

THE CONTEMPORARY REVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

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The present revolution in education . . . is . . . complicated, . . . penetrating, . . . widespread, . . . profound. Its urgency and its depth may be judged from the fact that until this century, no society could afford to educate more than a handful of persons, whereas now no nation can survive unless almost all its citizens are educated to the limit of their potential. We have been forced to move suddenly from dependence on an educated elite to dependence on an educated citizenry and this demands profound changes in our philosophy, our structures, our methods, our priorities. Concrete evidence of these changes can be found in the reform movements in Europe during the past twenty years, where a Royal Commission has been continuously at work in Sweden; in France, beginning with the Langevin-Wallon Commission; and, in the United Kingdom, where the Butler Act of 1944 has been followed by studies conducted by the Crowther, Newsom and Robbins Committees and profound changes in structure and policy. Anyone who has had the privilege of visiting these countries periodically during these years is well aware that these are no superficial or transitory movements, they are proofs of the awareness of new conditions which were well summarized in the Report of the Bellagio Conference on Economic Development in Europe, held in 1961:

Europe will have to give its people what would until recently have been thought of as a luxury educational system . . . This implies that education for many people will become longer . . . and it should give everybody a general basis for culture, essential alike for economic growth and human dignity . . . For unless we do so, Europe will fall behind, and in falling behind it will become culturally, socially and economically underdeveloped.

This is, of course, only one aspect of the revolution. No less important or profound are the changes in our attitudes toward learning. Research in social psychology and more specialized fields has produced new theories of the processes of thinking and learning, new appreciation of human abilities and new understanding of their measurement, new methods for developing certain skills, and a firmer basis for developing interest and motivation.