

Child Study for Better Schools

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MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN recently regarding techniques for obtaining data on children in school situations. Check lists have been provided and areas to be explored for obtaining data have been described and illustrated. In spite of such fine help little has actually been done at the all-school, all-city, or all-state level to actually use collected data in the improvement of instruction. Schools have been greatly interested in the improvement of instruction and in ways for obtaining data, but there is a great lack of evidence that such data has been utilized in an over-all corrective program in which changes in instruction have kept pace with increased understanding of children's needs.

This does not imply that no benefit has come as the result of child study. There have been great benefits but principally in the field of educational hygiene. Thinking of the child as a total organism reacting to his environment has brought a consciousness of the place of physical well-being, good hygienic surroundings, and medical inspection and supervision of the health of the children. As a result there is a greater recognition of responsibility for improved nutrition, better care of tonsils, eyes, teeth, adenoids, and orthopedic defects. On the other hand, there is but slight attention on the part of educational philosophers and curriculum makers to the part to be played by the data of child study in instructional improvement.

There are many school situations in which

child study is carried on but which are oblivious to the findings of child study. In a recent survey made in a certain school the average second-grade children were found to have reading levels which corresponded roughly to mid-first year norms. This situation prevails year after year in this school with no evidence that the teachers or the school officials recognize that the reading activities in these first two years are badly related to the needs of the children. Instead of recognizing immaturities and deficient backgrounds as a cause and initiating instruction from this approach, the school goes on year after year assuming that these children are remedial cases and need more of the same thing, namely,—drill, extra time, and pressure activity.

The purposes of this article are (1) to point out certain deficiencies, mainly administrative, which hinder effective child study follow-up, (2) to consider the needs of teachers for a broader understanding of the relationship of child study to instructional improvement, and (3) to point out where emphasis should be placed in summarizing collected data on children so that the recommendations themselves will point the way toward more effective usage.

Existing Deficiencies

curriculum improvement fails to materialize

A viewpoint on the part of teachers and administrators that child-study data provide the best basis for instructional improvement is too often lacking in programs of curriculum development. The purpose of child study is not only to determine what should be done with children to make them fit the instructional program, but also to discover ways and means for fitting the instructional program to the needs of children. Such a viewpoint must be developed and accepted as an operational thesis if child study is to result in better school experiences for children and youth.

all school direction isn't apparent

In many programs where every attempt is

While programs giving emphasis to growth and development have resulted in better health supervision and improved hygienic conditions in today's schools, too little attention has been paid to the part played by the data of child study in relation to instructional improvement. The need for acknowledging the deficiencies which hinder effective use of this data in curriculum programs is stressed by C. V. Millard, Director, Division of Education, Michigan State College, who suggests that one remedy might be fitting the instructional program to the needs of the child rather than fitting the child to the program.

made to build efforts toward instructional improvement on the results of child study, an obstacle is the lack of over-all or all-school direction and administration. The teacher who works alone without administrative direction and encouragement can accomplish child study only. A better understanding of children can perhaps result, but there can be no broad remediation or program overhauling in terms of ideas suggested by the collected data.

real understanding of children is lacking

Another current deficiency is the lack of understanding of children on the part of teachers. It must be admitted that great progress has been made toward understanding of children and their needs. There is a great deal of evidence of glib phrases used by teachers such as "the whole child goes to school", "you can't parcel out the child, one part for one teacher, another part for another", etc. This is all well and good but not sufficient. The implications of such concepts must be fully explored and understood before real understanding results.

plans disregard over-all needs of the child

Inability of both teachers and administrators to recognize data in terms of the needs of the whole child is still common. In the main, most conventional recommendations or summations on child-study data fail to see the child in relation to his total environment. Recommendations usually point out the need for remedial work of one kind or another, the need for social adjustment, or else become entangled with a mass of detail which at best is merely interesting anecdotal reading.

Organizing for Improvement

clinics replace teacher's meetings

The first proposal for improved follow-up is the substitution of child-study clinics in place of the routine weekly staff meeting. Such clinics can easily be substituted for the many conventional teachers' meetings where administrative considerations or reading of notices occupy most of the time. It is true that during the war years the elementary school assumed additional and important responsibilities in connection with the war program. As these activities are eliminated and meeting time can again be directed toward professional activities, it is to be hoped that the time available can be utilized effectively

and at a higher professional level that formerly was the case.

An elementary principal, or a home-room teacher may assume responsibility for the direction of the weekly clinic. One meeting each week, dealing only with one child, and participated in by all personnel directly concerned with the child in question, will represent a start in this direction. It is likely that first cases will be those children whom teachers think of as problem children in that they are problems to the teachers. As the program develops, teachers will learn to select cases who constitute the *real problem group*,—the maladjusted, the extremely ingrown type of child—rather than merely the noisy and the annoying.

Such clinics should consider all available child-study data. When so used, cumulative personnel data plays an important role in attempting to interpret the child. When all the evidence is in and has been considered, recommendations should be made which have as their objective the best possible adjustment of the child to his problems and surroundings.

curriculum efforts utilize child study

Curriculum makers are beginning to discover that real instructional reorganization is a technical job involving the study of child needs. This is true regardless of the age, grade, or maturity of the child. Curriculum making is turning from an activity of pure rationalization toward an activity in which objective data is the basis on which instructional reorganization is brought about. The kindergarten and the nursery school are the only spots in which this point of view has rather universally been applied. When second-grade teachers, sixth-grade teachers or high-school teachers also apply it, curriculum making will become a scientific rather than a rationalistic performance.

Application of this concept endows personnel records, or child-study records with two purposes. They provide the data by which discussion will direct itself toward providing the best possible adjustment of the child to his environment as well as that by which curriculum construction and instructional reorganization can take place on a scientific level.

longitudinal study brings results

Entrenched practice, which makes cumulative study ineffective or non-existent at all, is the emphasis upon the idea held by many

administrators, that the main purpose of child-study data is to facilitate transfer of the child from school to school or from city to city. Most administrators are concerned, perhaps because of pressures on them, with the number of credits earned or the child's I.Q., rather than with questions as to whether the child can "think", what he "thinks", or whether he is adequately socially adjusted. As a result we have thumb-nail sketches on grade-level in arithmetic, I.Q., deportment, and other data which are of a cross-sectional status or profile nature, rather than the longitudinal developmental pattern substantiated by anecdotal records, journals and observations.

On the other hand, child study will not progress very far on a statewide basis until child-study activity, which includes studying files on children, writing behavior journals, administering, scoring, and interpreting measurement data becomes a recognized part of the teacher's school day. Teachers are at present over-assigned to dealing with the academic aspects of instruction and under-assigned to instructional aspects dealing with the children involved. And further, "preparation" as usually regarded is also needed in respect to dealing with children.

Teachers frequently debate whether data collected by one teacher should be handed on to the next teacher of the child. Many are likely to state that they want to start at "scratch" with little Johnny, that they don't want to be prejudiced by what other teachers have said about him. Others say that it is unfair to the child to hand on observations about him which may come from prejudiced teachers, for example, from teachers with whom Johnny has been a great trial.

There is little doubt that in unorganized child study programs much of the data collected by the average teacher is prejudiced and that observations are available on a certain child because he has been annoying and trying. Teachers tend to select cases for their observations and recordings that are noisy, aggressive, and exasperating.

Teachers need not seriously worry about moving into a longitudinal study program because of the disadvantages cited. Studies are available that show great improvement on the part of teachers in eliminating prejudices and in becoming more objective in their observations. This worry can be eliminated by

carrying on an in-service program during the period of study. Any teacher who wishes to direct efforts toward such a program is quite aware that personal deficiencies in this kind of work can be eliminated. The clinics already mentioned, and the discussion therein in which constant pressure is maintained to get at evidence supporting generalizations does much toward weakening the arguments against cumulative records.

*teachers live with children
for longer periods of time*

A recent innovation which perhaps has resulted from the child-study movement in education is one of great importance although not yet adopted to any great extent. It is the idea that a teacher should remain with a given group of children for a longer period of time than the traditional one year.

The problem of adjustment between teacher and learner in the conventional school is one that is not only difficult but also inefficient. The teacher has the job of learning to know each individual and likewise has the responsibility for learning to know the group. In a sense a grade, home room, or group is a family, and as a family finds itself needing to adopt a new parent each year. Such a task is one which involves all kinds of delicate relationships between the children themselves and their new teacher.

On the other hand, it is just as difficult for the teacher to adjust to new groups each year. Perhaps no one but the teacher who has done this year after year realizes the tremendous differences between those groups of forty that come and go so regularly. The weakness in the idea suggested is found in the individual differences among the teachers. Children would protest and parents would actually rebel if their children had to have "Miss Smith" for one or two more years. This is a weakness without a doubt. It is, however, a weakness in teacher recruitment and selection, in teacher education and a weakness in a policy which covers up inefficiency and makes it possible for children and parents to endure a teacher for one year but not for more.

The teacher-pupil relationship is the only professional relationship which operates in this manner. People do not change doctors each year, nor do they change their ministers, husbands or wives, quite so often.

There need be only negligible space used for advancing the idea of efficiency in the

plan. If a child-study program requires a sacrifice of time, if it requires endless hours to study and to understand children, and if observations recorded over such a short period of time are inaccurate, perhaps prejudiced, and superficial, why should the present scheme of yearly making and breaking alliances be perpetuated?

Needless to say, those schools who have experimented with the idea discover that not only are the child-study techniques improved but so is the instructional program. The child for example who didn't read in the first grade, does begin in the second grade. His teacher knowing his difficulty can provide the right procedures with delicacy and needed caution to make the most of the changing situation. Where instruction and child study both improve, each is making its proper contribution.

flexible promotion scheme is indicated

Another administrative device which facilitates child study and likewise contributes to instructional improvement in the way of better adjustment of children is the provision of an elastic promotion scheme.

The present scheme has two weaknesses. First, it provides promotion at a time which may be entirely unrelated to desired maturities of the children concerned. This point is clearly brought out in examining any group of children promoted to the junior high school. The differences between individuals in such a group is tremendous. The same is true of other groups, particularly those promoted to the first grade from the kindergarten.

Children can easily be placed in more advanced groups whenever maturities with accompanying learning and growth patterns indicate that it should be done if they stay with the same teachers for a longer period of time. In the situation where one teacher remains with a group for several years the idea of promotion is de-emphasized and adjustments and rearrangements in learning groups can be made easily and without the formality required by semester and yearly promotion plans.

In addition, the present plan entrenches ever more firmly, the 100 per cent passing program of most public schools. Schools realize the importance of keeping groups together that are socially homogeneous. As a result this advantage as currently practiced at

set times is accompanied by so many disadvantages and so much criticism that there is danger that the school will regress to academic homogeneity in order to overcome current criticism. Again there is abundant evidence of the fact that until schools have the facilities for matching needs with administrative procedures no child-study program can be truly efficient.

Improving Our Understanding of Children

It goes without saying that implementation of child-study data would be greatly increased in relation to teacher's understanding of children. Mere knowledge of how to collect data is not enough. Teachers must know something about the environmental and developmental problems of children in order to truly make child-study activity efficient and helpful to the children themselves. What is the meaning of "understanding"? What can the understanding teacher do with child-study data that the non-understanding teacher does not do?

see behavior as a product

Understanding of children on the part of teachers implies that they look at behavior objectively, and because they are objective, they see behavior as a product of the child and his environment. Behavior is not something put on by the child to please or to annoy his teacher but is seen as something caused. Behavior is regarded as the cumulative product of the total environment of the child reacting to his potentialities, attitudes, and emotions. As stated by Prescott:¹

... This view of human behavior holds that a child's actions can be understood if his relevant past experiences are known, if his present situation is analyzed in terms of what it means to him, and if his desires and hopes for the future are taken into consideration. It also implies that every child is educable, that unacceptable behavior can be changed and that desirable and effective action can be evoked. This, we think, can be accomplished by arranging conditions and situations that are appropriate to the child's developmental level, capacities, and needs, by maintaining relationships with him that are supporting and reassuring, and by providing him with experiences that help

¹ Prescott, Daniel, and Associates, "Helping Teachers Understand Children", *Understanding the Child*, No. 3, Vol. XIV, June, 1945, p. 67.

him to understand the world and people around him, and that indicate effective ways of acting which he himself can perfect. This point of view is in sharp contrast with the more common conception of child behavior as capricious and impulsive and therefore to be controlled by adults without references to its causes. We believe that teachers find in the idea that behavior is caused and understandable a more reasonable and effective hypothesis for their daily work with children.

look at the individual objectively

Teachers who have an understanding of children respect the rights of the individual child and see in each child potentialities for worthy achievement. The child who falls short, who fails to achieve or who gets into trouble is not looked down upon or is not categorized as bad, but is regarded as a child whose conduct is the product of himself and his environment, *not* the product of himself alone. Such a situation does not imply that bad behavior is glossed over and excused. It is deplored and recognized as an unfavorable symptom, but the child is not regarded as totally to blame. Teachers who "understand" seek to discover qualifying conditions and relationships and attempt to extricate the child from their effects.

recognize individual differences

All teachers who understand children also recognize that each individual is different than any other individual. Individuals differ quantitatively, and qualitatively. They differ in their general pattern of development and they likewise differ in the combinations of factors which influence their pattern of development. In the terms of child study, differences are reflected in body and physiological development, aptitudes, intelligence, achievement, attitudes, and general environmental conditions.

The child at birth is a well-organized, highly complex mechanism. He has not only the mechanics for response but he is also dynamic, reacting to internal and external conditions. Individuals differ at any and every stage of the development both in regard to aspects of growth and in terms of inner satisfactions. And further, individual development at any time is modifiable by experience and by the conditions under which growth takes place.

Stated briefly, each child is a mechanism capable of response to environmental in-

fluences and capable of modifications by such reactions. The understanding teacher is one who appreciates the fact that differences are not necessarily signs of inferiority or superiority but a natural product of the individual and his environment. The understanding teacher not only recognizes this point of view but also strives toward further understanding by constantly attempting to obtain new information on children.

know phases of development

The understanding teacher has a knowledge of the phases of development through which a child passes and of the needs and the instructional processes to be used during various periods of development.

Understanding teachers, for example, are cognizant of the cycle concept of growth and its implications for instruction. The understanding teacher is able to determine whether a child is beginning a phase of growth, whether he is on a rapid rise in his growth pattern, and whether or not he is reaching a plateau or slowing-down period. The understanding teacher realizes that these three periods of growth within a given cycle call for varied instructional organization and methods for implementing learning.

Understanding teachers likewise recognize the interrelationships between different kinds of growth and learning. Such a recognition involves both an attitude and an alertness to any kind of change within the individual as a cue to anticipated change in the total growth pattern of the child.

The understanding teacher, likewise, has discarded concepts of mastery for concepts in which individual potential maxima are the goals of instruction rather than a parroted or rote learning temporarily raised to a mythical mastery level. From this point of view the understanding teacher looks for rises and leveling-off periods in all kinds of growth related to a given cycle of development. Acquisition of skills is anticipated in terms of multiple learning rather than in terms of simple to complex mastery. And further, the understanding teacher realizes the relationship between healthy organismic development and the potentialities for learning.

recognize the responsibility of the teacher

Another characteristic of an understanding teacher is his recognition of the responsibility of the mature in guiding the learning and development of children. The apparent con-

lict between domination and freedom, as an either-or condition, is resolved if teaching is seen as a means for facilitating growth and the function of justified domination as part of such techniques of facilitation. Domination which furthers growth is good, domination which hinders is bad. The same criterion may be used to determine the value of freedom. The exercise of freedom by the individual is good if it contributes to growth. It is bad if it hinders or is an obstacle to growth.

As used by the teacher who does not understand children, domination or control or other adult means for influencing behavior are wrong, not because of their influence on the behavior of the child, but because it is no part of their purpose to use such control in order to facilitate growth or freedom. No one will deny that for the most part, teacher or parent domination is used by adults to restrain children from becoming mature. Few teachers try to hasten the attainment of freedom on the part of their pupils, and few parents try to hasten the attainment of maturity in their children. Resentment and repression, and the wrong therein, is not directed or found in domination itself, but in the repression of desire for self-expression and self-realization.

It is increasingly evident, on the part of understanding teachers and others who deal with children, that when freedom is given, full account must be taken of the total situation and not merely of one aspect of it. Teachers frequently, without understanding the full responsibility of the mature, give children freedom to plan and to create in situations which demand mastery of techniques far beyond the experience of the children concerned. How to learn to acquire the kind of adult control that will further and not hinder maturation of the immature is recognized as a basic responsibility of the understanding teacher.

Making Better Recommendations

The purpose of child-study techniques is to provide the data for recommendations which, when carried out, will bring the child into a more satisfying relationship with his total environment. Case-study data without recommendations are either incomplete or inadequate. This does not imply that every time a teacher writes something down about

a child that a recommendation should be made regarding a major shift in his environmental relationship. Actually this is one of the things that child study is attempting to block. Many teachers make a single observation and are then ready with a number of cures. Recommendations should be forthcoming when a specific objective of study has been accomplished, or at the end of a special comprehensive analysis.

organize data

The first step, or what might be called the preliminary activity in drawing up recommendations, is the organization and study of the collected material. There is a danger that the collection of detailed case data may lead the observer away from a unified picture of the child. A final study and organization of data is essential to free the observer from the danger of becoming lost in a maze of detail.

The observer should attempt to organize his information so that the child can be clearly seen as a unified personality in a definite although perhaps complex relation with his environment.

Recommendations should take into consideration that the child as a growing organism has shifting needs, interests, and social and emotional problems. Many changes will occur in his life pattern, perhaps, in the next few months. In this length of time he will become older, more mature, and possibly even more capable. Recommendations must take the prospective future into consideration. The purpose of recommendations is to provide a guide for matching environmental changes with anticipated organismic changes, and to provide them at a time so that they will be most beneficial to him. The main problem in arriving at recommendations is the problem of timing, of tying in suggested changes with the changing needs of the individual.

recognize development as a factor

The current development of the child is decidedly a factor affecting the practicality of recommendations. To provide cues for interpretation, development can be described as going through certain phases. These may be described as follows:

Plateau period or period of slow growth.

Where reading and other academic and intellectual processes are stressed, the average or lower than average child is apt to be considered as a failing pupil. The child at this period of

development should be given broad background activities rather than emphasis on skill, drill, and other specific academic goals. This is the time for exploration and trips, for dramatization, for socializing, language development, and the like. Children at this level of development should have no formal work in numbers or spelling. If the school requires such a program, frustration, and feeling of inadequacy will be almost inevitable.

Period of rapid learning. A child at this time can learn at maximum levels. Performance at maximum potentiality will not be determined by status standing obtained by profile analysis but by ascertaining whether rapid growth is taking place. Children who are on this level and not performing up to full potentiality have been mishandled earlier and are now lost, covering up by cheating, or simply drifting. Such children provide a case source for intelligent remedial teaching.

Warning should be given the observer regarding children in this phase. Recommendations for these children should take into consideration the fact that some of them are soon moving into a slowing down period, a time at which learning curves will level off, old interests may be dropped, with perhaps a growing indifference to things in which they previously were greatly interested. This implication of the warning is that children who need remedial work may soon arrive at a stage at which many of their efforts are unresponsive and inefficient, and if pressure is included, constitute bad mental hygiene. In a follow-up program of remediation such cases must be watched carefully. Where results are unsatisfactory, remediation should be postponed until another period of growth is reached such as may be found in the last phase.

Period of development in which growth levels off, new interests begin to stir, and the child becomes quite unreliable in performance. Recommendations for remedial work at this time are usually inconsiderate and should be dropped if results are not immediately satisfying. This again is a period of readiness and for instructional implications is similar to phase one.

Period of development in which adolescence is not only budding, but particularly in the case of girls, is very obvious. This is the time when learning and social activities broaden and emotional and social inadequacies and problems become intensified.

see the importance of interrelationships of growth

Another point to be taken into consideration in making recommendations is the question as to the organismic unity of the child.

Some children who are very precocious may have an intellectual performance pattern which entirely outstrips their social and physiological development.

As an illustration, some children are rapid in their intellectual development, somewhat slower in their social and considerably backward in physiological development. Other children may show a close paralleling of development. In this case, beginning points, phases of rapid growth, and plateau periods all parallel each other. These children certainly will provide no problem in regard to placement, whereas children in the previous instance will demand continuous regrouping in order to place them properly. Adequate remediation for these may be found only by placement in homogeneously physiological groupings with most learning activities on an individual basis.

note stability level of the child

A third point to be taken into consideration in shaping recommendations is knowledge of the stability level of the child. Some children are very stable, showing a performance pattern or growth pattern which, when graphed, results in smooth upward trends with but little deviation from the ensuing smooth curve of development. Other children show growth but with deviations up and down from the pattern of development. No one knows whether one is *better* than the other. The child should be considered in terms of his own ranges of performance. If no factors can be discovered which cause this kind of variability, it is quite likely that such performance is normal for this child.

Utilizing These Recommendations

The purpose of child study data is to provide source material from which ideas concerning a program of improvement can be developed. Such ideas are necessarily needed from the standpoint of the individual and from the standpoint of the group.

individual remediation is important

The data of each child observed must be studied to determine how the situation may be improved, in respect to his individual needs. Such recommendations will involve both, (1) doing something toward changing the behavior of the child, and (2) doing something with the environmental situation surrounding the child. Examples of the first.

for example, are, "giving the child more responsibility", "assigning him to the safety patrol", "requiring a remedial class in reading", etc. These are the kinds of things that are generally recommended and the type of prescriptions with which child development people are most familiar.

The second type of treatment is that in which the environment surrounding the child is changed without directly attempting to change the child. Such a change might be "providing a more understanding teacher", "modifying the typical promotion plan", or "transferring pressure from the child toward reforming an antiquated curriculum."

group remediation is also necessary

Knowledge of group treatment both indirect and direct is not as well developed as is individual remediation. The importance of

group psychology is just beginning to be understood. Cliques, group loyalties and conflicts have previously been considered either as supporting or attacking without an analysis of their inner workings, their resources for providing security, for determining codes, standards, and patterns of behavior. It may frequently be discovered that over-all group treatment will produce not only changed group behavior but also, necessarily, changed individual behavior.

It cannot be over-emphasized that the instructional objectives of the school should be carefully compared with the data of child study. Objectives may provide the starting-point for an evaluation of instructional efforts. Child-study data provides a technique for a continuous evaluation of these objectives.



MEMBERS WILL BE INTERESTED in checking the title-page for the names of the new officers of the Board of Directors. You will recall that during the past few months, new state groups have affiliated with the National Organization and have elected members to the Board. Five new Members-at-large have been elected. Gradually the list has been revised to include these new people. Now, we are also including the new Executive Committee which took over its duties in March. The new officers of the Executive Committee are: *President*, Bess Goodykoontz, Assistant Commissioner, U. S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C.; *Second Vice-President*, Paul Misner, Superintendent of Schools, Glencoe, Illinois; and new member of the Executive Committee, Mary A. Haddow, Director of Elementary Curriculum, Youngstown, Ohio.

Continuing members are: Gordon N. Mackenzie, Director, Institute for School Experimentation, Teachers College, New York; James S. Hosis, 1521 Highland Road, Winter Park, Florida; Edgar M. Draper, Professor of Education, University of Washington, Seattle; and R. Lee Thomas, Supervisor of Elementary Schools, State Department of Education, Nashville, Tennessee.

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