educative experience. **A** philosophy of education, like any theory, has to be stated in words, in symbols. But **so** far as it is more than verbal it is a plan for conducting education. Like any plan, it must be framed with reference to what is to be done and how it is to be done. The more definitely and sincerely it is held that education **is** a development within, by, and for experience, the more important it is that there shall be clear conceptions of what experience is. Unless experience is **so** conceived that the result is a plan for deciding upon subject-matter, upon methods of instruction and discipline, and upon material equipment and social organization of the school, it is wholly in the **air**. It is reduced to a form of words which may be emotionally stirring but for which any other set of words might equally well be substituted unless they indicate operations to be initiated and executed. Just because traditional education was a matter of routine in which the plans and programs were handed down from the past, it does not follow that progressive education is **a** matter of planless improvisation.

The traditional school could get along without any consistently developed philosophy of education. About all it required in that line was a set of abstract words like **culture**, discipline, our great cultural heritage, etc., actual guidance being derived not **from** them but from custom and established routines. Just because progressive schools cannot rely upon established traditions and institutional

habits, they must either proceed more **or** less haphazardly or be directed by ideas which, when they are made articulate and coherent, form a philosophy of education. Revolt against the kind of organization characteristic of the traditional school constitutes a demand for a kind of organization based upon ideas. I think that only slight acquaintance with the *history* of education is needed to prove that educational reformers and innovators alone have felt the need for a philosophy of education. Those who adhered **to** the established system needed merely a few fine-sounding words to justify existing practices. The real work was done by habits which were **so** fixed as to be institutional. The lesson for progressive education is that it requires in an urgent degree, a degree more pressing than was incumbent upon former innovators, a philosophy of education based upon a philosophy of experience.

I remarked incidentally that the philosophy in question is, to paraphrase the saying of Lincoln about democracy, one of education of, by, and for experience. **No** one of these words, **of**, by, or for, names anything which is self-evident. Each of them is a challenge to discover and put into operation a principle of order and organization which follows from understanding what educative experience signifies.

It is, accordingly, a much more difficult task to work out the kinds of materials, of methods, and of social relationships that are appropriate to the new education than is the case with traditional education. I think many of the difficulties experienced in the conduct of progressive schools and many of the criticisms leveled against them arise from this source. The difficulties are aggravated and the criticisms are increased when it is supposed that the new education is somehow easier than the old. This belief **is**, I imagine, more or less current. Perhaps it illustrates

again the *Either-Or* philosophy, springing from the idea that about **all** which is required is not to do what is done **in** traditional schools.

I admit gladly that the new education is **simpler** in principle than the old. It is in harmony with principles of growth, while there is very much which is artificial in the old selection and arrangement of subjects and methods, and artificiality always leads to unnecessary complexity. But the easy and the simple are not identical. **To** discover what is really simple and to act upon the discovery **is** an exceedingly difficult task. After the artificial and complex is once institutionally established and ingrained in custom and routine, it is easier to walk in the paths that have been beaten than it is, after taking a new point of view, **to** work out what is practically involved in the new point of view. The old Ptolemaic astronomical system was more complicated with its cycles and epicycles than the Copernican system. But **until** organization of actual astronomical phenomena **on** the ground of the latter principle had been effected the easiest **course** was to follow the line of least resistance provided by the old intellectual habit. **So** we come back to the idea that a coherent theory of experience, affording positive direction to selection and organization of appropriate educational methods and materials, is required by the attempt **to** give new direction to the work of the schools. The process is a slow and arduous one. It is a matter of growth, and there are many obstacles which tend to obstruct growth and to deflect it into **wrong** lines.

I **shall** have something to say later about organization. All that is needed, perhaps, at this point is to say that we must escape from the tendency to think of organization in terms **of** the **kind** of organization, whether of content (or subject-matter), or of methods and social relations, that **mark** traditional education. I **think** that a good deal

of the current opposition to the idea of organization is due to the fact that it is **so** hard to get away from the picture of the studies of the old school. The moment "organization" is mentioned imagination goes almost automatically to the kind of organization that is **familiar**, and in **revolting** against that we are led to **shrink** from the very idea of any organization. **On** the other hand, educational reactionaries, who are now gathering force, use the **absence** of adequate intellectual and moral organization in **the** newer type of school **as** proof not only of the need of organization, but to identify **any** and every kind of organization **with** that instituted before the rise of experimental science. Failure to develop a conception of organization upon the empirical and experimental basis gives reactionaries a too easy victory. But the fact that the empirical sciences **now** offer the best type of intellectual organization which **can** be found in any field shows that there is **no** reason why we, who call ourselves empiricists, should be "pushovers" in the matter of order and organization.