

## Education is Special

"I am coming not to know what educational administration is and to doubt that it ought to continue an existence as an independent field of inquiry."<sup>1</sup> This radical statement by one of the leading authorities in the field is indicative of the very great degree of conceptual difficulty that attends any serious discussion of the topic of education and its leadership. It also highlights the confusion which can surround what to the naive onlooker might seem to be a straightforward sort of business: the operation and management of schools and colleges. After all, these institutions are very familiar. They have been around a long time, and all of us have had client experience of them at one time or another. What is the mystery? Surely their functions are well-enough understood and their workings cannot be any more complicated than, say, the running of a department store, or a small factory, or a government office?

But of course this is not the case. To argue in this way simply slurs over the inherent complexities of the concept of education itself, which, upon analysis, turns out to be one of the most complex concepts in the language. Far more complex than commerce or industry or bureaucracy. It is not merely complex but also profound. In short, education is something very special in the field of human affairs, as I shall endeavor to show.

In the first place, education is not susceptible of succinct definition in any strictly logical sense, although of course for rhetorical purposes it may be, and often is, telegraphically encapsulated. "History is a race between education and catastrophe"<sup>2</sup>; "Education has for its objective the formation of character."<sup>3</sup> Such rhetoric has its merits but it is not technically useful and, indeed, it is far easier to say what education is not than what it is. There is, for example, some general agreement that it must be distinguished from training. The acquisition of such skills as driving a motor vehicle, taking shorthand dictation, operating a lathe, cooking a dinner, controlling one's bowels, responding

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to military commands, and piloting a space-orbiting satellite are important but the acquisition of these skills is not what is properly understood by education. The confusion comes about because such important training tasks can rightly be subsumed under the overall concept of the educational project, but they are at best in the relation of part to whole even though, at times, their pragmatic importance can deceive us into taking them as the whole rather than the subordinate part.

It is also more or less agreed by professional educators that education does not consist primarily in the mere acquisition of knowledge, especially factual knowledge, nor in the dissemination and absorption of information. The operative term here is "primarily", for again it must be conceded that the transmission of facts has a very important part to play in the total business of education. Nor, but now there is no general agreement, would we normally classify as education any sort of indoctrination or conditioning or programming of the learner into a set of values or beliefs or moral codes or ethics. Yet everyone would agree that our acquisition of values, however it occurs, is an integral part of our education, and the teaching-learning of values is certainly somehow subsumed within the larger concept.

Without belaboring the point too much, a sense of the essential complexity of the concept can be conveyed by the following contemporary attempt at definition:

Education is not the art of training and subjugating people to serve the profit of others. It is the art of helping people to know themselves, to develop the resources of judgment and skills of learning and the sense of values needed on facing a future of unpredictable change, to understand the rights and responsibilities of adults in a democratic society and to exercise the greatest possible degree of control over their own fate. To educate is to look for truth, to stir discomfort in the placid minds of the unthinking, to shake ideologies, disturb complacency, undermine the tyranny of anti-intellectual commercialism which reins in the marketplace and in some of our legislatures, to the disadvantage of all of us. To educate is to reject the false analogies of the marketplace, to see justice and equality as noble aims rather than as obstacles to a takeover bid, to insist that human progress has no bottom line.<sup>4</sup>

Even such an extended and deliberative attempt as this cannot, however, be taken as generally definitive of the concept as it is presently understood in modern Western society. Many other authentic efforts would likewise fail to capture universal agreement and would

be open to specific critiques. All of which simply shows that education is a very complex activity indeed and the fact of this complexity can be taken to have implications for educational leadership and administration.

### The Evolution of Education

Educational leadership, the object of this study, is everything that consciously seeks to accomplish educational projects. But what are these projects and how do they emerge from the general or total enterprise? Is there in fact any overall project, any general purpose from which subordinate purposes can be derived? To answer such questions it is necessary to consider, however briefly, the history of the educational project within society.

This history, within Western society, is one of great antiquity. Its development has been spasmodic, moving slowly from classical times, toward rapid and exponential movements within the last century. From the perspective of our own times, it is possible to observe this evolution and discern how the cutting edge of advance shifts from one geographical locus to another. Greece endowed us with the organizational concepts of the Platonic academy and the Aristotelian lyceum, as well as the pedagogical notions of Socratic irony, the dialectic, the syllogism, and inductive and deductive reasoning; all precious ideas alive and integral to our educational culture to this day. Indeed, an historical authority as eminent as Sir Arnold Toynbee has remarked that all of European intellectual history is but a footnote to Plato. Hyperbole aside, it can nevertheless be allowed that the concept of *liberal* education, that is, the education of free men as opposed to slaves, can be traced back directly to the city states of classic Greece. Since then, of course, the concepts of slave and citizen have altered their meanings somewhat. Modern interpretations of liberation and bondage embrace such ideas as wage slavery, economic serfdom, and the totalitarian state but these, it should be noted, do not detract from the basic idea of liberal humanistic education—education which itself is liberating—an idea to which we shall return again and again. For now, let us note that education in this sense is in ultimate essence a pursuit of the verities (truth, beauty, goodness, justice, happiness, self-fulfillment) by those with the leisure or the means to do so. That is to say its aim is *aesthetic*. It could be evaluated as the grandest of human projects and aspirations or, at the other extreme, as a mere gloss upon human activity and effete dilettantism. Regardless of how it is judged, however, it is true to say that this general project remains with us still as a direct heritage from Grecian culture.

The Roman contribution to the development of educational purpose added dimensions of pragmatism and practicality. The concern of the Romans for governance, engineering, law and administration stemmed from imperial responsibilities and was often combined with a military proclivity for physical education. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. It is appropriate here to note the shift from aims of liberal education toward a more vocational emphasis. Roman education is more for the mastery of this world than for its transcendence. A division of value appears. On the one hand, education has terminal value; it is that which constitutes the human *summum bonum*; it is valuable in and of itself. On the other hand, education is instrumental, a means to an end, not an end in itself. In this latter instrumental function it becomes the guardian of entry to professions and occupations. It determines life chances. It sorts sheep from goats; even Greek goats from Roman sheep.

This utilitarian shift towards *economic* purpose in education is both ancient and interesting. The line between service and servitude is sometimes difficult to draw. Modern technology and bureaucracy can create their own form of bondage and a concern with pensions and job security can be as effective a taskmaster as any plantation overseer. Nevertheless, the economic motive is a powerful one and in this light education is often conflated with the concept of training, a concept which can then be rhetorically re-constituted as "vocational education". Once again, the origin of meaning can be traced historically to beginnings in antiquity.

With the fall of Rome and the ensuing centuries in which literacy, science and culture were under the aegis of a church struggling to establish a new but Holy Roman Empire the educational enterprise in the West acquired its third major dimension. This was religious indoctrination and moral conditioning. It is true that prior to the Renaissance the cathedral, monastery and church schools of the medieval period kept the flame of classical learning alive in Europe, but they also invested education with ideological connotations. Education in this sense was not primarily for work, or for aesthetic liberation, but for salvation. What could be more important, more special than this?

It is no accident, then, that a sort of moral onus clings and attaches to the person of the educator down to the present day. And this is as true of the Soviet Union as it is of North America, as of India, as of Africa or Japan. The teacher is to some degree invested with a moral charge or aura and it is this which distinguishes education from other professions and occupations. He or she is in some way an exemplar, or at least the guardian of, a special set of values and this applies whether the learners are graduate students in middle age and mid-career or kindergartners at the beginning of their long educational journey. Whether

this moral modelling extends to educational administrators and educational organization leaders is a question important to this book and one which will be examined in depth later. For now, it need only be observed that the professions of priest and teacher are more closely related than a secular society might normally acknowledge.

By the time of the Renaissance and the discovery of America, the groundwork had been completed for the establishment of modern European culture. Greek glory and Roman grandeur had been rediscovered and revived. The proto-scientific bases of astronomy, mathematics, and medicine had been enriched by direct Islamic contributions. The great universities—Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge—were active and growing. Learning was no longer a clerical monopoly. Vernaculars, especially Italian and English, were beginning to contest, if not displace, the hegemony of Greek, Latin and Hebrew. Europe was hastening toward the Reformation, printing, Modern German, agricultural and early industrial revolution, nation states, the settlement of other continents and the dawn of mass education. Schools now existed for others besides the clergy and the elite. Already they were avenues of upward social mobility for a few from the lower orders, a trend which was to persist and grow. Vocational training, apart from the universities, continued as a stabilizing social force through the perpetuation and modification of the apprenticeship system inherited from the medieval guilds. All of this helped in the growth and development of a bourgeoisie. The religious motive also contributed to educational growth. After the Reformation, literacy became instrumentally valuable for salvation. One had to be able to read as well as merely hear the Word and, later, for example, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was to take basic schooling to the far corners of Empire. Indeed the seeds were being sown for a basic conflict between the religious and the secular aims of education, a conflict of value quite apart from the already established conflict within the secular arm between liberal and vocational purposes.

These divisions became clearly evidenced in the American colonies of the British Empire. Massachusetts, for example, had had tax-supported schools as early as 1647 but they were Biblical in character and religious in primary purpose or motivation. Yet even here, sectarian quarrelling had already led towards secularism. By 1826 a law decreed: "The school committee shall never direct to be purchased or used in any of the town schools, any books which are calculated to favor the tenets of any particular sect of Christians."<sup>5</sup> Shortly after the American Revolution the constitution of the new republic had been amended to declare a separation between church and state<sup>6</sup> and by modern times these initial American moves had developed into a sharp

division between state schools and state education on the one hand, and denominational schools and denominational education of whatever stripe on the other. It should also be noted that within the non-state or private sector of education a further division of aim or purpose existed between denominational and secular or non-religious schools. These divisions of law and philosophy were reinforced by the fiscal power of the state. Eventually, in the Old World as in the New, education became an arm of the state as well as of the church. Nevertheless, the U.S.A. led the way—in Canada, for example, only one Province ever had purely secular school funding and that was British Columbia from the time of Confederation until the mid 1970s. Generally, with the American exception, some mixed form of religious and state schooling persisted until the most recent times.

Many factors contributed to the steady growth of governmental intrusion into education. Imperial demands (British, French, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Turkish, Portuguese and, latterly, American and Japanese) for political-administrative elites fostered elite systems of schooling. Industrial revolution fostered technical education and training, as did scientific progress in general. Moreover, even as the religious function of education came to be undercut, a corresponding demand for nationalistic indoctrination was a by-product of competitive nation-states in the era of imperialism. Education had both centrifugal and centripetal parts to play, both in holding together the various pastiches of Empire and in developing the counter-tendencies of movements for national and ethnic independence.

All of this may have been dimly perceptible throughout the Victorian Pax Britannica or it may have been hidden from close-up view, but in any event it was cast into sharpest relief by the apocalyptic event of the Great War. After that tragic watershed, state education ceased to be an idealistic prerogative and became instead a political imperative. The world, and education with it, had changed irrevocably.

### Educational Ideals

The First World War transformed Western culture. Before that cataclysmic event there had been a culture of optimism. Europe had extended itself and its influence throughout the world, populating the empty territories of the Americas, extending imperial dominion over palm and pine elsewhere. In an ethos of progressivism, meliorism and liberalism, education tended to be seen both as a white man's burden and at the same time the key to universal harmony and prosperity for everyone—colonizer and colonized, master and servant—in the long

run. After the 1914–1918 war, a war from which it can be said with some certainty that Europe, and perhaps the world, never fully recovered, the ethos changed along with the political realities. New ideologies were born: first Communism in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution and later, partly in reaction, Fascism in Western Europe. Religious orthodoxy weakened as scientific materialism strengthened. The masses were recognized not simply as political entities but as educable, malleable entities and new techniques of propaganda were devised to serve the ends of political control and manipulation; techniques assisted by all the artifices of the new media of communication. State education was now pervasive and generally superseded older, more traditional, and private forms. Hitler Youth, Young Pioneers, Komsomols—a host of organizations extended propaganda from the adult domain to the youth cohorts of society. The idealist educational philosopher Giovanni Gentile became Mussolini's minister of education and sought to implement his own educational ideals through the system of Fascist schools. In the United States schools assumed a special function: the integrating of foreigners into the immigrant nation. There was the ideal of a melting pot and the ideal of emergent Americanism. These ideals persist. Small American schoolchildren with hands upon their hearts still daily pledge allegiance to the flag. There is also a lively pre-emptive movement in the U.S.A. to establish English as the official language of that country by constitutional amendment. In short, anywhere and everywhere, there is a nationalist statist role for education. Education is expected to serve what might be called political moral imperatives.

The interbellum period also included the great economic depression of the 1930s, a worldwide slump which affected all nations and which only effectively ended with the outbreak of a second world war. Social experience in this period reinforced obvious linkages between the educational and the economic structures of society. The linkages were complex and embraced such contradictory factors as a newly created unemployed intelligentsia that constituted a political liability and established the notion that the education system, of whatever country, provides an avenue for upward social mobility, access to careers, and general opportunities for meritocratic betterment. Schools and colleges entrenched themselves as *de jure* guardians of entry to the professions and *de facto* guardians of access to the more rewarding work roles in society. This development was enhanced by the general increase in all sectors, public and private, of bureaucratization. The education system, public and private, consequently assumed a social function of gatekeeper and distributor of life chances amongst the oncoming generations. To the classical liberating purpose of education had now been added the modern function of sociological sorting.

After World War II there was a realignment of political power and a re-establishment of order. The interrelated and interdependent nature of the global economy and ecology became increasingly apparent and in the decades after 1945 technological advances in communication brought about a quasi-educational result described by McLuhan as the emergence of a "global village." Mass information is correlated with mass education and the obvious dependence of the new technology on educational bases, combined with the increased participation of adults in formal and informal educational experiences of all sorts, led to easy acceptance of the concept of lifelong learning. This at least was the perception in the developed nations; politicians clearly perceived the relationship between educational achievement and national status.

Paradoxically, this impetus toward state expenditures on education can, at least in part, be interpreted as a kind of reincarnation of the motivations of classical liberal education. To free men to pursue higher ends it was first necessary to liberate them from economic servitude. Looked at in this way, vocational training was itself a liberal art. Once economic ends were accomplished, the curriculum could then explode into all those areas now so typical of smorgasbord adult education: learning for personal and aesthetic or hedonic reasons rather than learning instrumental to job acquisition or credentialing.

Throughout these recent historical developments it has always been possible, in all countries, to observe a strong current of idealism amongst professional educators, even in the most pragmatic of societies. Thus Goodlad, in concluding his analysis of the purposes of American schools, declares an idealistic faith:

Central to all that has preceded is my belief in the common school. I regard it not simply as desirable for but as essential to the preservation and cultivation of our democratic way of life and our political democracy. The fact that as individuals and as a nation we have not lived up to our ideals in no way diminishes either the attractiveness of these ideals or their continuing appeal in guiding our actions. Indeed, the obvious gap between the two should challenge the best in us all. The fact that our schools have too often reflected our shortcomings rather than our ideals is no justification for expecting little of them or doing away with them. It is, I think, no accident that this democracy still survives in spite of our errors of commission and omission, and that we have one of the most comprehensive, accessible systems of schooling in the world.<sup>7</sup>

*This authority immediately goes on to say that "The prime role of our schools is the development of the full potential of each individual" (my italics).*

And, from a contrasting standpoint, in Fascist Italy, the philosopher Gentile expounds:

The school, this glorious inheritance of human experience, this ever-glowing hearth where the human spirit kindles and sublimates life as an object of constant criticism and of undying love, may be transformed, but cannot be destroyed.<sup>8</sup>

Such sentiments as these could be culled from the educational literature of every nation that possesses such a literature. Educational idealism knows no ideological boundaries. It seems fair to say, then, from the larger historical perspective, that education has about it an idealistic and humanistic quality which renders it distinctive and special among the occupations and callings of men. No other subset of human activity and organization possesses quite the same degree of commitment to the totality of purposes of mankind. Somehow education seems to be pre-requisite, co-requisite, and post-requisite to all of the other affairs, interests and occupations of culture. The crassest of politicians, the most banal of Babbits, will pay lip-tribute to this generality. Indeed one might well be forgiven for taking this argument to its limits and maintaining that education was the end that continued to be sought when all other subordinate ends such as security, health and wealth had been accomplished. As a learning species, the progeny of *homo educans* have gained the evolutionary advantage over all other species and massive dominion over the natural planetary environment. There is considerable consensus that the perpetuation of human species is now itself a very direct function of education and, hence, of educational leadership. The history of education also suggests that such leadership is likely to be imbued with a special degree of idealism, quite apart from any pragmatic concerns about survival.

### The Constellation of Purposes

Education must ultimately be defined in terms of its ends, its purposes. These constitute its imperatives. They shape and dictate its means. Our survey of educational history, curtailed and abbreviated though it must be, illustrates the three strands of purpose which have governed the educational endeavor from earliest times. These strands can be classified as the aesthetic, the economic, and the ideological.

#### Aesthetic Education

By the aesthetic purposes of education are meant those ends primarily associated with self-fulfillment and the enjoyment of life. Much falls within this rubric. The basic curriculum remains that of the

liberal arts and the humanities but it can also be said to include the tool subjects of literacy and numeracy as well as much of the content of adult education. Sports and the entertainment arts are likewise means to the aesthetic ends of education. The central classical idea of "liberation" remains a valid component of this strand of purpose even though modulated in a variety of hedonic and even utilitarian ways. We should neither discount, however, nor disvalue in any way the hedonic side of things; hedonism, the seeking of pleasure as distinct from the seeking of happiness, is a fundamental part of human nature. It cannot be dismissed as trivial. In practical terms this might mean that bridge classes for senior citizens are as honorable as the study of history by statesmen and scholars for the avoidance of future folly. Aesthetic purpose is however only rarely pure and more generally is inextricably intertwined with the other major strands of educational purpose.

#### Economic Education

All vocational education or training is economic in motivation. In crudest terms people undertake this sort of education with the manifest end of making money. The apex of this educational system is of course the universities where induction into the major professions is tightly controlled. The curriculum associated with this purposive strand permeates the entire spectrum of educational activity. Thus, while the first days of schooling may be construed as aesthetic wherein the aim is to impart initial literacy and numeracy to the learner, still this aim is also instrumental and prerequisite to further progress throughout the structured educational system and thus to the ultimate economic status of the learner. So in that advanced educational nation, Japan, fierce competition begins as early as entry into kindergarten. It may indeed be liberating and rewarding for the Japanese infant to master his first thousand characters; it will certainly enhance his enjoyment of life, but it may also partially determine the capitalized yen value of his discounted lifetime earnings.

The interdependence between aesthetic and economic education can also be illustrated in the relations between, say, medical research and quality of life. Medical science is in general a highly remunerative and intensely professional occupation. The fruits of its labors, however, also redound to the extension of human life and improved capacity for the enjoyment of that life. In this sense it performs a liberating and aesthetic function; its purposive emphasis can be considered as aesthetic education at one remove. The same holds true for engineering, accounting, aviation and possibly all of the practical arts. Conceptually, however, there is a difference between learning to earn and earning to learn.

#### Ideological Education

It has always been a function of education to transmit the culture of the society in which it occurs. This has always been so. It is as true of aboriginal education as it is of the most advanced nation-state. The impulse to perpetuate and advance a nationalistic spirit, to inculcate rising generations with a nationalistic (or euphemistically *patriotic*) ethos is universal. It has been only mildly tempered, if at all, by the realities of international organizations such as the United Nations, or by the realities of multi-national conglomerates and cartels, or even by the stark realities of super-power nuclear weaponry. The thrust of this purposive aspect of education extends into all levels of educational structure although perhaps with a major emphasis in the earlier years of the educational process. As has been said apocryphally of Catholic educators, the principle seems to be, "Give me the first years of a child's life and I give you the man."

Although this purpose can be interpreted psychologically as in-group indoctrination it is usually complemented or supplemented by religious concerns which may themselves be either sacred or secular. Catholic nations seek to ensure the propagation of orthodoxy. Communist states consciously place education at the service of their political ideology. Fundamentalist Islam relies especially on Koranic schools. The rabbi is an archetypical educator in Judaic culture. Even the most liberal and laissez-faire of democratic countries look to their educational structures to imbue youth with at least a modicum of patriotic and citizenship ideals. Moreover, quite apart from any ideologies, there is a universal concern with moral education. Formal educational organizations share with the family a primary responsibility in this large and difficult task. It is well established that schools operate according to a hidden as well as an overt curriculum and these curricula reinforce each other in the perpetuation of an ethos or system of cultural values. All such education can be classified as serving the ideological strand of purpose. This aspect of purpose, given its direction toward the inner life and emotional experience of learners, given also the amenability of those learners to indoctrination, again supports the claim that education is a special sort of activity, closely akin to though not identical with the work of churches, synagogues, mosques and temples. Even in the most thoroughly secularized societies and in formally atheistic systems such as the Soviet Union, the moral dimension of ideological purpose persists. This fact carries over to the perceived status of administrators and leaders. It does not necessarily invest them with moral stature but it imposes upon them a subtle kind of onus that has a distinctive moral charge.

This third strand of purpose also rarely appears in pure form. Normally the aesthetic or economic emphases are salient. Even where the ideological purpose is clear-cut and dominant it is usually intertwined with and modulated by the other strands. It is this normal condition of confusion or mixing of purpose which goes to explain the general difficulty of polemic in the field of education. Administrators need to know the purposive source of criticisms that arise from various client and member groups. This may by no means be immediately apparent even to those who are themselves the source of complaint. Demands for foreign language training, for example, may be presented on cultural grounds or ideological grounds—a liberal belief in bilingualism for example (French in Canada, Spanish in the U.S.A.)—while the real motivations are economic (career opportunities for offspring). Furthermore, it becomes only too easy for the skilled rhetorician to shift the ground of argument from one strand of purpose to another in order to contest or confound the opposition.

#### The Special Nature of Education

Schools, colleges and universities have obvious differences from hospitals, factories, shops and barracks. The really crucial distinctions, however, run deep and are more profound. All human organizations, whether they are simple or complex, exist to achieve purposes. These purposes in turn are rooted in human desires or values. Each organization seeks to serve its members and its clientele by altering the world in such a way as to realize those values.

Military and police forces have a legal monopoly of violence granted them by the state so that they can achieve the desired state of security (by defending against enemies or controlling offenders). Here one can say the basic value is security. The medical establishment exists to maintain and promote public health; its basic value is health. Government with its ministries and bureaus exists to maintain and advance the general public welfare. Its basic value is the public interest. Commerce, trade and industry generate organizations whose fundamental purpose, whatever the rhetoric to the contrary, is to make a profit. The basic value here is wealth, economic wealth. Institutionalized religions seek through their organizational forms to promote and propagate their doctrines and actualize such values as salvation, liberation or enlightenment.

What then is the basic value of educational organization?

It can be seen from the foregoing that non-educational organizations subscribe primarily to one or the other of the three strands of educational purpose, whereas education subscribes to all of them. It

seeks to establish and enhance the values of security, health, the common good, the interest of the state, the capacity for profit, wealth of all sorts and the highest values of philosophy, ideology and religion. It is in this sense the most general human pursuit. If we were to seek a term for the basic educational value we might call it fulfillment. This term is both sufficiently precise and sufficiently imprecise for the scope of our present analysis. Education has been shown to be a general set of human behaviors and experiences organized about three categories of purpose: aesthetic, economic, and ideological. It can also be said to subserve all human values and to be prerequisite to their fulfillment. It is this all-inclusive quality which makes education so special and, at the same time, so *human*. Because of this relevance to all aspects of the human condition, education is also invested from the outset with a moral character. Through it we are all inducted into the ethos of our particular culture. Through it we acquire our moral dimension. On it we depend for our livelihood and the quality of our life. And if education is this special then it follows that educational leadership ought likewise to be special. It is, in fact, a moral art.

This chapter argues that educational leaders should be aware of the deep roots of purpose which underlie their organizations. Analytically, these embrace three major strands of purpose: aesthetic, economic and ideological—purposes which in turn correlate with three types of value to be explicated later. Leadership is always a function of value and of commitment to organizational value or purpose.

In this chapter we have explored the question, What is education? In the next chapter we shall turn more directly to the question, What is educational leadership?