

Learning Comes Through Living

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One of the pressing questions in education is how the secondary school can actually meet the needs of today. This account, by Miles E. Cary, Principal, McKinley High School, Honolulu, Hawaii, is not a pattern to be followed to the letter, but it does reveal the development—over a considerable period of time—of some ways in which these needs can be fulfilled. It will be interesting to those who are eager to find concrete examples illustrating ways in which secondary schools can work toward the solution of this problem.

MANY TEACHERS and principals over the country today are truly dissatisfied with the way they are "teaching" democracy and are eager for suggestions pointing toward the progressive development of their schools into more effective "laboratories of democracy." It is for this audience that some of the achievements and processes toward a better teaching of democratic citizenship at McKinley High School¹ covering a period of approximately sixteen years are described. In order to see the way in which democratic living gradually came into being it is necessary to go back a number of years. For it is only through continuous development and growth that efforts toward providing a true "laboratory of democracy" eventually become actualities.

During the period from about 1928 to 1931 there was a growing conviction among certain McKinley teachers—and this group included the principal—that the high schools should be making a more positive contribution

toward the development of citizens for a democratic society; that young people should be helped to identify and study, i.e., think about, their real problems; that much of the study-learning process should be of the nature of cooperative classroom study; that students should participate in the management of the school; and that each student should be helped to develop as a unique personality and to enjoy the feeling of success in his school undertakings.

The first significant step in the direction of fundamental reconstruction was the establishing of several experimental "core" classes during the year 1930-31. The main purpose behind this effort was to see what high school teachers could do in the way of enlisting the interests of young people in the creative integration of the fields of English and social studies. This effort had the approval of the superintendent and the director of the division of research.

As the year 1930-31 advanced, those who were observing the work of these experimental classes became so enthusiastic over developments that it was decided that the entire sophomore class should be brought in on the new pro-

¹ McKinley High School (Honolulu, Hawaii) is a senior high school with an enrollment of 3008 students (Dec., 1946). While this population represents many racial backgrounds, nevertheless, 3005 of these young people are American citizens.

gram in September, 1931. But there was much to be done if the school was to be ready for such an undertaking.

Organizing Begins

Accordingly, a group of interested teachers, the principal, and a consultant from Teachers' College, University of Hawaii, met together each Saturday morning through the spring of 1931 to work on the basic ideas and concepts of the new integrated "core" program. Then during that summer (1931) the teachers who were to initiate the new program were permitted to organize a summer school seminar at the University under the leadership of the principal. This group undertook the task of getting things in readiness for the opening of school.

The main features of the reconstructed McKinley program were set forth in a statement approved by the Council of Department Heads and presented to the school commissioners on March 25, 1931. The following proposals are a digest of that statement:

A "core studies" course that would supplant the traditional English and social science courses was planned. These classes would meet two periods per day, five times per week. The new course would be developed in terms of the following: (a) vocational problems, (b) citizenship problems, (c) problems of home membership, (d) problems of health, (e) how to use leisure time, (f) how to live a better life, (g) the improvement of written and oral English. History was to be used as background in the study of present-day problems. Literature was to be used for the light that it threw on present-day problems.

Students were to be encouraged to participate actively in the useful work of the community and its projects.

A new worker, a placement director, was to help young people find part-time and full-time jobs.

Less attention was to be given to marks, credits, and graduation and more emphasis was to be given to the intrinsic rewards associated with genuine accomplishment.

The school day was to be lengthened to accommodate those students who were doing part-time work.

Students were to be encouraged to engage in a variety of "doing" activities: sewing, shop work, music, art, gardening, cooking, and hobbies.

It was expected that the new program would be put into effect gradually. Most of the elective courses would still be offered. College entrance requirements would have to be met. The interests of parents would have to be considered. Teachers would have to be prepared for the new work.

Continuous Conferences

Certain important features of the new program were not adequately treated in this statement to the commissioners. Especially should it be pointed out that there has been a continuous series of teacher conferences throughout the ensuing years; the Council of Department Heads, representing some sixteen departments of the school, has been meeting weekly. The teachers of each department have been encouraged to have their weekly meetings. There has been at least one general teachers' meeting once a month. All sorts of special committees have been instituted to work on special problems or aspects of the program. For example, during the current year the following committees, representing all departments of the school, have been

working continuously: English, guidance, community relations, curriculum for intellectually slower pupils, curriculum for intellectually brighter pupils, testing and evaluation, and health. In addition, the following special committees have met from time to time: scholarship and loan fund, plant development, intra-school (non-athletic) contests, war memorial activities, assembly board, campus and lavatory supervisors, finance, and study room organization and procedure. A number of these committees include students.

Machinery Depends on Student Contributions

In order to bring the students into the program, a number of devices were developed. Each "core studies" class was organized as a "local" unit of the school government with its officers and representatives taking part in class and school representative assemblies. Within the "core studies" classes themselves, the students were organized into working committees to work cooperatively on special problems and to further the various aspects of the program. It was intended that all manner of school problems should be discussed by the students—including *the basic assumptions upon which the program was built*. It was expected, too, that the teacher would use the school-community as a continuous opportunity to show these young people the relationships between their human-relationship problems and those of their elders outside the school. Thus there would be no sharp line of demarcation between school and community.

In addition to the representative assembly, the machinery of the school

government has included an executive council, a variety of committees and bureaus, school police, and a court. From the outset the student-teacher participative process has been called "The McKinley High School Government" on the ground that ours was to be a student-teacher-principal cooperative process, and not a "student body" government. The executive council includes the school government officers, the presidents of the sophomore, junior, and senior classes, the chairmen of certain committees, the teacher-adviser of the school government, and the advisers of the three classes. The principal is *ex officio* member of both the representative assembly and the executive council.

"Has this machinery actually provided educationally significant experiences for youth?" Such a question is indeed a legitimate one. For the actual test of any such organization ultimately lies in the way it contributes to learning. Unless it makes for an environment in which democratic living grows and flourishes, the machinery itself is of little value. Students have participated in campus improvement, in the purchase and maintenance of a school truck, the establishment of a voluntary mutual-aid fund to assist in paying the doctor's bills of those students who were injured in connection with school activities, the hiring of a health director with the assistance of the PTA, paying doctors for health examinations, including the TB skin test, chest X-ray, and the Wassermann test, buying and maintaining an X-ray machine, buying a sprinkling system for a portion of the campus—with the help of the PTA, buying a movie machine for the audi-

torium, printing a daily paper, production of school annual, and re-examining and revising rules and policies in the light of new situations.

Students Share in Planning

An important phase of student-teacher participation is the course of study planning at the beginning of the year. For several years the teachers of nearly all departments have brought their students into the business of planning the year's work. Official courses of study of the department are still used as points of reference in development of the school program. Nevertheless, this planning has given the students the opportunity to see that their special problems and interests were given some recognition in the year's program. These creatively built courses of study represent a synthesis of at least four factors: (1) the official course of study, (2) suggestions developed jointly by the teachers, (3) the special twist given by the teacher to the work of a particular group of students, and (4) the wishes of the students themselves. These yearly plans are signed by the teacher and representative students and are filed in the office for future reference. At the end of the year each class submits a summary of the year's work which, in turn, is a cooperatively built product.

This sort of cooperative activity reaches into all phases of the school: the social program, budgeting and account keeping, the parent-teacher-student-alumni program, the daily paper, school annual, creative work publication, speech improvement program, individual guidance, the self-supporting dental program, the intramural and neighbor-

hood athletic program, school court and police, forums, long-time class projects, the development of a war-activities talking-color-motion picture—"McKinley in Action," the reading improvement program, an individualized mathematics program, the weekly school assemblies, annual graduation program, the school cafeteria service, open-house programs, special activities-period organization and program, and the work of the various specialized departments.

Some Criticism Exists

It would not be honest to create the impression that everything has been sweetness and light during the years of reconstruction. The program has been bitterly criticized, both outside the school, and by a few frightened teachers who have felt that "English" or "American History" were being neglected, or that "standards" were being lowered. Some of these teachers have asked for transfer to other schools where they could teach "straight English" or "straight history." Before the war, certain professors at the local university expressed heated criticism of the quality of work of McKinley graduates. (Among these was a visiting professor of history from Nazi Germany who later was head of the German propaganda agency at Shanghai.) The upshot of this was the appointment of a committee of professors by the president of the local university to make a study of the comparative success of high school graduates. This study showed that McKinley graduates at the university did slightly better on the average than the average for all students. In spite of this study some of this criticism continues. Furthermore, one

of the local newspapers has gone out of its way editorially to discredit the McKinley program. Others have criticized the program on the ground that it has neglected "the fundamentals." Here again standardized tests in reading comprehension, English usage, mathematics, and in certain other areas, have indicated that, on the whole, our students have continued to make normal progress through the high school years.

But the interesting thing about these criticisms is that *no one has found fault with our program because it is not do-*

ing a good job of helping our young people to learn about and to practice democracy. As the McKinley program stands today no one associated with it claims that it is perfect. There are many problems that continue to challenge our study. We are especially concerned over the problem of understanding and managing the psychological aspect of human relations. But I believe we are in agreement that we are to go forward creatively, cooperatively, using our best intelligence and the results of research elsewhere in the progressive improvement of our program.

Unity in Planning

ARNO A. BELLACK

That there are many stumbling blocks in the way of planning a program of education which will be unified is pointed out by Arno A. Bellack, junior high school teacher, Tenafly, N. J. in this article describing many of his school's experiences in trying to effect this change. Mr. Bellack does suggest, however, some methods of approach which should be good guideposts toward increased improvement and understanding of the modern curriculum.

IN HIGH SCHOOLS today there are almost as many varieties of the "core curriculum" as there are Heinz's products. Educators will usually agree that the "core" of a school program should consist of a large block of time during which one or more teachers plan with a single group of students "common learnings" considered necessary for desirable growth at their particular age level. But there similarities stop. Differ-

ences are evident in *ways* of developing the program and in the *kind* of experiences finally selected.

This article describes the approach used by a group of teachers of seventh and eighth grade students in Tenafly High School, a six-year secondary school. We hope that a description of our experiences will help other teachers who are planning a similar program to anticipate some of the difficulties which

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