1. AIMS OF EDUCATION

BY

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WHY WE DEFINE EDUCATIONAL AIMS

Goals and values are not absolute and unchangeable, but must be constantly reviewed in the light of the decisions that men make in a changing society. To discuss educational aims is valuable in that without debate we cannot achieve our stated goals in the field of education; whether we attain these goals will depend upon the attitudes we adopt now and the decisions we make now in planning for the future and in implementing that planning.

Our attempt to define the educational aims of primary education in the 21st century should be viewed in the light of our discussion on the two future alternatives for society, the seeds of which are already contained in the present. The second model of society that we have described is a “participatory democracy”, based upon small group activity and face-to-face relationships among individuals who have abolished the oppression that today alienates man from himself and from his fellow human beings. The main agent of his liberation will have been education. This concept has been clearly expressed by Herbert Marcuse in *An Essay on Liberation*. He believes that “the creation of a new reality” depends not only upon the establishment of the “primary, fundamental institutions of liberation” based on “collective ownership, collective control and planning”, but also upon the development of a “new sensibility, sensitivity against domination; the feeling, the awareness that the joy of freedom and the need to be free must precede liberation”; a “spontaneous” elan, which can become “a radical and revolutionary force” only “as a result of enlightenment, education, political practice – in this sense, indeed, as a result of organisation”.

This “ingression of the future into the present” is made authentic by our new awareness and understanding of the current situation, the
prerequisite for its transformation. We manifest our genuine desire to bring about a new social and human condition by the choice we make of the means by which we hope to attain this goal. "If the socialist relationships of production", Marcuse declares, "are to be a new way of life, a new form of life, then their existential quality must show forth, anticipated and demonstrated, in the fight for their realisation", by the objective and subjective relations which will bind the individuals engaged in this process of change to each other. In the common struggle for social change and, most important, in interpersonal relations, there must be no form of "exploitation". "Understanding, tenderness toward each other" will be the key note. "Only thus will the future be lived as if it were already present".1

In imparting the type of education appropriate to these societal aims, the stress will be upon the need to maximise human potential to avoid dichotomy between the cultivation of the intellect and the social development of children and young people, factors that are closely related to emotional education.

In deciding on the methods of achieving these goals – and thus forming well-rounded personalities – we will have to translate the model we have chosen for the society of tomorrow, "participatory democracy", into educational terms. Recent research on the future of education has highlighted "the concept of participatory planning", a process that involves teachers, students, administrators, parents and the public in the choice, examination and assessment of alternative paths to the goals "toward which we desire to orient our educative conduct".2

THE CURRENT DEBATE ON EDUCATIONAL AIMS

This view of educational aims and of the most suitable method of attaining those aims helps us to understand the substance and implications of recent debates on the purpose of education and the proper choice of educational procedures.

The concept of the school as an institution dedicated to the intellect has played an important role over the past decade. It originated in the anti-pragmatist position taken up by Robert M. Hutchins and a group of educators and writers in the years immediately preceding and fol-