SOME SOCIAL PRINCIPLES
OF EDUCATION

The public school is not a natural institution but a willed creation. It was called into existence by society for a definite purpose. Since back of the public school lies no instinct that operates as a great social force to keep it true to its mission, society must ever be on its guard to keep the school its servant rather than its master. The social purpose back of the public school is the protection, conservation, and development of society. Society wishes to be rid of certain ways of thinking, acting, and living that have proved detrimental to social welfare—it wishes to be protected against these things; it wishes to conserve from the past those fine experiences that have helped to solve the great social problem of human living together; it also wishes to develop in associates a fine type of social co-operation and social good-will so that the members of the social order will stand together, think alike, and work at the essential tasks of life to the end that the antisocial person may be eliminated and those social attitudes essential to the development of social and national unity may be engendered; moreover society has a passion not only to prepare the individual for the social present but to make him a force to produce the social future. Hence it wishes to make the good citizen an efficient worker. It wishes every citizen to work at that task which he can do superlatively well, to the end that he may be happy in his vocation and make the largest possible contribution to the protection, conservation, and development of society. For the accomplishment of these ends, society maintains the public schools and finds justification for taxing one man to educate another man’s children, for compelling children between certain ages to attend schools, for requiring certain subjects to be taught, certain methods to be followed, and certain standards to be maintained, for endeavoring to equalize educational opportunities, and for the recognition of individual differences in pupils. Expressed in a word, society hopes by its system of popular education to make the social man.

What are some of the social principles of education that should govern the school to realize its purpose? What are the principles of social education? In the brief time allotted to me I wish to mention the following social principles that the school should recognize.

1. The school is a social institution. The entire school organization, administration, and program of work should provide for social development to the end that social co-operation and social good-will may be secured. The development of “we feeling” in pupils is at the basis of all social education. If the school is to become a real social institution, it must provide that training which will cause the pupil to begin to identify his best welfare with that of the community and to realize that social unity is essential to social progress. Provision must be made also, if the school is to fulfil its social purpose, to provide for social “followship” as well as social leadership, for society needs intelligent co-workers as well as intelligent leaders.

Moreover, the program of studies of the school must make provision for imparting social knowledge. We live in a social world and most of our adjustments are social in nature—adjustments to men and to the institutions created by men. “Human relationships make or mar the world,” and are perhaps the most fundamental relationships of life. It is not safe to trust common sense and experience to adjust the individual to the world of human relationships. Social knowledge is just as essential to the citizen as agricultural knowledge is to the farmer. If our social adjustments are to be intelligent, we must possess definite social knowledge.
As Ellwood says: "There can be no democracy if our boys and girls know nothing of the responsibilities, duties, and privileges of citizens in a democracy and the social conditions and ideals necessary for the success of democratic society." Since in a democracy a man or a woman is a citizen first before he is a member of a calling, trade or profession, it follows that a study of those social sciences, such as history, civics, economics, sociology, etc., essential to preparation for citizenship in a democracy, should be required of all those who attend the free schools of a democratic society.

2. The program of studies must make possible the education of all who attend schools. The good citizen is also the efficient worker. In a socialized community, every person should bear his economic load, should be a social asset rather than a social liability. Provision must be made, therefore, for the recognition of the individual needs of pupils. The school must endeavor to discover "the interests, abilities, and aptitudes" of its pupils. The school must be a prevocational institution before it becomes a vocational one. Vocational and educational guidance must come before vocational education. The junior high school idea must find real expression in the school program.

3. The mental freedom of pupils should be the end point of instruction. Children are sent to school to learn. To learn they must know how to study. Instruction is the principal business of the school and the improvement of instruction the principal duty of supervisory officers. The chief instrument of adjustment is the mind. "A safe and desirable social life is impossible without mental freedom." The school must teach children to think. Some form of directed study should take the place of the old formal type of recitation. The class period, therefore, should be a learning period and should be devoted to study, investigation, teaching and learning, and reciting. The capacity of the pupils, the nature of the subject, and the exigencies of the learning process should determine just how the class hour should be spent. The position of the teacher in the classroom must become less autocratic than it has been.

4. Training for the "worthy use of leisure" is an essential part of the program for social education. Education should equip the individual to secure from his leisure the recreation of body, mind and spirit and the enrichment and enlargement of his personality. Almost every subject in the program of studies as well as the recreational and social activities of the school, may and should contribute to the attainment of these ends. The cultural aspects of education must always receive proper attention in any real program of social education.

5. Provision must be made by the school for the physical development of all pupils. The best contribution to society is made by those socially trained individuals who enjoy physical health and strength. It would be foolish for society to neglect physical training in its passion for positive social education, for the social fruits of social education are conditioned by the physical health and strength of those who labor. Health needs cannot be neglected without serious danger to the individual and the race. The school anxious to justify its social mission must provide health instruction, inculcate health habits, organize effective programs of physical activities, regard health needs in planning work and play, and cooperate with home and community in safeguarding and protecting health interests.

WILL DISCUSS INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH EDUCATION

Plans and accomplishments of various agencies now working for better international understanding through education will be discussed at the seventh annual meeting of the American Council on Education, which will be held in the assembly hall of the Cosmos Club, Washington, D. C., May 2-3. Dr. John J. Tigert, United States Commissioner of Education, and Dr. Glen Levin Swiggett, chairman of the National Council on Foreign Service Training, have been invited to take part in the discussion.