STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

EDUCATIONAL THEORY is published quarterly at Danville, Illinois, by the University of Illinois. The general purposes of this journal are to foster the continuing development of educational theory and to encourage wide and effective discussion of theoretical problems within the educational profession. In order to achieve these purposes, the journal will be devoted to publishing scholarly articles and studies in the foundations of education, and in related disciplines outside the field of education, which contribute to the advancement of educational theory.

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A MESSAGE TO PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS: EDUCATION AND AMERICAN WORLD RELATIONS

BY J. WADE CARUTHERS

The central fact in your life is that you are going to be public school teachers at a time when the United States and Russia cannot establish and maintain peace. For that reason I am going to address myself to the question: What is the relationship between public education and American foreign policy? Let us start with a truism which is a statement based on a truth so profound and fundamental that society is afraid to face it much less put it into operation. Recall some of the truisms that have rolled off the tongue of Americans for generations—all men are created for equal opportunity or that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. My truism is: American world relations can advance only so far as the understanding of the American people has advanced.

First we must recognize the fact that American foreign policy has evolved slowly as a fairly continuous process. It did not spring full blown from the minds of public officials at any given time nor did it take shape out of the sudden pressure of event. There has been a continuity about our foreign policy that transcends current political debates.

If intelligent understandings is the basis of constructive world leadership there are certain things we should know about the current domestic scene as they influence our relations with the world. It seems ironical that in times of crisis, when we should be reforming and improving our way of life, social change slows to a virtual standstill. A quick look at our recurrent social problems shows that we are still plagued with the fear of economic collapse, unemployment, lack of proper housing and racial discrimination. In the Southwest we have “wet back” migratory farm workers living in a state of virtual peonage. Our press is noted for its irresponsibility and articulate men in positions of influence often confuse rather than clarify important public issues. Although we are familiar with these dark aspects of democracy and we do feel that something is being done about them, they present a false picture of America abroad. Our foreign policy is like a great mirror reflecting our domestic ills. The reflection, somewhat distorted, feeds Russian propaganda, disturbs our allies, and repels our would-be friends.

Fear of Ideas

In this time of uncertainty we are afraid—not of bombs, invasion, and death—but of ideas. By our efforts to defend ourselves against communism there is the
real danger that loyal dissent and criticism will be stifled. This is not a bright prospect when we consider that only by the free exchange of ideas do we advance and improve. A self-improving society is a self-critical society. We are in danger of crushing out the very ideas that may save us. A blind and unquestioning defense of our status quo is like ceasing to row upstream—we drift back.

Growing out of this climate of fear is a noticeable reaction against public education. In recent years education has been attacked on the grounds that it costs too much money; that it is too progressive; that the children do not learn their three “R’s”; that it robs the home of its proper function and that public education is irreligious. The attack is carried on by laymen educated a generation ago, by business-minded school boards, by homespun politicians, by traditionally trained teachers, and by deliberately organized enemies of public education.

The campaign is advanced by such clichés and half-arguments as: “you can’t change human nature”; “teachers are not overpaid and overworked—look at the vacations they get”; and “it is not expensive equipment we need but just natural-born teachers” (the Mark Hopkins-Leg allegory). Often we are enjoined on the grounds that we are public servants and hence are obligated to keep silent on controversial public questions (the Greek slave tradition).

You prospective teachers must be alert to this movement and be armed with counter-balancing arguments. To make sure that there is no doubt in your mind as to what is implied I would say to you, if you have the children of America at heart you will favor teachers unions, you will favor school consolidation, and you will favor state and federal aid to education. If you do not, then you are giving in weakly to these groups who would rob you of your maximum power as a public instrument.

All of these things—the social problems, the climate of fear, and the cramped educational viewpoint—cannot help but contribute to a dim and narrow view of our world relations. Because of our preoccupation with the defense of capitalism we hesitate to aid socialistically-inclined countries; because of our high standard of living, as Stringfellow Barr has said¹, we forget we are like rich suburbanites living amid slums; and because of our inexperience we still depend upon military power, our geographic location, and an arsenal of atom bombs as the best defense against the spread of communism. A limited world view is reflected also in our reluctance to heed the advice of older nations who have had more experience than we in dealing with the world.

This is a dim picture to be sure—probably exaggerated a bit for emphasis. But the central question for us is: What can education do about it? The process of education can do very little about it. But that little bit is of utmost importance. It is essential. By education we learn what a great nation should be—powerful economically and if necessary militarily. But that is not enough. Henry Steele Commager² reminds us that a great nation should also be tactful, magnanimous, imaginative, bold, and willing to do unprecedented things. Above all a great nation must have the support of wise and mature people.

E D U C A T I O N  O P E R A T E S  W I T H  W I S D O M  A N D  M A T U R I T Y

Wisdom and maturity are the keys to greatness. This is where education starts to operate. Let us be specific. Through history we get the long range view. History enables us to understand the origins and consequences of various types of social action. Through it we absorb a pride in our past but more than that—a critical insight into our weaknesses and mistakes. Through a sense of history we gain the confidence to move ahead. Anthropology is a relatively new study of a very old subject. It is the science of man. If you do not like the word anthropology just think of it as being the study of human relations. Its concepts can be grasped by children of all ages from grade one through twelve. If you accept its findings you see man as being essentially the same all over the world. It is a science that breaks down barriers that divide people. It gives the scientific base for the world community ideal.

A wise and mature people would not only see man as being essentially the same, they would also realize that all men live in the same place. Atomic science has rendered the old patterns of war and nationalism obsolete. This suggests the role of global geography and the social implications of science in educating for wisdom and maturity. The ability to communicate clearly is certainly a requirement for constructive citizenship. Old words and slogans tend to lose their content. As we discuss public questions we fall into semantic pitfalls at every turn. We need new words or new content for old words as we try to interpret ourselves to the world or attempt to understand ideologies foreign to us. Not only a clarification of the English language is needed but a knowledge of many foreign tongues increasingly will be a requirement of more Americans if our world responsibilities are to be met. The language arts teacher is hereby challenged as well as the foreign language teacher who would find a fertile field down in the elementary grades.

U N D E R S T A N D I N G  O F  C O N T E M P O R A R Y  A F F A I R S

A study of all of these fields of knowledge, history, geography, anthropology, global geography and language arts is an indirect approach to achieving wisdom and maturity. It is not enough. We must also have the direct and deliberate study of contemporary affairs. This does not mean merely the study of day-to-day happenings as a body of subject matter but the study of the background of a few carefully selected important issues. In a changing world one can not be sure which of today's issues will be important next year but by the study of the how rather than the what we get something of permanent value. This means that an understanding people would be able to inform themselves intelligently. They would be equipped to select the most reliable newspapers, magazines, and news commentaries. If this were achieved less influence would be exerted by irresponsible politicians, some low-grade Hollywood movies and many state and big-city newspapers. Perhaps such cramping pressures on American thought could be "bred" out of our society—maybe they would just fade away. By an intelligent approach to current issues, articulate citizens might be sophisticated to the point of being able to say: "This is a constructive plan," "This is good for America and the world," "This is enlightened Americanism."

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MESSAGE TO PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

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Education for world leadership is what we are really after. Social ideas must catch up with technology. We need a person to come along and do for the social what Darwin and Pasteur did for science. We need a science of man. As art Chase' has put it, perhaps some day a child will appear in your classroom with an I.Q. near the boiling point who can qualify. Let us hope you will recognize him and guide him in seeing life and seeing it whole. We need wise mature people with an integrated view. In the meantime you can all approach this. You can, if you are not lulled into silence and apathy. And you won't you won't if you continue to learn and to understand and above all if you are not afraid.