TOWARDS EDUCATION OF A NEW GENERATION:
SOME THOUGHTS

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This paper is more related to policy making than specific experimental findings and is based on personal educational experience accumulated over many years. Although the ideas are not necessarily novel, they merit a renewed consideration and a reformulation in terms of present needs and problems.

The three divisions of the paper are: (1) a short and concise description of some characteristic features of modern society pertinent to education in general, and to early childhood education in particular; (2) a discussion of the importance of the cognitive processes to the general adaptation of the individual living in such a society; and (3) some suggestions of ways in which society should--and could--cope with the educational problems which are of paramount value to the individual and society.

We should start by a statement which expresses a well-known phenomenon: The more a society is technologically developed, the greater the number of individuals in the society who have severe difficulty in keeping pace with societal demands. More and more individuals are considered to be low achievers or underachievers, and the educational system in countries with high technology has to deal with masses of students considered problematic from different points of view. More traditional societies which are less achievement-oriented are less confronted with problems of inadequate functioning, especially in the cognitive area. The etiological factors for this phenomenon are probably inherent in modern life, and some of them are noteworthy.

For example, a society with a high level of technological devel-
velopment is a society of specialization. In other words, appropriate social and professional placement requires higher levels of basic functioning that necessitate long-term and continuous investment both from the individual and from the society. Professions are undergoing a continuous—and rapid—process of differentiation that places considerable strain upon the individual, both while striving towards placement and in order to progress or even to maintain his acquired position. Specialization is based upon the capacity of the individual to perform tasks of a high level of complexity, to handle complicated technical instruments, to adapt them continuously to new situations and difficulties, and to make rapid decisions based upon highly differentiated configurations of relevant variables.

Another aspect of this problem is the explosion of knowledge. Education today—even though less than 30 years ago—is still burdened with a heavy load of routines accumulated over many centuries of teaching, namely, teaching towards knowledge of "facts." Certainly, knowledge of facts is important to the individual, but today there is growing awareness that knowledge of facts alone is not sufficient for proper functioning and adequate adaptation of the individual to life. Rapid changes in society require continuous reevaluation of what is "true" or "important to know." It becomes evident that more important than a body of facts may be the individual's capacity to adapt knowledge of how to learn and how to benefit from being exposed to a world of stimuli with which he must cope, while maintaining his role of a subject that acts upon his environment. Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffmann and Miller (1980) list a variety of cognitive functions which are deemed necessary prerequisites for appropriate cognitive functioning of the individual while he is being confronted with highly complex configurations of stimuli. The acquisition of these and other appropriate cognitive functions becomes more and more essential and education has made only the very first steps in this direction.

I should introduce at this point an additional variable which is of a sociopsychological nature: anonymity. Modern society is mainly an anonymous society. Dense population conglomerations and highly extended possibilities—as well as motivations—for geographical and social mobility contribute considerably to the development and enhancement of anonymity as a characteristic feature of the individual in society. The individual has to rely heavily upon himself and his own capacities in order to be able to cope with and overcome difficulties in areas of importance to his future or to his current well-being. Anonymity is also considered to have a strong impact upon the value system of the individual because extrinsic social barriers are often weakened, and behavior has to be guided from within, from the interiorized elements of the normative social rules. Anonymity also considerably increases the importance