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FUTURE TRENDS IN EDUCATION

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I want to begin by emphasizing the motif of the lecture this evening as dealing with the future because I want to turn your views forward and engage in what might be called projection. Perhaps many of you think the future is unknown, that a sort of veil or mist shrouds the vision and cuts it off. To a certain extent that is true, yet it seems to me that the future is not wholly unknown. Some things we know almost intuitively; for instance, no research is necessary to predict that during the immediate future we shall be speaking the English language in this country rather than Japanese or German.

On the other hand, we must make a careful statistical study before we can say that during the next twenty or twenty-five years the average expectation of life in this country will be between sixty and seventy years. We can certainly say that the business cycle will continue to give us depressions and periods of prosperity, but we are unable to say when the present depression will end and when the next period of prosperity will begin. We are not able to say when the next war will take place or what will be the outcome. Predictions must be viewed in terms of probabilities; some things can be foretold with considerable accuracy and some not at all. This means that I cannot deal with every important phase of education and make a serious guess about the future, but there are some things about which I think I can make a fairly reliable statement. That is what I shall attempt tonight.

One of the ways in which we can look ahead is to project trends. Any social institution, such as the school, goes forward partly on its

1 The first of a series of annual summer lectures sponsored at the University of Chicago by Zeta Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa. This lecture was delivered in Mandel Hall on the campus of the University on July 12, 1939.
own steam, but it is also influenced by forces outside which impinge upon it. I come to you from the field of sociology, hence as I see them, most of the forces which will direct education will come from outside the field of education proper.

The first significant trend I want to mention has to do with school attendance. We know that the birth-rate has been declining for half a century, and we are reasonably sure that it will continue to decline for some years. It is very likely that some twenty-five or thirty years hence the population of the United States will begin to decrease. Such a trend is certain to have some influence on school attendance. Indeed, the influence is already evident in the enrolment data for many schools. We can, therefore, predict that there will be no rapid increase but rather a decrease in the number of pupils in the elementary schools. This decrease will probably lead to a decrease in the number of teachers in the elementary schools.

Whether this trend will affect the high schools is a question. It produces a reduction in the number of elementary pupils because nearly all children of elementary-school age are in school. Only about 65 or 70 per cent of children of high-school age are in high schools. I think it was only about ten years ago that 40 per cent were in high school. Since there is such a possibility of increase in the proportion of persons of high-school age who attend school, we feel that the diminution in attendance in the high school will not be so noticeable for a time as it is in the elementary school now.

A smaller percentage of college-age people go to college. If, however, a large proportion, some 90 per cent or more, of the persons of high-school age go to high school, it seems probable that we shall have an increase in college attendance. Such a trend suggests some interesting possibilities. One that occurs naturally to sociologists as well as to economists is the question of whether college and high-school graduates will be able to find jobs that are appropriate to their qualifications and preparation. It is quite apparent that there will not be enough white-collar jobs for all the graduates; many will take jobs that are not white-collar jobs. I think this possibility is not necessarily a matter to be regretted. I am not sure there is any reason why plumbers should not enjoy the fine pleasure of discussing
Aristotle as well as do professors of philosophy and teachers of education.

Another aspect of school attendance which may be noted is the attendance of children at younger ages. Formerly we never heard of anyone going to school before six years of age; sometimes they did not go until nine or ten or even older. The Census of 1930 tells us that one in five children who were five years of age were going to school. It is quite probable that we may have an increase in attendance in the earlier age groups. One cause may be the percentage of mothers who are employed outside the home. One in eight or nine married women in the Census of 1930 reported themselves as gainfully occupied. At the beginning of the century this proportion was one in twenty-two. Quite possibly, the future ratio may be one in four or five. That force may operate to put children in schools at early ages, although this result is not likely to occur suddenly because of the cost to the taxpayer of providing for this increase.

I am brought to another point which buttresses this prediction. Schools in the future are likely to give more attention to what we call the personality of the pupil, in addition to the training of the intellectual virtues and the intellectual capacities as such. With college students personality training is almost a hopeless task because their personalities are already formed, and only a violent shock can change them. Hence this training is not a probable development in college, but it is quite a possibility in the lower schools, particularly for the younger children. Again I get my basis of estimation from a force outside the school.

Some centuries ago the personalities of children were shaped largely by three institutions: the family, the church, and the village or community. It is my observation as a sociologist that these three institutions have suffered a decline in the past one hundred or two hundred years. As they have declined, their power over the development of personality has diminished. The function of developing personalities is tending to leave the church, the village, and the home, and pressure is being brought by the home for the schools to take up this function. I have often talked with parents about schools and where to send their children, and I cannot remember the parent who was tremendously concerned over pedagogical methods as such.
They were much more concerned over such questions as personal relationships, the racial elements in the student body, the athletic situation, the social customs, dancing, fraternities, drinking, and the size of the student body. All these, it seems to me, concern personality. If the parents have anything to do with it, I believe the schools will be forced to undertake to do what they can for personalities.

I do not believe the influence of the family on personality will ever entirely disappear, but certainly there is a pressure for this function to be shifted in part to the schools. My thought is that this shift will continue during the next half-century. I think that the schools will be reluctant to assume this increased responsibility. It is too big a task, which they will not undertake voluntarily; but I think they are going to be forced to undertake certain steps. How they will do it is, of course, a question.

The classroom as such is by no means the best instrument or the best locale for training personalities. There is much better opportunity outside the classroom. Schools in small communities; schools that have playgrounds; extra-curriculum activities that utilize the school buildings for other purposes than training in the three R’s; schools that hold dances, debates, and athletic contests—all offer better opportunities for personality training. The school personnel who have the greatest influence on personality are the coaches, the trainers, the deans, and the individuals who deal with extra-curriculum activities. The new demands placed on the school will cause these activities to be expanded.

With regard to the curriculums of the schools I do not know that any statement I make on this subject has a high degree of possibility and soundness. Certainly the trend of curriculum revision at the present time is in the direction of practical, utilitarian courses; and I should think that the demands of the social and the economic institutions upon the schools would be for further development of the curriculum along these lines.

I realize that this great question of what is and what is not utilitarian depends on your viewpoint. All courses are utilitarian in a sense, some immediately practical, others ultimately so. It seems to me we overemphasize tradition in regard to the academic cur-
riculums. I can illustrate this point by reference to a description of village life in India. The social and the economic conditions of Hindu village life are deplorable. The use of fertilizer for cultivation of land is unknown. The soil is nearly worn out. The natives live on very inadequate food, polished rice, and send away their wheat to pay the interest on their indebtedness. They represent benighted and ignorant agricultural conditions. In one of the schools established by the British, the youngsters were found engaged in memorizing the names of the Plantagenet kings of England. There is a certain parallel to this situation in our college and high-school curriculums. It would seem that the practical forces of life are likely to take away the lag of curriculums and to bend them in the direction of more practical utilitarian courses.

Furthermore, I think the schools are likely to be more efficient in the future. The efficiency movement is spreading throughout all our social institutions. It is centered in the movement for scientific management in industry, but it is spreading to political institutions. The various record-making devices and studies of management are all focused in that direction. I think that the efficiency movement in schools will be encouraged by the infiltration of the efficiency movement from outside into the schools.

There are actually two schools in two cities that may be compared from the point of view of efficiency. If you start a boy to school in City A and his twin brother in City B, the school systems are so organized that the graduate in City A would enter the Junior class at college at the same time the graduate of the school in City B would be entering the Freshman class. The boy in City A would have just as much information and training and would have gone over the same books and material as his brother in City B but in a shorter time. In City A this result is achieved largely through coordination of the curriculum. It illustrates something of the possibilities of an efficient system.

There is one other aspect of this efficiency movement that seems to me likely to develop in the future, namely, the lessening of the inequalities that exist in education. Again referring to trends outside education, we can see a strong movement throughout the United States for establishing a minimum below which any institution or
any individual is not allowed to fall. This movement is manifested in the advances made with regard to maternal health, childbirth, old-age pensions, social-security measures, and the like. The tendency is to spread the accumulated benefits of the more favored of our communities and citizens to the less favored ones. That movement is already well under way in education and seems likely to operate to raise standards which are rather low in less favored communities. Inventions and improvements in transportation and communication have broken down isolation and have brought opportunity to remote regions by enlarging the unit of administration.

Now I turn to another trend which is interesting to the student of sociology, namely, the accumulation of culture and the growth and magnitude of civilization. There was a time in society when the old man of the tribe knew practically everything in the way of history and knowledge that existed in regard to the tribe. The most recent example in our own culture was Herbert Spencer, who wrote authoritative books, the best of his time, in the fields of education, philosophy, biology, geology, sociology, economics, etc. There will never be another who will know it all because the amount of knowledge is too great and accumulates too rapidly. This great accumulation of knowledge raises another question: How can the school pass on this tradition, this vast amount of knowledge?

One of the thoughts that come to mind is that something might be done to prolong the period of schooling. Many years ago John Fisk developed a theory called “the prolongation of infancy.” It is quite interesting to see how long infancy may be prolonged by the school system. When I was a young man in an agricultural civilization, a man was supposed to be a man at twenty-one and a woman a woman at eighteen. Now we refer to some man who enters the graduate school at thirty as a youngster. A student who is graduated from college at twenty-two, spends three years in law school or three or four years in medical school, and then lives through a “starvation period” of several years for the lawyer or two years’ internship in a hospital for the doctor, really gets started on his career rather late in life. Prolongation of infancy of this sort is one way in which we can adjust to this accumulated knowledge. I think this trend will con-tinue.
Another method of adjustment is to develop specialization. This tendency is already evident in many fields. For example, there is the field of genetics, which is a branch of zoology, itself a branch of the biology about which Spencer wrote one of his volumes. A geneticist is sometimes unable to read the papers of another geneticist because the language is so technical. This example could be duplicated in many other fields. Specialization is likely to go forward and is likely to lead to specialized schools. It is certainly one way by which society may adjust to this accumulated body of knowledge.

I would like to predict here that there will be many other educational institutions besides the schools. This prediction really indicates a changing concept of education, a notion broader than that of the behavior which occurs in the schoolroom. In a changing society like ours there is something of a tendency for the concepts to change because the underlying social conditions are changing. But we are extremely conservative: we resist simplified spelling, a change in our system of measurement, and modification of linguistic conceptions. Education should, in the course of time, overcome this inertia and develop new meanings. The word "art" is undergoing a redefinition today, as is the word "education." We think of art as classical art, that is, painting, sculpture, and music, but Gilbert Seldes has written a book on the seven lively arts in which many phenomena such as vaudeville, motion pictures, and radio are included as art. Why may not photography be art as truly as painting? The changing aspects of life are infusing new meanings into old concepts.

Link, in his book *Return to Religion,*\(^1\) suggested that we should be better off as a nation and that our students would be better off as students if they would abandon one year of college and substitute therefor one year in the C.C.C. camps. Link considers the C.C.C. camps as educational institutions. Similarly, we may classify the Boy Scouts and the 4-H Clubs as educational.

This infiltration of new meanings into education may be observed in Germany at the present time. The Germans know specifically what they want in education, be it right or wrong. They see clearly the young German type that they want to turn out, and they do not consider the schools as the only educational agency which is to mold

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this product. Their institution known as the Arbeitdienst, similar to the C.C.C. camps, is among the agencies utilized for that purpose. We cannot overlook the possibilities of other institutions as educational agencies. Today we have a population in which everyone reads and writes. Soon we shall have a population in which everyone has at least a high-school education.

With a change of technique there are possibilities of spreading certain types of education widely through the different communication inventions and agencies. I can see that the radio might become quite an institution of an educational sort. Indeed, the radio news commentator now exerts something of an educational influence in civilization and in social science. Magazines certainly qualify in that regard. They have a definite role in extending educational influence in a community. I am impressed with the possible agencies of this kind. I think the movie is already educating us in ethics and manners and broadening our knowledge about customs and current events by serving somewhat as the equivalent of travel. It also teaches some history.

There are also possibilities in facsimile transmission—a device which prints bulletins or newspapers. The machines are not particularly costly. I saw one of them at the San Francisco Fair print a sixteen-page newspaper in an hour and a half. Think what might be done with correspondence courses.

The specialization of newspaper columnists is interesting. Some of the columns today may be the equivalent of a lecture on political science. Other columns contain much valuable advice on the subject of health and disease.

Thus I think you are likely to find a certain increase and extension of what I would call educational institutions. As the family, the church, and the village lost these functions, they have been taken up by the schools, newspapers, magazines, forums, and various clubs and societies.

One may also predict wider use in the schools of some of the newer inventions. It is easy to see that an invention is first adopted in order to make a profit for the manufacturer. To schools a new invention means expenditure of money, with no saving or profit. Hence business adopts new inventions before the schools do. It is likely
that the business world will take up television quicker than will the schools because such innovations on the part of the schools require additional money from the taxpayers. There seems to be a lag in adoption of these newer devices by the schools, and for that reason we underestimate the potentialities of these instruments.

Television will have great use in the future in the schools. It certainly is a marvelous instrument for orientation in current events, politics, and economic science. The radio will be used more. In fact, the schools may have to abandon some of the traditional classroom instruction for other methods.

Educational motion pictures have been developed to a considerable degree. Another important invention is the mechanism for making a film book. This device is very cheap. About four hundred pages of typewritten material can be photographed for about a dollar, and I am told that it will be possible to produce the required number of copies of a Doctor's dissertation for about fifteen dollars. The apparatus for projecting the film is also simple and inexpensive. I believe this device is certain to be used widely to great advantage in educational institutions.

There is another invention I have often speculated about. It is the talking book, which was suggested to me a number of years ago by an advertisement offering for sale a phonograph record that would run for thirty minutes. Certain speeches and lectures were available. As I thought about it, I could see possibilities of using this device in education. Suppose you were the president of a small college and could get a set of lectures in philosophy delivered by Whitehead, Dewey, and Bertrand Russell. Why engage any local talent when such distinguished philosophers are available through this new medium? This is just one of the possibilities; there are many others, but I do not wish to let my fancy go too far.

There is one more point I would like to make before I close. Changes in the political organization are taking place at the present time which seem to me to be of profound significance for the schools. I have talked about changes in the family, village, industry, and in various other institutions, but I have not said much about government. What is happening is that government is being united with business, and we are moving in the direction of the totalitarian state.
Government is becoming a much larger institution and is touching our lives in more ways than it used to—paying checks to farmers, taking care of aged and unemployed, furnishing work and relief. It is telling workers that they can unionize, telling employers what they can and what they cannot do with regard to labor.

As government expands and touches our lives in more and more ways, it is evident that politics and political matters become more important. They are going to reach out and try to control our activities. I think that they are likely to try to dominate, or at least to exercise influence over, the curriculums of the schools. Not long ago the legislature of a neighboring state passed an act requiring all schools to teach all the pupils the virtues of cheese. If it is possible to put cheese into the curriculum, we don’t know what else may be slipped in. Propaganda has made tremendous strides since the World War, partly as the result of inventions, such as the radio, and of improved methods in advertising and printing. The average American believes that he thinks his own thoughts and that he plans his own actions and does not need anyone to tell him what to do. But propaganda is subtle; its ideas filter in in all sorts of ways and its possibilities are tremendous.

I am concerned over the potential dangers from government because of what has taken place in Europe. In the Fascist and the Communist states there has been the most bitter strife between the church and the state over the control of youth. The dictators knew very well that the foundations of their social order would be insecure unless they had control of the youth. Consequently they have developed organizations to insure this control.

I was impressed by what a friend of mine from China told me the other day about the word “propaganda.” Over there they call it “thought control.” They realize that it is a device for controlling thought. It would be a serious matter if we did not maintain freedom with regard to what is taught to children. An important step in putting propaganda into the schools is likely to spring from patriotic organizations, which may attempt to influence legislatures to pass laws requiring youths to take oaths of loyalty to this or that. They may make their influence felt by censoring textbooks and by requir-
ing propaganda to be incorporated in textbooks. This matter is serious and surely one to be watched carefully.

It is said that the requirement of a good speech is that the speaker should close on an optimistic note. I have mentioned a good many optimistic predictions in my remarks. I am sure you would think it unrealistic if I predicted nothing but good things because I would be giving you an example of wishful thinking, which is the greatest obstacle to successful prediction. If, however, you do not like the things I have predicted, I would like to make this reservation: that, because of the element of human will-power, it is never as easy to predict events of human behavior as it is to predict the movements of astronomical bodies. If you think some of my predictions unwise or undesirable, then it is up to you to change these trends and to bend your efforts to avert the occurrence of the undesirable courses which I have predicted.