

# **CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION**

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Changing Conceptions of Education by Ellwood P. Cubberley

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OF EDUCATION**



**Riverside Educational Monographs**

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OF EDUCATION**

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### *Experience and progress*

THE proper means for reconstructing our social institutions are best suggested by a careful accumulation and analysis of our institutional experiences. In every work of political and social reform, we are more or less conscious of the past failures and successes of our instruments. But such consciousness is not altogether deliberate and thorough. With communities, as with individuals, much is forgotten or neglected; while other fragments of our past, emphasized beyond their true importance, influence us unduly. Thus many of our social advances are gained through a radicalism that has finally to be tempered by the work of the reactionary. Such progress, the product of conflict and partisanship, is costly. It arises out of an imperfect mode of bringing our experiences to bear upon our problems. In the reconstruction of states, schools, vocations, and other social instruments, we need a wider ac-

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culmination and a saner interpretation of the facts of our educational history.

### *Experience and school reform*

The institution of education does not escape the full force of the principle suggested. Indeed, educational conditions are such in America to-day that one might be disposed to say that this principle has a special and peculiar applicability to the problem of school reform; at least, there is no institution where a rational use of institutional experience could effect more good.

### *A static view of education*

We have among us those who have become keenly sensitive to the evils of the many changes in the methods of our schools. They have perhaps been over-sensitive to the very necessity of rightful change. Seeing that our schools have been alternately pulled and hauled by radical and reactionary, and failing to perceive the slow but certain progress that has taken place, they have wearied of change in educational theory and practice. Impatient of the hasty wrangling and contention, these sigh for a peaceful and fixed



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programme in education. As temperament or rearing dictates, they offer one of two modes for its achievement : (1) the return to the educational system of some past century, or (2) the solution of the entire matter once and for all by some council of wise and agreeable experts. Nothing save educational history alone can well reveal the naive futility of such notions of what is best in education.

### *An unstable view of education*

There are those, too, among us whose error is quite the reverse of these we have just mentioned. They are impressed by the panorama of the decades, by the changing nature of man's economic and spiritual surroundings. They perceive life as ever new, calling for some modern virtue or skill in man, and for a new training which will provide it. Each change in life must be met, and the school must be quick to provide the power. The new necessities dominate ; the old and the eternal are forgotten. So the school, disregarding the value of stability, must flit from one purpose to another. It is civic training to-day, moral training to-morrow, and industrial training the day

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after. For these, too, educational experience has its message, — the lesson of poise and permanence, — its revelation of the abiding powers in men and the continuing necessities in all ages.

### *A preliminary historical interpretation*

It would be impossible to offer in a small volume any complete answer to the tendencies of unrest in our educational thought. But it is possible to present a preliminary interpretation of American educational history which will suggest the fundamental nature of many of our present problems. Even the cursory reader of the essay here presented must perceive that ours cannot be a static system of education. Change is the inevitable accompaniment of schools which are the defense and the support of a progressive democratic society. But change need not be whimsical and irrational, the fruit of mere radicalism or mere reaction. A deliberate and thorough consciousness of our educational past with all its lessons for the present and future will reveal the stable relations that exist between the school organization and social conditions.

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In these days when some of our educational workers are doubting the power of educational history to give practical guidance to the teacher, it is a particular pleasure to offer this illuminating historical treatment of the problem of educational reconstruction.