DRUNKARDS seldom show up at temperance lectures. As a result, the audience in such situations is overwhelmingly made up of persons already convinced of the evils of strong drink. So it is with the readers of Educational Leadership in reference to the implications of social change for the school—they do not need to be reminded that progressive curriculum development is now and henceforth an everyday imperative if educational sterility is to be avoided.

But what some readers of this magazine may be in need of is additional evidence that progressive curriculum development will result in better public relations for the school. Such evidence is at hand in the findings of a citywide poll of parent satisfaction-dissatisfaction with the public secondary schools recently completed in a mid-western community of about 60,000 population. (Decatur, Ill.)

In this completely anonymous poll, each representative parent was asked to tell whether “all things considered” he was satisfied or dissatisfied with the public secondary schools. On the basis of their responses to this question it was possible to divide the parents into three groups:—

1. a generally satisfied or “thumbs up” group,
2. a generally dissatisfied or “thumbs down” aggregation, and
3. the “fence sitters”—i.e., those who said they were “partly satisfied, partly dissatisfied” when all things were considered. What we shall here note are the comparative responses of groups (1) and (2) to certain of the other questions included in the poll.

Proportionately, somewhat more than three times as many of the “thumbs up” than of the “thumbs down” parents felt that “practically everything” their children were learning in the schools would be valuable to them in real life situations. Conversely, more than twice as great a percentage of the “thumbs down” patrons said that half or less of the things their youngsters were studying would be of value in real life.

The point here is not whether the things the pupils in question were learning are in fact valuable in real life. Rather, it is that parents who believe this to be true tend very markedly to be generally satisfied patrons of the school. Conversely, parents who hold the opposite view very markedly tend to fall in the “thumbs down” category. Apparently, if good public relations are to be had, the parents must feel that what the school teaches “adds up” in real life terms. Since only some of the people can be fooled all of the time, it follows that no school whose offering is in fact sterile can over any extended period of time enjoy good public relations.

Percentagewise, over three times as many of the “thumbs up” group felt that the school was giving their children reasonably adequate help in resolving their personal problems. The proportion of the “thumbs down” parents who replied in the negative was more than double that of the generally satisfied patrons who so responded. Thus it seems apparent that no school that persistently neglects the personal problems of its pupils can hope for good public relations.

The parents were also asked if there were any things that their children needed to learn now which could not be learned in their present schools. Proportionately, twice as many of the “thumbs up” patrons replied in the negative, while over three
times as many of the generally dissatisfied parents gave the contrary response. Apparently, the providing of a curriculum which is adequate in scope is another of the necessary conditions for good public relations.

"Do your child's teachers really know him as well as they should?" was another of the inquiries in the poll. Relatively, nearly three times as many of the "thumbs up" group said "yes" to this question. The proportion of "thumbs down" patrons who replied in the negative was about treble that of the generally satisfied parents. This, too, is apparently a curriculum consideration heavily freighted with implications for public relations.

Since the curriculum must be thought of as the sum total of the child's experiences which fall under the control of the school, the general treatment accorded the child is, of course, a very important—probably the most important—part of his curriculum. Persuant to this thought, the parents were asked to tell whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the way their children were treated by the school. How very importantly this consideration bears upon public relations is reflected by the finding that over four times as many of the "thumbs up" parents said that they were satisfied in this regard. Conversely, over eight times as many of the "thumbs down" patrons gave the directly contrary response.

The moral that I draw from these findings (and others of a similar nature not here noted because of space limitations) is that progressive curriculum development of the type implied by the ASCD platform, if it be gotten across to and understood by the parents, is not only a boon to good public relations—over the long haul, it is a necessary condition for building and maintaining maximal parent satisfaction with the schools.

Members of ASCD and readers of Educational Leadership will be interested in plans developing for the annual meeting to be held in Cincinnati February 15-18, 1948, with headquarters at the Netherland Plaza Hotel. Last month we printed the problems to be considered by discussion groups during Monday afternoon, Tuesday morning, and Tuesday afternoon sessions. (If you plan to attend the Cincinnati meeting and have not yet registered for one of these groups, refer to your November magazine and send your first and second choices to the ASCD office.) Open Association committee meetings will feature the Monday morning program. Ernest Melby of New York University will speak at the opening session on Sunday evening on the topic "Educational Leadership for Our Times," followed by a panel discussing the issues with which the conference must deal. Hollis Caswell of Teachers College, Columbia University will speak on the topic "Speeding Curriculum Development" at the Monday evening session, and Stephen Corey, University of Chicago, and Edward Krug, Stanford University will present the implications for curriculum improvement in the 1947 and 1948 Association yearbooks. Further news concerning speakers and plans will be included in the News Exchange, sent to all members. It is hoped that programs will be mailed to all members from the Washington office by January 12.
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