

I. EDUCATION IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Characteristics and effects of change

Change begets change. Physical growth and the accumulation of experience by the individual moderate his attitudes and actions; communal growth and experience result in a dynamic society, continuously adjusting to its self-inspired new demands. The alternative, if history is a guide, is extinction. The dinosaur perished because it could not bring itself to adapt over many millenia to the changing physical environment. Human societies which have set their faces against change have met the same fate. The continuing problem for all societies and for individuals within them is not whether or not to change, but how best to adapt to the changing environment in order to preserve an identity and ensure a continuing existence.

The recognition of the inevitability of change is not new. What is new is the rate of change in all aspects of human existence. The accelerating rate of change, with all the stresses and tensions which it imposes on the bewildered individual attempting to adapt himself to new demands and control the pace, may well be more important than the direction of change. Disparities between individuals and societies tend to increase in the face of pressures for change. As the Pearson Report demonstrated, the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. As newly independent states seek to build themselves into nations, the longer-established nation states are already merging into larger units. The individual, seeking only to live in modest comfort and security, feels himself ever more like the White Queen, running wildly to stay in the same place. To categorise as "drop-outs" those who abandon the chase is a particularly happy metaphor.

It is however, profitless to seek refuge in nostalgic myths of a bygone golden age of stability, security and prosperity; action must be founded on current realities. As national populations in the developing countries grow, and grow younger, new social patterns emerge at the same time as the more industrialised countries face the problems of adapting to an increasing proportion of their populations in the older age-groups. Technology, communications, medicine, political and economic developments, all add to the pace of inevitable change, affecting the way of life and the quality of life, often exciting stress and conflict, for not all change is planned, nor is it always for the better in the short term.

Accepting the inevitability of change, therefore, the essential question emerges as whether strategies may be devised to control its pace and nature, to build bridges between the past (although it be only yesterday) and the present as they merge into the future. Successful strategies promise evolution; unsuccessful strategies or the absence of strategies are likely to lead to conflict and revolution. Yet there can be no overall global strategy because needs differ between societies and between groups within societies: one man's economic growth may be another's environmental pollution. Strategies depend on many agencies for their implementation. Among the most influential agencies is the formally constituted educational system.

The contribution of education

The attempt to distinguish between the roles of education as an active agent of change and as a reflection of changes which have already taken place has never been concluded satisfactorily. That schools influence social and economic (and in some cases political) changes is hardly open to doubt; what is debatable is the degree to which such changes can be consciously induced and effectively guided. The nature of the formal educational process means an inevitable time-lag before innovations become fully integrated. As a result, educational structures are often out of date as soon as they become fully established. Society will have changed while the educational system adapts itself in accordance with its role as an instrument of society. There is thus a perpetual paradox: education influences change society and then must itself change to meet the needs of its new creation. Although belief in education as an investment with calculable economic returns has been severely shaken, by and large faith remains unimpaired in education as a way of helping the individual and the nation in their search for individual and collective growth. Increasingly questioned, however, is the extent to which the educational process should be institutionalised.

The definition of precise aims for education also remains elusive. Little effective help is given to educators when they receive instructions in forms such as "to prepare students for democratic citizenship", or "to train the young generation for effective participation in social and political activities", or "to inculcate a sense of the dignity of labour". Nor can it be assumed that the declared aims of education do in fact reflect the true desires of the society. Education is often hailed as an agent of social change by the same voices which deplore "subversive" teaching, while teachers are branded as conservative by a public which exerts powerful implicit pressure against change. The belief, too, that education authorities, teachers, parents and pupils have the same educational objectives has often proved false. Herein lies much of the disillusion when the schools and other institutions fail to lead to all the varying goals thought to be desirable by the different groups - the good citizen expected by the government, the fully-developed individual hoped for by the teacher, the trainable manpower unit desired by the employer, the still-respectful yet better-educated offspring wished for by the parent, the successful job-seeker demanded by the pupil himself. While the very real difficulties should not be minimised, the need seems to be established for educational objectives to take into account more realistically the varied hopes and expectations of controlling authorities, parents, teachers and students. Nor should it be overlooked that these objectives may well vary among different communities and groups within a country.

Much of what education achieves it does incidentally, by putting students into a particular environment and by exposing them to each other. The circumstances in which education is undertaken probably exerts as much an influence as the content of the teaching. This compounds the difficulties of controlling authorities in their efforts to direct the work of their institutions and evaluate the results.

Educational provision, like so many other factors influencing society, seems to be set on an exponential growth rate. As more youngsters emerge from primary schools the qualifications for employment rise and the consequent pressure for more secondary school places grows. The "threshold of competence" moves upward, putting the anticipated rewards always out of the grasp of the many until, as a growing number of countries, rich and poor, are now finding, the top of the ladder is reached when holders

of research degrees are declared unsuitable for recruitment into the lower levels of employment where most of the vacancies occur. How far control of this process can be exercised is problematical, for educational desirability must be tempered by political reality. Governments seek to balance the developmental needs of their country against the legitimate aspirations of the individual and the pressures of public demand. In these circumstances the degree of control brought to bear on educators and the responsibility of governments for the just disposition of public funds should reach towards a compromise acceptable to both. In cases where governments have accepted responsibility for the totality of the development process a consequence has been close control for the government of the educational system. In such circumstances only the government can be in a position to appreciate the overall national situation and thus be able to co-ordinate all the agents of development. Many governments have not sought to exercise such close control. Not all governments have even attempted to formulate national objectives or determine strategies by which they might be attained, although the absence of a clear policy can lead to dissipation of limited resources and a lack of a sense of national purpose. Where aims are declared and general strategies made known, education can be adjusted to anticipate the needs of society while remaining free to its basic tenets.

Formal education in most countries has grown piecemeal and largely unplanned until very recent times. Provision has been uneven geographically and socially; mass education has generally been conceded with reluctance and often accepted with suspicion. Schools have been criticised for raising unrealistic aspirations and alienating their pupils from their communities. For those of humble origin the reward for academic success has been the issue of a passport to somewhere else, in the form of a certificate, thus tending to deprive already deprived communities of those members potentially most able to help them. The schools, too, are censored for their presumed role in widening the generation gap of mutual misunderstanding, yet it may be that many of the younger members of society are more attuned to the realities of their environment than are their elders.

Not infrequently the schools have failed to recognise the particular needs of the community in which they are set. Although children in the Caribbean, for example, may no longer be required to learn the names of the railway stations between London and Glasgow, other insensitivities remain. It is not unknown for agriculture to be taught to boys alone in societies where women are traditionally the farmers, or for gardening to be taught in places where the future potential lies in fishing. Adaptation does not mean only replacing lessons on the daffodil with lessons on the hibiscus; such superficial adaptations leave the underlying structure unchanged and hence the basic institutions undisturbed.

There are indications that future developments in schooling should lie more in a greater concentration on helping pupils to develop satisfactory human relationships, to learn to live once more as a community, to encourage a renewed sense of mutual responsibility. This can come about only if the schools recognise their potential role in the community and if teachers are trained to participate in such novel activities. If, however, the importance of an early concentration on academic education is to be moderated, schooling can no longer be conceived in terms of a single period during childhood and adolescence. Opportunities will have to be provided for the unschooled and the early leaver as well as for those who have completed courses to obtain further education, training and upgrading. If it is remembered, for example, that one man in three in the United States labour

force is now employed in a job the type of which did not exist when he left school, the need for schools to adjust to the demands of change can be seen as incontrovertible. Not only should the school structure allow for flexible response to evolving demands made upon it but the school should so conduct its activities as to enable its graduating pupils to face the future with confidence in their ability to adapt to the inevitable changes and developments which they will meet in their lives. Children now in the first year of primary school may well remain active citizens and members of their country's labour force until the year 2031; they can be prepared initially to enter upon their adult lives primarily by encouraging in them a readiness to meet change with determination and confidence.

The United States example also makes it apparent that informal, unplanned and largely non-institutionalised forms of education must even now be catering for the need for further education and training. The development of the whole area of non-formal education, therefore, allowing for multiple entrances and exits at different levels over an indefinite period, seems to form an essential element of educational development in the future. Such a flexible system offers an additional benefit. The developing countries especially are in a hurry, unable to wait while a new generation matures to inherit the new situation; non-formal education allows for the swift reorientation of the matured members of society who can accelerate development and prepare the way for those who will inherit control.

The role of the teacher

The role of the teacher in these circumstances becomes much more complex and more professionally rewarding. He must deal at once with two basic functions; on the one hand he must conserve what is of continuing value in traditional and current society and assist in the transmitting this heritage; on the other he must seek to prepare individuals for a new society, the precise form of which cannot be determined in advance. It may be felt that such a responsibility must be the corporate undertaking of more than one type of person and should not be given as a burden to the teacher alone.

The teacher frequently finds himself in a dilemma, attempting to reconcile the often conflicting demands made upon him by the state, the community, parents and students. Nor must it be forgotten that the teacher is himself a member of the society at large, if not always a member of the community in which he works. Teachers, like all other individuals, play multiple roles; they are not only teachers but also parents, taxpayers, electors and members of various smaller associations and interest groups. Sometimes, it may be noted, these roles are in conflict; what the individual demands as a teacher or parent may not be what he wishes to pay for as a taxpayer.

If the teacher is to meet the requirements of the state it must be made quite clear what those requirements are, and both communication and clarity are often deficient. The fact that so many individuals in positions of influence in the state have been teachers often makes the teacher's job that much more difficult, for the assumption may be made erroneously that he knows the mind of his controlling authority. Only if he is adequately informed can he interest the desirable directions of change to those in his charge.

In the setting of populous, fragmented and increasingly complex societies, the teacher faces a major problem. How should he attempt to prepare his pupils for their future as he anticipates it? He can expect in most countries in the world that his pupils will spend their most active years in dull, monotonous, repetetive and poorly rewarded work, yet he cannot honestly avoid his professional duty to attempt to develop each child's intellectual capacities to the full. He cannot but wonder whether by so doing he is aiding the evolution of society or merely adding to the sum of human discontent by opening a window on a better world, knowing that for all but the exceptional few the door to that world will remain firmly shut. The teacher can only hope that the world which will have emerged in two or three decades will confound this prediction, and prepare his pupils to respond to the opportunities which he hopes will eventuate.

To do this he must attempt to inculcate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for survival in the existing situation, together with that flexibility and power of discrimination necessary to adjust and adapt selectively to change. In this task he should be able to rely increasingly on the active co-operation and participation of parents and other members of the community with whom he is working. The teacher in most communities can no longer command that respect which was accorded to his predecessors when they constituted the sole local repositories of literacy and communication, linking the community to the world beyond and negotiating with authority on behalf of those in his area. Increasingly this function is being eroded as other professional people assume similar and overlapping functions. If the teacher is to retain a real status and position of influence in this community he must be recognised as an individual of such quality and professional standard as will inspire the confidence of those among whom he works.

It is doubtful whether the generality of teachers ever achieved that lofty status which current mythology would accord them. Teachers working in mass education have almost always been recruited from the lower end of the social scale, poorly paid and inadequately trained. Not infrequently the teaching profession has been a bridge to higher-level occupations for the ambitious and a safety net for the unsuccessful; even today the greatest consumer of educated manpower, especially in the developing countries, is the educational system itself. Although the profession is leavened by a proportion of individuals who are highly motivated and professionally competent, it is hardly surprising that the teaching profession is sometimes accused with some justice of undue conservatism and reluctance to accept innovations. Some conservatism, however derives from the highest motives. Knowing that a pupil's future is in his hands and that mistakes once made can rarely be rectified, the teacher not unnaturally continues to do what he has done in the past, accepting that while his work may be less than perfect he is at least not bringing disaster upon his charges. Unlike the craftsman, if he makes an error he cannot erase it and start again.

In the present conditions of rapid change it may be that responsibility for some aspects of education could beneficially be shared with individuals and agencies other than professional teachers working within institutionalised structures. Education of the community may perhaps be provided more effectively if it draws on the range of resources available within that community. Such a development has a fundamental implication for the role of the teacher, who may in future be more of an enabler, a catalyst, than a polymath performer, the conductor of an orchestra rather than a one-man band. Education for a changing society requires a reappraisal of the functions and attributes of those entrusted with the implementation of educational programmes. It calls for a new look at the role of the teacher in educational development and the methods by which he is prepared to assume it.