

EDITORIAL

The suggestion that teaching should be related to today's complicated society is a common one, put forward, also commonly, without much "educational thought." The basic assumption seems to involve a simplistic connection between "teaching about" and "teaching for."

Certainly our children need to know about the larger society in which they will participate, but the question is: what do they need to know, and what is the school most equipped to do. To answer part of the question negatively first, children do not profit from the continuation of traditional exercises on content consisting mainly of social trivia. They will be exposed to enough of both traditional exercises and social trivia without our efforts to concentrate the dose.

The school's exclusive task is intellectual, but not in a narrow sense. This means that the school is the institution best equipped to deal with the essential character of modern society and social change, as that character is derived from a complicated mass of information and action details, which impinge on the child initially as fragmentary sensory attractions. From such an essential derivation, the proper function of education is the establishment of a psychological, intellectual and moral base which undergirds present social life, but which does so not only through its immediate reference to that present, but through its simultaneous reference to a cultural unit extending to times and places unknown — perhaps unknowable.

I understand this to be the foundation of humanistic education, regardless of the various forms assumed historically under the term. To lead the child to an understanding of himself as man in the cultural environment of mankind is to lead him to the recognition of his own worth and to a confidence in his ability to confront and cope with a world of which he feels a part.

These are not new thoughts in or on education. I take this opportunity to reiterate them, perhaps give them a particular focus, because the conduct of schooling seems to demonstrate disfunctionality in terms of almost any idealized purpose of education accepted theoretically by educators or manifestly by the general public. The one function apparently effected by schooling is the preparation of children through a long process of mental intimidation and subjugation to endure boredom, to work *without* intellectual motivation or honesty, and to accept superficially an authority they do not accept in their hearts.

Such an effect has the consequence of fragmenting personality and ultimately, of alienating the individual from his world, just when we

face the possibility of social crises whose solution will depend on integrative personalities moving fearlessly and optimistically in a society identified with themselves. While schools and teachers are not solely culpable here, they, as the appointed educational agents of the society, are responsible for the actual determination of ends and of adequate accordant means in education. To accept this responsibility is to accept the task of working continually toward the educational formula which allows individual development to flow freely into the collective enterprise of social life.

R. F. Lawson