

We Found Our Plan Sound

Although the group had the opportunity to discontinue this technique of individual evaluation, consensus was that we should continue with one modification—some re-evaluation of objectives. But when a committee charged with this task suggested that several of the objectives were not as important as the others, the group did not agree and we returned to the use of the list as we had first prepared it.

Certain basic assumptions underlie a sound type of evaluation. It is a process that seeks to bring about changes of behavior, and these should be in the direction of objectives set forth by the in-

dividual or group evaluated. In a direct sense it is an effort to ascertain how much progress has been made in realizing goals. Evaluation must use as wide a range of techniques as possible in gaining evidences for measuring changes and is the cooperative responsibility of all concerned in the process.

We do not conclude that our informal experimentation with two-way evaluation conferences has solved the complex problem of evaluating individual growth. We do believe, however, that our experience has given each person an opportunity to better understand himself and to direct his efforts toward reaching goals which he and his fellow students have considered important.

What Do We Mean by Curriculum Change?

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This article grew out of observations which were made when George Henry interviewed parents all over the country. The results of his research will be helpful to all who are engaged in curriculum revision. George Henry is research assistant at the Horace Mann-Lincoln School of Experimentation, Teachers College, Columbia University.

AFTER CONVERSATIONS with upper middle class parents in forty different states, one inevitably reaches some conclusions about home and school relations. Parents everywhere, it would seem, are almost completely ignorant of the problems arising out of the presence of the new kind of pupils in high schools since the depression. From the

type of questions they ask, they show a meagre conception of the task facing the present-day teacher—the whole gamut of individual differences, the bewildering array of home backgrounds of pupils, the difficulties involved in motivating this throng.

Not understanding these matters, parents are at a loss as to why we should

want to change anything except to polish and improve what we already have. Human nature is human nature, they reason—pupils are pupils, so what difference does it make that in 1948 three out of four youth attend high school whereas in 1900 only six out of a hundred graduated from high school?

Broadening Communication Channels

It became increasingly clear, as more and more parents were contacted, that the typical annual report of the superintendent to parents, the news items, the innumerable PTA meetings, the pamphlets, and even the workshops have so stressed the quantitative problems of housing and staffing growing out of this phenomenal increase in enrollment that parents are left unaware of what a modern classroom is actually like—the demoralization if not breakdown, when old familiar methods are applied to today's pupils. The most recurring question from parents everywhere is, "Why weren't we told about this long ago?"

We Have Problem Parents

These parents, in the main, conceive of improvement as a change in *content* of instruction, not in the interest of some neglected sixty percent of the youngsters in school but in the interest of up-to-datedness. This confirms some recent surveys concerning parents' readiness for curriculum change. For example, parents are less conservative in their willingness to incorporate controversial issues in the classroom than educators supposed. But on the basis of his own experience in dealing with upper middle class parents from Bangor, Maine, to Brownsville, Texas, the writer

finds these surveys misleading. That most parents will tolerate TVA discussions, collective bargaining units, and sex education is true; *but they want these taught in the manner of 1900.*

Any curriculum revision that is to be but a subject matter reconversion *inside* the traditional course labels will not generally involve much dissention from the public. But parents, even here, consider the modernization of the curriculum as contemporary items appended to older chronology or to systematized bodies of knowledge. To them the "new" is a subject matter need, not a pupil need nor one of the culture. What parents too often do not understand is that it is not subject matter but their conception of human nature that is obsolete.

As a result, almost all parents interviewed strongly disapproved of newer processes of instruction. Too often they did not realize that these processes were based on scientific research into how pupils learn and what happens to pupils when they do learn. An analysis of the controversies that were being or had been waged in the various communities—as brought out in innumerable conversations with parents as they "cut loose" at forums, question periods, buffet suppers way past midnight, country club bars, business offices, hotel lobbies, and service club luncheons—revealed that parents seldom flare up over the study of unions, cooperatives, and race relations as much as, for instance, over the fusion of English and history, tampering with the report card, or phonics. The reason is that the alteration of one kind of subject matter for another really does not cut so deeply into the mores as does a change in methods.

Complete Understanding Is Essential

In spite of the wondrous mass media of communication at hand, it would seem that the breach between public and school is greater than at any time since the turn of the century. Parents generally do not realize that the influx of pupils involves not a mere matter of crowdedness but a redefinition of the meaning of democratic education. In addition, scientific research in education is challenging parents in respect to their own basic assumptions of what a school should be. For the curriculum worker it means that the success of any new program, such as general education into the high school, must rest on how well his public relations program explains to parents these two events: the new pupil, and the accumulating research about the learning process.

To explain this, with all its implications, the curriculum leader must avoid repeating the mistakes of those who, in the words of Sidney Hook, "committed themselves to a system of pedagogy, not to a social philosophy." The revolt of parents over "methods," that all too often to the educator means a more effective way of meeting pupil needs, is due exactly to their awareness that these methods are upsetting their cherished political, social, and economic beliefs. A discussion of controversial issues involves, after all, only the possibility of change in the social order; the introduction of new methods actually establishes a small-scale social order in school in contrast to the order all about it and open for all to witness.

At no time was the scientific validity of a certain method challenged; there was, instead, consternation about how

to fit the methods into what parents regarded as the natural scheme of things. In other words, why risk dumping an admittedly unscientific report card en route in the present urgent drive of their children toward success? Mere explanation does not move parents—it is not good public relations in support of curriculum change.

How can this gap between home and school be bridged so that a thoroughgoing curriculum revision can be undertaken? Or, put in another way, maybe bridging the gap and curriculum revision are two aspects of the same thing.

More Is Involved Than Changing the Curriculum

Since the culture is all of a piece, any curriculum development in the secondary school that is based on the findings of social psychology, anthropology, reading clinics, child development, psychiatry, and even the physical and biological sciences necessarily identifies itself with certain on-pushing forces, social and economic, rather than with certain others.

For example, the educator proceeds on the basis of a psychology that argues that personality thrives better in a climate of cooperation than in one of intense competition; that personality tends to disintegrate when the intellect is drilled at the expense of the rest of the organism. He is also acutely aware that anthropology disclaims any innate aggressiveness in human nature that requires a special arena like economics in which to gratify itself. The community, on the contrary, is inured to a psychology, rational and non-experimental, that considers Man a *want* engine, ever

seeking to be well stoked, and that competition for the satisfaction of these wants in a "natural" milieu refines the sensibilities of the spirit. In fact, to parents generally, the school is set up to gird the young for the race to achieve status.

Parents, then, are suspicious of nearly all curriculum change emerging out of educational research, not because it may be sound or unsound pedagogically, but because it seems to add to the confusion of an era that is already upsetting to us all; it cuts to the very root of assumptions created before there ever was an adequate experimental psychology or even a high school, before there ever was a community paying school tax or electing school boards. In a word, controversies over curriculum change are at one with the conflict over what direction our society shall take in the years to come.

Facets of the Issue

If curriculum development is not understood to be in the very heart of this conflict, it cannot be any more than superficial tinkering; it cannot be considered pragmatically "true." From the outset, the community must come to understand that curriculum revision is part of this transition of our times toward an expanding democracy. For example, even what to parents may look like a mere strengthening of the "R" called reading becomes, from the scientific point of view, an ultimate rearrangement of "the grade and promotion scheme now in vogue," which in turn questions the age-old premise that school be a miniature competitive environment to prepare the child for the competitive blows to come.

Nor can guidance, if scientifically administered, advise youth any longer that there is inherent failure in not reaching the near top. Yet some parents regard this concern as an invasion of family rights. And pupil planning of course content is at once a challenge to all familiar parental ideas of authority and so-called discipline. Add all these up and it is no wonder that these methods seem at variance with what parents commonly call democracy.

This realization does not mean that the consultant, the director, and the administrator should already have preconceived economic or political views that they hope will subtly prevail at these discussions with parents. Rather, in all honesty they must acquaint parents with current research in these social sciences, must show how it leads in one direction instead of in another, and must make parents aware of ways in which these findings deviate from their present thinking.

Schoolmen Lead the Thinking

Public relations, under this conception of research, can no longer be regarded as a matter of explaining to the community the organizational side of the "new" curriculum or the advantage of a two-hour block of studies *within* the school. We are not asking parents to help achieve an efficiency that is but a refining and elaborating of what they have condoned for decades. And to discuss at length with parents whether controversial issues should be introduced into subject-matter courses in order to make the school "real" is only begging the question.

The community must sooner or later come to realize that certain terms that

have become by-words within the profession—"general education," "the neglected sixty percent," "the education of all American youth," "the community school," "the whole child"—proceed from definitely investigated, observed, and tested findings about human nature, of the way people learn, and how people become maladjusted or well adjusted; that this changed conception of ourselves draws us into the vortex of changes in social and economic matters as well—collective bargaining, race prejudice, class structure, TVA, group processes.

There are pupil needs, parents must also see, that are more fundamental than the three R's; these time-honored skills become meaningful only when embedded as minor components within what Americans mean by the dignity and worth of the individual. Whether the public school should be concerned with these needs is the fundamental issue in any curriculum revision called "general education." Such a decision, it must become clear to parents, involves a complete shift in the present function of the American high school. From its inception the American high school has been thought of as an institution that sets the stage for opportunity, freedom itself being "given," guaranteed in the Bill of Rights; the high school was never organized to be a place where democracy itself is to be learned through practice.

Parents Must Be Researchers

Any discussion of this sort inevitably leads the parents to reflect not only upon their schools but also upon their community in order to observe its defects—the decline of the family, the breakdown of personality, the wholesale reduction of opportunities for economic status, the inability to practice common citizenship tasks at the local level, the complete innocence of knowing how to work together in groups.

This kind of research should appraise the procedure for what it is: a job of social engineering, done by a "practicing social scientist." Research of this type is a function of education as profoundly important to the nation as the making or the repeal of a Taft-Hartley law. To discover ways of getting parents to understand that the kind of change-over in the curriculum that scientific research calls for is every bit as important as foreign policy or price controls identifies the curriculum director and the faculty with one of the greatest social and moral undertakings to be found anywhere in progress in America. To discover adequate techniques of bringing scientifically verified material to bear upon curriculum revision with full participation of parents has itself, therefore, become a matter of research. Since parents will eventually decide these issues anyway, why not include them from the beginning of curriculum change as part of the research?



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