

## What Is Progress in Secondary Education?

THE overarching theme of this number of *Educational Leadership*, "Secondary Education Reports Progress," makes news at a time when secondary education is under fire for its failure to meet the challenge of the times. This editorial is being written without knowledge of the progress which is being reported in this number. This fact may explain the note of pessimism which is sounded in this brief statement. The writer sincerely hopes that the reports of progress in this issue will change his attitude.

In one sense it is possible to report a great deal of progress in secondary education. Witness the new functionally designed buildings that have sprung up all over the land since World War II; the enormous increase in guidance and "extra"-curricular programs; the proliferation of elective subjects designed to meet the special needs and interests of students; the increases in teachers' salaries; the improvement in textbooks; and the strengthening of libraries. These are significant gains and not to be depreciated.

Has corresponding progress been made in the very heart of the secondary program—general education? In this time of crisis when the very existence of our free society is threatened from within and without, what is the secondary school doing to strengthen that part of the program which is primarily designed to develop the common values, understandings, and skills of living that are essential for *all* American youth?

A half-century of experimentation has shown that it is possible and desir-

able to break down the compartmentalization among subjects, and to center the curriculum—particularly in the area of general education—upon the needs and problems which grow out of the interaction of the student and his environment. The best elementary schools have long been organized in terms of broad comprehensive units of work. Extensive experience in student-teacher planning and the application of democratic group processes has demonstrated the feasibility of breaking with the tradition of logically organized subject matter doled out in terms of daily assignments from textbooks. The Eight-Year Study demonstrated that students gain more of the cherished values essential to effective citizenship, if the design of the curriculum is changed from the subject-centered to the experience-centered approach. The fear that graduates from such programs would not succeed in college proved to be completely unfounded. In 1944, the National Association of Secondary-School Principals endorsed a "common-learning" program in *Education For ALL American Youth*, and attempted to popularize it through wide publicity. The "Ten Imperative Needs of Youth" are quoted glibly by school administrators and teachers. We have the "know-how" to introduce this program into the schools and we have the research to prove that to do so would really constitute progress.

In spite of the fact that we know how to transform our static program of general education in the high school into a dynamic one based upon the vital problems which beset youth in a cul-

ture that is becoming increasingly confused about its basic values, the program of general education is still defined in terms of Carnegie units, ground-to-be-covered and lessons-to-be-learned. This situation is well documented in recent studies by Wright.<sup>1</sup>

These studies indicate that only 3.5 percent of the public secondary schools of the United States have departed from the traditional design of general education. More than four-fifths of the changes are at the junior high-school level, and even in this area, the changes are frequently limited to the seventh and eighth grades. To face the problem realistically, it is necessary to look more closely at the actual changes which have been made. *Most of the programs reported merely combine social studies and English in a double period.* Only a handful of schools have actually developed an Adolescent Problems program in general education throughout the junior and senior high schools. Noteworthy among these schools are Garrett County, Maryland; Fairmont Heights High School, Prince Georges County, Maryland; and the Ohio State University School, Columbus, Ohio.

### A Realistic Appraisal

Must we continue to describe progress in secondary education in terms of curriculum tinkering, resulting in the addition of a few courses, which however valuable they may be, fail to improve the basic design of the curriculum? Will the new pronouncement published in 1952 by the Educational Policies Commission—*Education for ALL Ameri-*

<sup>1</sup> Grace S. Wright. *Core Curriculum in Public High Schools. An Inquiry into Practices*, 1949, Bulletin 1950, No. 6, Washington, Federal Security Agency, U. S. Office of Education, 1950; *Core Curriculum Development Problems and Practices*. Bulletin 1952, No. 5; Washington, Federal Security Agency, U. S. Office of Education, 1952. "Core Curriculum Why and What," *School Life*, XXXIX, 71 ff., (February 1952).

*can Youth: A Further Look*— have any more effect on the schools than did the original volume published in 1944?

Will the present emphasis upon Life Adjustment suffer the same fate as did the Eight-Year Study? Perhaps we need to look at the blocks which seem to interfere seriously with curriculum before we can find an answer to these questions.

1. *The climate in which the high school operates today is not conducive to basic curriculum development.*

A fundamental factor in this climate is the fear and anxiety of the public engendered by the struggle between the free world and totalitarianism. This fear and anxiety is manifested in the willingness of many people to accept as true the charges of pressure groups that feed upon unrest. Schools are not likely to transform a passive and relatively ineffective curriculum which imparts "tried and true" subject matter into one which centers on the vital problems of living when they witness so many examples of attacks upon such programs. No teacher was ever accused of subversion for teaching Caesar's Gallic Wars, but teachers who deal with controversial social-economic issues are likely to be attacked on the ground that they are undermining the "American System of Free Enterprise." Loyalty oaths and legislative investigations have served to dampen the enthusiasm of schools for curriculum reform. It is easier to retreat to the teaching of the "fundamentals," and the classics.

However potent this climate of fear may be, it is not sufficient to account for the lag between theory and practice in curriculum development. We must search further.

2. *School administrators by and large are not prepared to direct curriculum-development programs.*

Many administrators define their jobs in terms of school buildings, finance, public relations (which means keeping the public happy), and developing a smoothly running machine. Their graduate professional programs have been largely taken up with these matters. They have had no time or opportunity to become students of society or of the curriculum. Thus they tend to feel insecure when faced with the difficult task of curriculum development, and often compensate for their insecurity by keeping themselves so busy with details of administration that they have no time to devote to more important matters.

3. *Teacher-education institutions have not given sufficient emphasis to curriculum development as an important aspect of the work of the teacher.*

Most institutions are hopelessly compartmentalized. On the one hand, prospective teachers build up majors and minors by "taking" a series of specialized courses quite out of relationship to the function of the various fields of knowledge in helping youth to solve basic problems of living. On the other hand, the student acquires professional credits in prescribed courses, each one of which is divorced from the other. The emphasis is upon "school management" and general and special methods rather than upon the organization of classroom activities. Finally the student is thrown into a teaching situation in which the curriculum is ready-made in terms of fixed quotas of subject matter derived from a textbook. And all this is divorced from his academic program. This neat scheme is usually perpetuated by certification requirements. Only a few professional schools have recognized the need for preparing teachers for core programs in the high schools.

4. *College entrance requirements are still defined largely in terms of Carnegie units.*

The Eight-Year Study proved as conclusively as could be expected that there is no *one* curricular pattern that is more satisfactory than another for preparing a student for college. At the conclusion of the study an attempt was made to acquaint college officials with the results. However, traditional practices still persist and school officials and parents fit the student into the pattern. Suggestions for changing the high-school curriculum are met with the objection that the new program might not satisfy the demands of the colleges. True, some colleges have changed, but often these changes are not known to school officials—and particularly to parents.

5. *By and large, laymen have not participated effectively in curriculum-development programs.*

It is recognized in public addresses made by educators that "the schools belong to the people." And it is not difficult to find illustrations of laymen working side-by-side with educators in selecting school sites, carrying bond issues for new buildings, improving safety programs, and the like. It is much more difficult to find good illustrations of democratic participation in curriculum development by laymen. The conditions under which laymen may participate successfully have not been clearly determined. The result is that school officials tend to fear that any attempt to bring laymen into the program will result in disaster. Yet it is a well known fact that public support of education depends upon active, well planned participation by all who have a stake in the enterprise.

How may these blocks be removed? It is not likely that any simple formula can be developed that will result in immediate improvement of the present situation. Yet it is possible to find many instances of school programs which

have succeeded in spite of the obstacles which have been enumerated. A study of how such programs were developed should be helpful. Possibly this issue of *Educational Leadership* will provide some good illustrations.

Not all attacks on the schools have succeeded. Battle Creek, Michigan and Arlington, Virginia are illustrations of successful resistance to unfair tactics by pressure groups. There is now a large body of literature in this field which is available to schools. The current year-book of the Association, *Forces Affecting American Education*, is a good example. The Kellogg Foundation's experiments in leadership which are now under way promise a great deal of help in improving the training of administrators. Such institutions as the University of Minnesota, Temple University, and New York University have developed promising programs for preparing core teachers. The new broad-fields programs which are being developed in the colleges are bound to affect general education procedures in the high school. Successful in-service programs are legion. These tend to make up for the deficiencies of the teacher's formal educational preparation. The National Citizens Commission is pointing the way to successful lay participation in school programs.

The high school has at its disposal all of the resources that are necessary to transform itself into a dynamic institution designed to provide leadership in perpetuating and refining our way of life. To date these resources have not been widely utilized. Perhaps we need to take a "further look" at what really constitutes progress in secondary education.—HAROLD ALBERTY, professor of education, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

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