

screening, and provides individual vocational counseling on call. He is also assisting in coordinating the program and is working constantly with the Career teachers in curriculum planning, in enrichment of the program, and in being a resource person for the program.

Manual also possesses a job placement office called the Occupational Adjustment Service. A teacher spends half-time in this office locating part-time and full-time jobs, placing both graduates and pupils in school in jobs

for which they are qualified, and working closely with the vocational counselor and the teachers in the Career Program to relate school and work.

It must be realized the Career Program is in its infancy, is experimental at present, and will be expanding and improving. Devices for evaluating the program are being included in it. Many of the outcomes and values may not be known for years, but the Manual staff and community feel the experiment will meet more realistically the needs of a selected portion of its pupils.



GEORGE DEXTER

FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS

in a Core Program

Do pupils in a core program develop effective control of fundamental skills? This author reports results of observation and study on this important question.

WITHIN THE PAST two years there has appeared upon the educational scene a rash of books and magazine articles generally condemning the quality of public school programs. Because of the extremely wide circulation of these publications, their effect upon the public at large has become a matter of serious concern to all school people. From the start the "progressive" segment of education has received the brunt of the attack. It is equally apparent that the newer curricular organizations of our public schools, variously called "core," "general education," "common learnings," "unified studies," and "life adjustment" have also been focal points for this attack.

It is generally agreed that modern education must take a more positive step in "selling its wares" to the public. At all levels educators and sympathetic lay groups, therefore, need to discuss ways and means of allaying the fears and misconceptions that have been growing in the minds of the public regarding their educational programs.

Target of Criticism

But school people need not have waited for these latest recriminations to take action in defense of their programs. Nor is it necessary to take a look into the dim and dark past to see that all has not been "sweetness and light" in our school public relations.

The now famous Pasadena affair afforded abundant evidence of this. Here the school curriculum, and especially the core program, were found to be vulnerable to any suspicious group. Even in systems where a core program has been operated successfully for a number of years, it still may not really have been accepted. In Denver, the school system, well known for its excellence, slowly was forced to give ground to such an extent that now its core program cannot be considered to possess more than a vague semblance of its former effectiveness. After an auspicious start, which included much community participation, the Santa Barbara, California core program lost its vitality within four or five years.

That the core program was being threatened was known to citizens in Minneapolis as early as 1949 and 1950. On March 14 of the latter year the *Minneapolis Tribune* printed the following article, which was part of a campaign in that city against the so-called "common learnings" program. This campaign ultimately brought about the complete collapse of the program.

"But this idea of making education a sort of easy-to-take entertainment leaves the pupil with something less than habits of thought. In the very old-fashioned school I attended, we were forced to take two subjects every semester that you did not like and had little aptitude for. You had to learn the darned stuff. Sometimes you learned to appreciate it, even to like it enough to go on. You discovered that you could buckle down and learn—if you had to.

"Learning to face life with some sort of easy-going courses may pass the school day entertainingly but what is learned?

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"Going light on the homework (we used to have about two hours a night for studying at home—or else!) may give the young people a marvelous week for looking at TV, listening to the radio, going out . . . but what is learned? Perhaps I'm talking an old-fashioned discipline that shouldn't exist in these days of freedom and progress and leave-me-alone."

In 1951, from an organization which calls itself the "American Education Association" came this attack on the New York City public schools:

"In the junior high schools the 'freedom of expression' theory with its resultant ignorance, lack of discipline and irreverence has been running in high gear. . . . Too many of the children who come, as graduates of these schools, into the senior high schools have had poor scholarship records and are confirmed truants. Far too many of those boys and girls are not disciplined to study, will not put forth any effort to master a problem that requires effort. They will interest themselves in nothing that does not entertain them. They recognize no rules except those that they themselves make."¹

I shall not elaborate upon all the reasons for criticism of our educational programs or of the core curriculum in particular. However, most critics and parents alike see in the core program a distinct break between the educational methods by which they were taught and the methods utilized today in the core. When it is observed that the students move about freely in the classroom, often conversing with one an-

¹ Milo F. McDonald, "Progressive" Poison in Public Education. New York: The American Education Association, 1951, p. 13-14.

other; when students bring home very little assigned homework; and when they hear that the students have a voice in the decisions of what and how work will be carried on by the class; and this together with little or no emphasis upon repetition and drill and frequent examinations; then it is likely they will question very seriously the effectiveness of these methods.

Parents' Natural Concern

Parents and critics alike have been very much concerned with the structure and methodology of the core program because it has seemed to indicate a serious lack of regard for fundamental skills. Some modern educators seem also to have forgotten about parents' deep concern in this matter. They are rather surprised to learn that in spite of their attempts to stress other worthy functions of the educative process parents still value above all else the teaching of so-called "fundamental skills."

A state-wide opinion survey, typical of the attitude of the country as a whole, concerning the importance of fundamental skills was conducted in 1946 by the Florida Citizens' Committee on Education.² Of six thousand usable replies to the question, "What things are very important for the schools to do?" the first on the list of five was the teaching of fundamental or basic skills. It is also of interest to note that in Peoria, Illinois,³ when parents were asked the importance of teaching the fundamental skills of read-

² Bess Goodykoontz, "Parents Know What They Want for Their Children," *Educational Leadership*, VII, February 1950.

³ "What the Parents of Peoria Think About the Public Schools," Champaign, Illinois: College of Education, University of Illinois.

ing and writing, the vast majority, eighty percent, said these are "very important." Yet, in answer to the question of whether the schools were doing a good, mediocre or poor job in this respect, forty-seven percent gave a negative answer, while forty-three percent answered positively.

Teaching Skills Effectively

Almost all groups criticizing the core program contend that such a curricular pattern does not lend itself to the teaching of fundamental skills. However, a consensus of the numerous studies on the problem of fundamental skills in an enriched program, of which the core curriculum is a recent development, indicates very strongly that such programs are equal or superior to traditional programs. Beatley,⁴ as early as 1932 discovered that there was no decrease in reading growth when students made a transition into an enriched program, though less time was devoted to skill development than previously. The Pistor and Wrightstone studies revealed superior achievement on the New Stanford test by students in an enriched curriculum as compared with students in a conventional program.

Recently the writer compared two hundred junior high school students in Prince George's County, Maryland who were enrolled in core classes with a like number of students from the same schools who were more traditionally taught. In all cases the core group equaled or surpassed the achievement of the traditionally taught group in the following skill areas:

⁴ Bancroft Beatley, *Achievement in the Junior High School*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.

1. Reading — reading comprehension, vocabulary;
2. Work-Study Skills—map reading, use of references, index, dictionary, graphic materials;
3. Language Skills — punctuation, capitalization, usage, spelling.

By testing at the beginning of the school year and again near the end with the Iowa test it was also found that the students near the bottom and the top of the achievement scale showed greater growth in the above mentioned skill areas in the core group than in the traditional group.

One great benefit of testing in the core program is that it can do much to reassure parents. It can demonstrate that their children are making effective growth in fundamental skills. Results of testing can also pay off with a community atmosphere that is conducive to good education.

It should be abundantly clear to all school people that the issue of whether or not fundamental skills are being given sufficient emphasis is potentially dangerous to the core program. I have found, in talking to many lay groups concerning their own core program that they are usually in hearty accord with the aims and objectives of the core. However, they are conscious of the fact that this course generally re-

places traditional English and Social Studies classes, and they are certain that the core program should be responsible for the skills once taught in these areas. No person who has worked long in a core program will contend that fundamental reading, work-study and language skills are not within the province of this program. However, in spite of clear evidence that the fundamentals are of major concern to parents, frequently schools with perfectly sound core programs have preferred to emphasize the unique side of the program.

In a recent PTA meeting the principal was expounding the philosophy and psychology of core, the life adjustment program, personalized instruction, problem solving, and democratic process, use of mass media, and teacher-pupil planning. One parent remarked, "I'm so pleased that the school is making it pleasant for my boy, but you know, he doesn't read very well, and we're a little worried about it." In the mind of this parent a seed of doubt had been planted simply because the speaker failed to realize that his audience wanted some specific information; not a lecture on pedagogy.

The core does a good job with fundamental skills. Why not say so, and why not prove it?



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