

# **PROBLEMS OF EDUCATIONAL READJUSTMENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649366385

Problems of educational readjustment by David Snedden

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**DAVID SNEDDEN**

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BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
*The Riverside Press Cambridge*

41947

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The Riverside Press  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
U. S. A.

## PREFACE

How shall education be made efficient? Undiscriminating critics have always condemned the schools for their failure to produce a higher type of men and women; but now the large majority of educators are themselves convinced that the traditional processes of training and instruction are far from rendering efficient educational service. In all directions men and women, moved by the vision of a brighter future on earth, are striving to promote human well-being. Education is but one of the phases of this newer social economy. It, too, is certainly capable of being made more purposeful, more scientific, less blind in its methods, less doubtful as to its results.

But educational processes can be improved only as particular phases or fields of education are singled out for consideration and constructive effort. It is probable, for example, that American primary education, judged by valid



standards, would be found to be far more efficient than that designed for young persons from twelve to fourteen years of age, or that designed for youths from fourteen to eighteen years of age. Again, careful analysis might show that the customary education of the high school is fairly effective for that minority who are qualified to pass to institutions of higher learning; while for the large majority, to whom it represents the final stage of systematic cultural education, it may be of little actual service. The problem is one to be considered as it touches particular groups of children or particular aims to be realized.

In each of the following papers a particular educational problem is isolated for purposes of analysis and discussion. In each case the problem is one growing out of contemporary efforts to render education more effective by defining purposes or aims in a scientific manner, and to secure methods designed to achieve these purposes.

There can be but little question that the most characteristic weakness of American edu-

cation, as that concerns young persons from twelve to eighteen years of age, is to be found in its failure to formulate valid aims. Being guided by no sufficient aims, it is inevitable that the educational practice followed shall waver between the Scylla of custom-made (and therefore blind) method on the one hand, and the Charybdis of purely empirical device on the other.

The following papers, with one exception, treat of but a few of the fundamental problems growing out of the unscientific aims of contemporary education as that is designed for adolescents. What do we mean by culture, social efficiency, or liberal education? What is vocational education, and how is it related to general education? What are some broad principles of method by which profitable results are to be achieved? These questions are at least implicit in the discussion of each topic presented.

The papers have been written with a view to provoking further discussion of the questions involved. If it be true that in the field

of general secondary education we have as yet few aims that are educationally serviceable or valid, then we must address ourselves to this field of study before we can either determine subject-matter or elaborate right method. An illustration may serve to make this clear.

If, for example, we ask the question as to why girls should, as a condition of graduating from the ordinary high school course, be required to study algebra, we shall be given two sorts of replies, each based on certain conceptions of educational aim. The first answer will be to the effect that algebra is a necessary part of a secondary education, that it is prescribed for admission to college, etc. But if it be further asked why the subject is required in secondary education or for admission to college, we receive the familiar replies that the study of algebra has peculiar merit as a means of "training the mind," "giving culture," "leading to a comprehension of the universe," "serving as a foundation for vocational efficiency," etc.

It is evident that no school subject can