

The Role of the Foundation in Education

1. Past & Present

SLOAN WILSON

BACK in 1911, when Andrew Carnegie gave more than a hundred and thirty-five million dollars "for the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding," that was philanthropy. When, beginning in 1913, John D. Rockefeller and his son gave more than four hundred and sixty-nine million dollars "to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world," that also was philanthropy, although the Rockefellers' efforts, together with Mr. Carnegie's, were already beginning to amount to something a long way removed from a charity bazaar. But when in 1950, the Ford Foundation started operations with nearly ninety per cent of the Ford Motor Company, or more than a half billion dollars, the project was getting too big for even a long word like "philanthropy" to stretch around. After one adds to these three foundations the hundreds of others at work today, the result is a good deal more than philanthropy; it is private management of funds for the public good on a scale never before seen in the world.

The enormous growth of these foundations has been little studied or understood. Fifty years ago, there were only about fifteen American foundations. Estimates of the number today vary tremendously because there is little agreement on the precise definition of a foundation, and the records of many of them are extremely hard to get. Mary H. Kolb, executive secretary of the H. C. Frick Educational Commission in Pittsburgh, wrote not long ago that there were "well over ten thousand." Thé late Edwin R. Embree, who was vice-president of the Rockefeller Foundation and president of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, wrote in 1949 that there were over five hundred *general* foundations, in addition to endowments for special subjects. One thing is certain: the capital controlled by the various foundations runs into billions of dollars. The annual expenditures of those which make their records easily available run into more than \$125,000,000.

This privately controlled concentration of wealth has become a new kind of catalyst which is enabling both private and public institutions to work more effectively for the public good. It is a sort of third force, exerting rel-

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recent years the two traditional guiding forces in American education, private enterprise and government, have been joined by a third force, the educational foundation. It is to this third force that this year's education issue of *The Saturday Review* is especially devoted. In the article at the left, Sloan Wilson traces the part the foundations have played in education since their appearance on the American scene half a century ago and describes some of their present activities; at the right, Clarence H. Faust, president of the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation, considers what is the proper role of an educational foundation. Dr. Faust's discussion is supplemented by an editorial on page 24. On page 16 Robert Lewis Shayon evaluates the work now done in education through radio and television.

atively small power, but using tremendous leverage to help the peculiarly American combination of big government and individual initiative to produce the most.

How have they used this power? This article is certainly too short to review everything the foundations have done in the past half century, or even to summarize what they have done in the field of education alone. But here are a few examples of the way this completely independent third force has pushed government, church, and private agencies.

The early work of the Rockefeller Foundation in causing the reorganization of medical education in this country is perhaps too well known to need description. Less is known, however, about the far-reaching effects of the Carnegie Corporation's plan for the retirement of college professors. It was one of the first projects of the Carnegie Foundation, and certainly sounded like an innocuous enough one—yet it gave the foundation tremendous power over all universities, both private and public. The college had to meet the foundation's standards to receive the benefits of the retirement plan for its faculty—and the benefits were considerable. This power alarmed and even angered many people, and if it hadn't been used so extraordinarily well, it still

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2. Opportunities

CLARENCE H. FAUST

UNLIKE the practice in primitive or ancient societies, education in modern, civilized societies is accomplished by formally structured institutions. The establishment of schools, colleges, and universities involves elaborate organization, expensive and relatively permanent physical equipment, and the development of a profession in which men engage as a career. All this has undoubtedly increased the effectiveness of education, as the substantial support given to modern educational institutions by governments and individuals plainly acknowledges.

From the point of view of the advancement and improvement of education, however, the existence of private and public institutions presents certain disadvantages, among them the difficulty of effecting needed changes. More or less fixed purposes and operating habits govern the support of an established school or college. Teaching and administrative personnel tends to be selected with a view to carrying out these purposes within the framework of the established organization. The physical facilities of educational institutions reinforce the tendency to permanence and the self-perpetuation of their practices.

Under these circumstances, change of educational programs is, as to some extent it should be, difficult. Every leader in education encounters these difficulties daily. Additional obstacles to change arise from the natural desire of the institution's supporters—public or private—to preserve the institution's purposes and program, and also from the limitation of the institution's resources which must first of all be applied to carrying out its established activities. Against these obstacles, changes that would be difficult at best sometimes become impossible. Thus educational institutions tend to lag behind the insights and plans of their leaders and fall short of the needs of the society which has established them.

In this situation lies the great opportunity for the private educational foundation. By providing funds for initiating or accelerating promising experiments or developments in education, by encouraging constructive change rather than by supporting existing programs of education, or by



serving as relief agencies to financially embarrassed institutions, foundations can make their limited resources go farthest and accomplish most. They should therefore devote themselves to experimentation and new developments in education.

If this is their function, certain principles must govern their operation. Foundations must be carefully selective. The annual budget of a large university is many times that of a foundation, yet the foundation has a responsibility to education in general rather than to the program of a single institution. One of its serious dangers, therefore, is what an early officer of the Rockefeller Foundation called "scattribution-giving."

In being selective a foundation must face the difficult problem of the relative importance of projects. The Fund for the Advancement of Education received requests last year which totaled thirty times its resources. Most of these requests, certainly far more than could be granted, were meritorious. Since a foundation cannot support all the interesting and useful plans proposed to it, it must select a relatively small number of critically important areas in education on which to concentrate its efforts. To do this wisely and effectively it desperately needs, from all sources, the best advice it can secure.

If a foundation violates the principles of selection and concentration, it cannot avoid an ineffective dispersal of benefits or a haphazard and accidental application of them. The history of foundations makes amply clear that they have been most useful—as in the case of the Rockefeller Foundation's support of developments in medical education—when they have directed their attention to a small num-

ber of critical developments which could not have found support elsewhere.

ONE of the basic criteria of selection and concentration grows out of the limitation of a foundation's resources in relation to its concern for education in general. In selecting projects and concentrating its resources upon their development, it must consider what influence the particular educational experiment may have, not so much upon the institution or institutions engaging in it, but upon the course of education in general. Will it demonstrate the possibility of similar improvements in other institutions? Will it lead to the development of insight or knowledge that will be generally or widely applicable, as, for example, a project for enriching the education of future teachers might ultimately affect education in many institutions? Or where a new program may not be itself adopted elsewhere nor its particular effects generally felt, does it stimulate general or widespread reconsideration of important problems in education?

Indeed, a third principle of foundation operation might be called the principle of ferment. It is illustrated by the program or project which stimulates attention to or action on a variety of educational problems beyond the immediate focus of the project itself. The interest of the Fund for the Advancement of Education in the project on early admission to college, for example, lay largely in this aspect of it.

This project provides scholarships to enable students to enter college before completing the customary years of high school. In developing and carrying out the experiment, the dozen

participating colleges and universities have been led to re-examine a wide range of basic questions of educational policy and procedure. This project has, moreover, stimulated the planning of other approaches to the articulation of secondary school and collegiate work, notably such projects as that of a group of Eastern preparatory schools and universities for replanning the curriculum of the eleventh through the fourteenth grades as an effectively cumulative whole, and that of the Committee on Admission with Advanced Standing, in which a dozen colleges and a number of secondary schools are working out plans for improvements in secondary education on the basis of which advanced standing will be accorded to students who have the advantage of the improved curriculums.

Similar stimulation has resulted from the project proposed by the colleges of Arkansas in cooperation with the state's Department of Education for preparing public-school teachers by giving them four years of liberal arts education plus a year of internship training for teaching. This project has been followed by new programs in the preparation of teachers at Harvard, Cornell, and the University of Louisville. It seems also to have generated a controversy which may do something to provoke the re-examination of the problems of preparing men and women for the profession of teaching.

If a foundation follows these principles, especially the principle of ferment, it must be prepared for criticism. To perform its proper function, it must take the risk of being attacked, at least for a time. It must also take the risk of being found in error, for the funds of a private foundation are "venture capital." Sure things are likely to find support from more conservative public or private sources. If to avoid the risk of criticism or error, a foundation supports only programs and projects that are already widely approved and generally accepted, it does not fulfil the mission which its unique position both enables and requires it to perform.

I do not want to be misunderstood as imagining that new developments in education depend wholly, or even in major part, upon the operations of foundations. Advancements in education are brought about by the men and women of insight and devotion in our educational institutions who conceive and develop new ideas and who carry out the plans by which education is improved. I am convinced, however, that it is to the support of this aspect of education that an educational foundation should devote its efforts.



—Culver Service.

"Caught Napping"—"advancements are brought about by insight and devotion."