

Diagnose Before You Treat

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How can a school gather and use evidence obtained from graduates as to the success of the instructional program? Kenneth B. Henderson, University of Illinois, tells of one practical approach to this problem.

EVERY NOW AND THEN we hear of a curriculum development program that has come a cropper. What started out as a well-conceived program disintegrates as disaffected teachers or parents begin to snipe at the program and undercut confidence in it. The least harmful effect may be the weakening of the dynamic that has been keeping the program going. The worst may be the fighting of the battle in the newspapers. This confuses the general public and weakens their confidence in the administrator and faculty of the particular school. What can be done to prevent such an occurrence?

Agreement Before Action

Well known to people who have worked in curriculum development programs is the fact that changing people's minds is more than half the battle. Once there is a meeting of minds and an agreement as to basic objectives, there is less likelihood of a later "blow-up." In other words, the building of consensus should be the first job of curriculum development. Without consensus, a faculty will be fortunate indeed to have the program much more than a series of crises—even catastrophes.

The importance of building consensus concerning the job of the secondary school was recognized early in

the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program. So the fifth of the Basic Studies, which are part of this program, was designed to enable a local school to accomplish this necessary task.

This work, *The Follow-Up Study*, may be thought of as a piece of engineering research designed to enable a school's faculty to achieve the following purposes: 1) to build a strengthened teacher-pupil-school patron consensus concerning the need-meeting function of this particular secondary school; and 2) to appraise the extent to which the school is, or is not, now meeting the real-life problems of secondary school youth; to focus the spotlight on the high and low spots in the current program.

Plan of the Follow-Up Study

Six instruments, one formulation of real-life problems and five questionnaires, were designed for use in the study:

Problems of High School Youth. Fifty-six real-life problems of high school youth were identified and variously grouped under the headings: "Earning a Living," "Developing an Effective Personality," "Living Healthfully and Safely," "Managing Personal Finances Wisely," "Spending Leisure Time Wholesomely and Enjoyably,"

"Taking an Effective Part in Civic Affairs," "Preparing for Marriage, Home-Making and Parenthood," and "Making Effective Use of Educational Opportunities."

"*What Do You Think?*" This questionnaire was designed for anonymous use by teachers, pupils, parents, and non-parents (adults). The questionnaire contains each of the fifty-six real-life problems of youth given in the basic formulation. The respondent is asked to indicate whether or not he thinks the secondary school should help pupils with each problem. If his reply is in the affirmative, the respondent is asked to tell how important it is for the

school to provide such help.

Obviously, use of the questionnaire will enable the local faculty to secure an estimate of the "attitudinal given" which they confront as they move to unite more adequately themselves, pupils, parents, and other patrons in support of a school program geared to the real-life problems of youth. Data secured by its use will tell them what proportions of each group favor or oppose the introduction or strengthening, as the case may be, of each type of problem-centered content into the curriculum. The data will also afford them an estimate of the relative intensities of the views of each group included in



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Youths and adults can explore common problems

the canvass of opinion.

"How Much Real-Life Help Did They Get?" The teachers in the local school respond anonymously to this questionnaire. It includes all of the fifty-six real-life problems in the basic formulation. In reference to each of the problems, each teacher is asked to tell how much of the help needed by students he thinks was typically received by those in the last graduating class.

The school's faculty can use the data secured by this questionnaire to get an estimate of the extent to which they believe the school is already helping students with their real-life problems. Any appreciable difference between (a) their views concerning what the school should be doing as revealed by their replies to the "What Do You Think?" questionnaire, and (b) their judgments of the actual accomplishments of the school as revealed by their replies to the "How Much Real-Life Help Did They Get?" questionnaire, may be taken as a rough but useful measure of the willingness of the faculty group to make curricular changes of the type indicated.

"What Has Become of the Members of Your High School Class and What Are They Doing?" This questionnaire is one of the three designed for use with graduates of the school. All three are used anonymously for increased validity. This first questionnaire is designed to find out what proportions of the relatively recent graduates (students who graduated from one to three years previously) are already experiencing the real-life problems included in the basic formulation.

The central purpose underlying use of this questionnaire is that of securing

factual evidence which can be used by the school's administrator and faculty to persuade a larger proportion of the students, teachers, and school patrons of the necessity for a high school curriculum that is more functional.

As an example of the power of this evidence, consider what the sixty-six Illinois high schools found, in part, from this questionnaire. In all, 1080 "one-year-old" graduates replied to this questionnaire. Every one of the fifty-six problems was encountered by some of these graduates. More than 75% had encountered each of twenty-four of the fifty-six problems. Sixteen per cent were already married; 6% already had children; and three of the 1080 were divorced.

"How Much Were You Helped by Your High School?" In the second of the three follow-up questionnaires used with the graduates, the respondent is asked to tell how much of the help he needed in reference to each of the fifty-six real-life problems he received from his high school. The faculty can use the graduates' replies to this questionnaire as another appraisal of the adequacy of the school's curriculum. Teachers, pupils, and patrons can be expected to take this appraisal seriously.

"How Well Equipped Are You For Effective Living?" In the last questionnaire used with the graduates, the respondent is asked to estimate how effectively he is meeting the various problems included in the basic formulation. Effective living is the object—and hence the real test—of education. So we can expect the school's "family"—teachers, pupils and patrons—to be influenced by the results of this questionnaire.

Local Schools Conduct the Study

Each of sixty-six schools which completed the Follow-Up Study surveyed opinions of its teachers, students and graduates. Sixty of the schools surveyed opinions of parents, and seventeen surveyed in addition the opinions of non-parent patrons of the school.

Small high schools conducted the study without drawing samples of the various populations involved. Larger high schools variously sampled their populations.

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Bureau of Research and Service, College of Education, University of Illinois, financed the study. There was no cost to the participating schools other than that of postage and express charges.¹

Data on each school's questionnaires were tabulated, and the school was sent a summary of findings for use by the faculty in accomplishing the purposes of the study.

The Schools Use Their Findings

It is recommended² that each school present, through use of special sum-

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² Kenneth B. Henderson and John E. Goerwitz: "How to Interpret and Use Your School's Data on the Follow-Up Study." This mimeographed pamphlet and others written for use

by the schools participating in the study have been included in a bulletin of the Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program.

mary sheets, the "story" it obtained on each of the fifty-six problems. By means of these sheets a school can group the problems in three categories: 1) Problems which the school's "family" believes—as revealed by the "What Do You Think?" questionnaire—should be a responsibility of the school, and which the school is presently meeting reasonably well—as revealed by the teachers' responses to the "How Much Real-Life Help Did They Get?" questionnaire and the graduates' responses to the "How Much Were You Helped By Your High School?" questionnaire; 2) Problems which the school's "family" identifies as the responsibility of the school and which the school presently is *not* meeting reasonably well; and 3) Problems for which there is a low consensus concerning the school's responsibility.

Given the American tradition of local lay control of public education, it is both necessary and desirable that a voluntary community (patrons, students, teachers) consensus be reached that will lend *understanding support* to curriculum changes *before they are made*. The technique illustrated by the Follow-Up Study secures data that "belong" to the local school. These can be used as a springboard for group discussions intended to build or strengthen the consensus that must be the foundation of any program tuned to the real-life problems of high school youth.

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