

Department indicate that during the next 20 years the nation's total labor force will be increased by 21 millions and that large increases of 27 to 75 per cent are projected in the following fields: professional and technical, clerical and sales, craftsmen, operatives and service workers.⁵ Most of these occupations will demand more general and vocational education than is currently available in most high schools. There are indications that community colleges

⁵ House Committee on Education and Labor. *State Committees on Education Beyond the High School*. Hearing held June 25, July 12 and 13, 1956 (84th Congress, 2d Session). p. 33-35.

and urban universities will probably meet much of this demand.

This brief article does not permit a detailed analysis and consideration of other higher education developments anticipated in the coming decades. It is quite evident that many will represent a projection of present discernible trends. It is also clear that these developments will impose heavy responsibilities upon all college administrators and teachers. However, they also provide a great challenge and opportunity to serve the Nation's young people and assist them in contributing to America's progress and international peace.

KENNETH HELFANT

A School Project in Preventive Mental Hygiene

A case history of the Rye Project in Human Relations and Mental Health, this article indicates several important implications.

IN THE winter of 1952, the Westchester Mental Hygiene Association received a gift of \$15,000, with the stipulation that it be used to improve mental health in the area of Rye, New York. The association, after investigation, turned the money over to the Rye Board of Education to finance a two-year pilot program for preventive mental hygiene. This fund enabled the Board of Education to hire the author, an educational psychologist, as a full-time consultant to the program.

A description of the first year of operation and of the underlying rationale of the project has been outlined in a pre-

vious article.¹ The purpose of the present article is to review the first year of the project, to report on the second year and its consequences, and to make some recommendations based on these experiences.

The basic purpose of the Rye Project was to go a step beyond the usual area of preventive mental hygiene—namely, the attempt to spot and help pupils who are suffering from emotional problems or who seem headed for emotional diffi-

¹ K. Helfant. "A Project in Human Relations and Mental Health." *Educational Leadership*, April 1954, p. 434-39.

culties—into the area of giving *all* the pupils in the schools a series of experiences designed to lead to increased understanding of themselves and others.

In line with this objective, work was undertaken in five areas:

1. Bi-monthly seminars held with teachers and administrative personnel of the two elementary schools to explore the application of mental health principles to the job of teaching.

2. Weekly conferences with the guidance staff of the high school to discuss mental health problems of individuals and groups and to integrate mental health principles into general school policies.

3. An experimental series of human relations classes in the high school.

4. A parent education program.

5. A consultation service for parents and teachers.

The Project and the School Staff

At the time that the Rye Project was instituted, the Rye Public Schools did not employ a school psychologist. A minority of the teachers were actively opposed to psychological services and many were doubtful. This attitude on the part of the faculty proved to be one of the most formidable obstacles to realizing the goals of the project.

The consultant psychologist had been hired primarily to do educational rather than clinical work, and the first year's work was conducted almost entirely along educational lines. Bi-monthly seminars held by the consultant for teachers and administrative personnel of the high school and the two elementary schools were a major feature of the work, the object being to explore the application of mental health principles to teaching. Among the techniques used were short

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lectures, films, outside speakers, and discussions. Topics included the aggressive child, the withdrawn child, principles of child development and techniques for handling problem behavior. These seminars were held after school. Every effort was made to make it clear that attendance at the seminars was completely voluntary.

About the middle of the first year an evaluation committee composed of seven interested citizens was formed. The first problem facing the committee was to ascertain the degree of acceptance of the project by the teachers.

Accordingly, after the seminars had been in operation for a period of one year all the members of the faculties of the three schools were asked to fill out a questionnaire in which they anonymously expressed their opinions with regard to the value of the seminars and of the project in general. Although an overwhelming majority (95%) of the faculty were in favor of the continuation of the project, they were also overwhelmingly against a continuation of the seminars conducted by the consultant.

There appeared to be three main reasons why the faculty was opposed to the seminars. Probably the most important reason was that a large number of them were not convinced of the validity of psychological services as such and therefore were basically unprepared for an extension of such services. Probably the second most important reason for the non-acceptance of the seminars by some of the faculty was the fact that although they were supposed to be voluntary, many of the faculty did not regard them

as such, and resented what they regarded as being forced to take a "course" that they had not asked for. A third reason was that another part of the faculties felt that the material presented to them in the seminars was already familiar to them. Although the faculty members undoubtedly were familiar with much of the material on an intellectual level, there was ample evidence that it was not being used in their daily work. The seminars were apparently not successful in their purpose of helping these faculty members to become aware of ways in which the material could be used.

During the second year of the project, because a large number of faculty members had indicated that they were not convinced of the validity of psychological services as such, the consultant devoted much more time to clinical work with individual pupils referred to him by teachers, administrators and parents. Experience during the first year showed us that if teachers concretely saw and experienced favorable change in pupils who were especially troublesome to them, they tended to become more aware of the validity of psychological services.

In view of the generally negative reaction of the faculty to the seminars, during the second year they were discontinued and in their place the consultant devoted himself to conducting demonstration human relations classes in the fifth and eighth grades. The object of the demonstration classes was two-fold: (a) to show teachers by direct demonstration the techniques by which such

classes could be conducted, and (b) by using measuring instruments administered at the beginning and at the end of the program to attempt to test the value of such classes.

Faculty reactions to the second year of the project, as determined from individual interviews which members of the evaluation committee conducted with a sample of about 20% of the teachers, and from a general faculty meeting at which the project was discussed in the absence of the consultant, were generally favorable, especially as regards the clinical services the consultant had been rendering.

When the project ended in the fall of 1954, almost all the teachers felt a definite need for clinical services. The majority were favorably disposed toward the demonstration human relations classes, but only a small minority were really thoroughly "sold" on this aspect of the project.

The Project and the Community

Rye, New York, is a residential community in Westchester County, about 30 miles from New York City. It has a population of about 13,000, most of whom live in one-family dwellings. The average income is high, as is interest in the public schools and community affairs in general.

The community proved to be the greatest source of strength as well as the greatest source of weakness of the Rye Project. In the beginning the community proved to be a very important, if not the most important, source of strength. The consultant to the project offered a course in mental hygiene as a part of the Adult Education Program of the Rye Public Schools; and the students in this course provided the nucleus of a strong group of people in the community favorably

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disposed toward the project. In addition, the principal of the high school, as secretary of the Westchester County Mental Hygiene Association, was instrumental in organizing a Rye Committee of the Westchester County Mental Hygiene Association during the second year of the project. This committee provided an organization around which people interested in the project could rally and also publicized and forwarded its aims. Through the efforts of this committee, a number of parent study groups were organized around particular topics, such as the withdrawn child, the aggressive child, and the preadolescent. These groups met in the homes of the participants, and were led by qualified professional people who volunteered their services. In addition to this, the Rye Committee conducted a series of well-attended public meetings of a general educational nature.

For the first year and a half of operation there seemed to be rapid progress, both in the school and in the community. Human relations classes had been organized in the fifth and eighth grades, three discussion groups for parents were flourishing in the community, periodic meetings with the faculty were being held in order to increase their sensitivity to the mental hygiene needs of children, a consultation service for teachers and parents was functioning, and a local psychiatrist had volunteered his services and was holding regular meetings in the high school and elementary schools to discuss disposition of more difficult problems. The picture in general was one of a very successful undertaking.

At this time, however, when everything seemed to be going at its best, a series of events occurred which proved to be very damaging to the project. The first of these developed in a demonstra-

tion class in human relations for the fifth grade which was conducted by the consultant. The students in the pilot human relations unit put on an unrehearsed demonstration to which parents were invited. The consultant read a story to the children and asked them to finish the story by means of acting out an ending for it with puppets.

The story related how two boys found a change purse, and decided to spend the money in it on candy. Unbeknown to them, however, they were observed by a third boy. The class was then asked to act out what might have happened at this point.

The children suggested the following three alternatives:

1. The third boy might demand that the other two boys cut him in on the money, under the threat that he would tell the teacher if they didn't.
2. The third boy might go to the teacher and tell her what had taken place.
3. The third boy might persuade the other two boys to go to the teacher and tell her what had taken place and tell her himself only in the event that they refused to.

The alternate endings were dramatized and discussed in the above order, with the consultant taking a non-directive role. There was general consensus among the children at the end of the "lesson" that the third ending was the best.

The point of this exercise for the children was that at times "tattling" is justifiable and at other times it is not. This had been a problem in this school because there had been a number of instances when children had not reported serious things that had happened because they did not want to be accused of "tattling," while other children had

made a practice of telling the principal and teachers every little infraction of the rules. The consultant, in summary, tried to help the children to realize that there are times when "tattling" is justified and other times when it is not.

In the discussion following this demonstration, however, the parents were not at all concerned with the problem of tattling, but were very deeply concerned about what they considered to be the moral issues involved in this particular story. Several of the parents expressed the opinion that the consultant had not made it clear to the children that stealing was something they should not do. The consultant tried to point out to the parents that he was trying to help the children understand the human relations involved in this particular situation and that both he and the children already knew that it was wrong to steal. The problem the consultant suggested was not whether it was necessary to tell children once more that it was wrong to steal but how to deal with a situation involving stealing and in addition involving another aspect of human relations—how one implements one's ideals or principles in a conflict situation. Most of the parents were satisfied with this reply but a minority still felt that somehow the moral issues had been neglected in this particular presentation. Following the meeting two members of the community wrote letters to the Rye Board of Education which were published in the local newspaper. These letters were answered by other members of the community and an exchange of letters took place for a period of about a month. There is not sufficient space here to reproduce all of the correspondence. The following excerpts may give some idea of their general nature. From a "con" letter:

" . . . There's going to be a major controversy over the 'Rye Project' in Mental Hygiene, in which the children in certain grades are being used as Guinea Pigs. . . . If we can stop it here we will be doing a real service to the nation.

"I believe the whole program to be misconceived, misdirected, and confusing and dangerous to the mental health of our children.

"The basic term, 'Mental Hygiene,' implies that minds—in this case our children's minds—are unclean, perhaps unbalanced and in need of hygiene.

" . . . No adult direction is given to the children's conclusions . . . the discussions . . . lead to the idea that there may be several solutions to a problem, such as a problem of simple honesty.

" . . . This project is a bad local outbreak of the black national plague called 'progressive education' . . . a system whereby some educators abandon their responsibilities to the children, to their parents, and to the Nation."²

From a "pro" letter:

"It was surprising to me to read (the) letter condemning the Rye Project in Mental Hygiene. It is rather a coincidence, isn't it, that this should appear in *The Daily Item* the same week that Governor Dewey announced certain State funds could not be used to relieve overcrowding in Public Schools because they were even more urgently needed to relieve overcrowding in the State's Hospitals for the mentally ill.

"(The writer's) attitude seems to me to be similar to that of parents who protested against vaccination when I was a child in the 5th grade.

"Criticism of the Problem Technique . . . misses the point. If the Consultant had attempted to propound his own moral solution to a problem sufficiently complex to give an adult considerable thought, he would in my opinion be open to criticism. Instead of this, he encouraged the children to think out the problem themselves and arrive at their own solutions based upon their own moral and religious training and home background. There is guidance in these classes but not direction.

² *The Daily Item*, Port Chester, N. Y. January 30, 1954.

"... If it's agreed that Physical Hygiene and Health are properly the concern of schools, then why not Mental Hygiene and Health? If the possibility of faulty vision or faulty living habits which retard a child in school and later life are legitimate concerns of school authorities then why not the possibilities of faulty personality adjustments and mental habits?"³

Following several exchanges such as this, a meeting was held by the consultant with the parents of the fifth grade children who had been involved. An attempt was made to explain the purposes of the project. Some of the parents were satisfied, but a minority were quite displeased, and three parents requested that their children be withdrawn from the "experimental" human relations unit. This request was complied with. The battle went on, however, and more letters both pro and con appeared.

In order to clarify the issues and offset some of the unfavorable publicity which the project had received, the Rye Committee of the County Mental Hygiene Association held a meeting to which it invited a prominent psychiatrist to speak on the topic of mental hygiene and the parents' role in maintaining mental hygiene of children. Following this presentation, in a question and answer period, the speaker was asked whether he was in favor of the principles under which the Rye Project was organized. The speaker replied that he was *not* in favor of such a project because, in his opinion, not enough was known about mental hygiene to justify any program in mental hygiene. This position was challenged by several people in the audience, including one who asked, "If so little is known about mental hygiene, how is it possible for a psychiatrist such as you to practise?" The speaker, never-

theless, maintained his position; in fact, held it more strongly the more he was challenged on it. At several points audience reaction indicated strong differences of opinion with the speaker, but his comments undoubtedly aroused considerable doubt even in the minds of those committed to the project. The following report of the meeting was made in a sort of gossip column of the local newspaper following the meeting:

"Advocates of the Rye Mental Health Project, . . . were set back on their collective heels last week at the meeting of the Rye branch of the Mental Health Association of Westchester . . .

"During the question period the speaker, a psychiatrist, was asked whether he didn't believe, in view of the increasing amount of mental sickness, that it is wise to begin to attempt correction and prevention with school age youngsters (as the Rye Project does)?

"With an emphatic 'No!' (the speaker) remarked that he was definitely against working on an experimental basis with children, especially with healthy children in whom the project might stir up harmful effects. He criticized such a plan as wrong, dangerous and harmful to a youngster."⁴

This piece of reporting in the local newspaper seemed to lend the weight of authority to the position which had been taken by the minority of people in the community who were against the project, and was a very serious blow to the project. A new rash of letters appeared in the local newspaper, again about equally "pro" and "anti" project. Their general content was the same as the previous letters except that the "con" letters expanded their attack, suggesting that the project would cause a rise in juvenile delinquency and that the children exposed to it would lose respect for their parents and teachers.

³ *Ibid.*, February 3, 1954.

⁴ *Ibid.*, February 16, 1954.

The Rye Committee of the County Mental Hygiene Association held a second meeting to which it invited another prominent psychiatrist, who warmly endorsed the project. Following this a third meeting was held in which a panel consisting of the superintendent of schools, the consultant to the project, the president of the Mental Hygiene Association, and three parents of children attending the Rye Schools, discussed the project before a capacity audience. The panel members' presentations were factual and were documented by research in the field and by the results of the objective valuation of the Rye Project as discussed in the next section of this report. The general tone of this meeting was favorable toward the project, as was the discussion from the floor.

Research Aspects of the Project

The human relations classes held in the fifth grade were based on the reading of incomplete stories dealing with problems in human relations, with the children acting out endings to the stories under the direction of the consultant. Some of the stories were supplied by George and Fannie Shaftel,⁵ others were culled by the consultant from various sources. The method described by the Shaftels⁶ was used, except that to reduce self-consciousness the children acted out the story endings with puppets instead of doing the actual acting themselves.

The demonstration human relations

⁵ F. R. Shaftel and G. A. Shaftel. *Creating the Democratic Personality; A Resource Book for the Teaching of American Ideals*. American Ideals Project, School of Education, Stanford Univ., 183 hectographed pages.

⁶ G. A. Shaftel and F. R. Shaftel. *Role Playing the Problem Story*. New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews, 78 p.

classes⁷ held in the eighth grade were based on materials consisting of a series of readings and exercises designed to increase the children's understanding of themselves and others. Two of the fifth and two of the eighth grade classes were designated as "experimental" groups and two of each as "control" groups. A test of insight into human relations selected from those developed in connection with the Preventive Psychiatry Program under the direction of Ralph H. Ojemann of the University of Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, was administered to all groups before any of the lessons were begun, and after the lessons had been given for a period of 15 weeks to the "experimental" classes. When the results of this before and after testing were analyzed, it was found that the human relations classes had significantly increased the scores of the children in one of the two fifth grade "experimental" classes and both of the eighth grade "experimental" classes.

As can be seen from the reactions of some members of the community quoted previously, the term "experimental" was misconstrued by some people in the community as indicating that we were using children as "guinea pigs" and conducting irresponsible experiments with them, whereas our real purpose was to evaluate the project and provide concrete evidence of its worth rather than to discover new scientific truths.

Judgment Day

Near the end of the second year of the project, the Evaluation Committee of the Rye Project submitted a report to the

⁷ The general nature of the readings and exercises used are described in Chapter 4 (p. 22-32) of *Education for Self Understanding* by Jersild, Helfant, and Associates. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953, 62 p.

Board of Education which was highly favorable to the project and recommended its continuation. The superintendent of schools also submitted a report on the project in which he also recommended its continuation but recommended that the project be incorporated into the school system and that the consultant be a school psychologist who would devote a major portion of his energies to the usual functions of a school psychologist, while at the same time continuing the purposes of the project. At a meeting of the Board of Education, near the end of the school year, the board voted to continue the project and provided funds for its continuation, as outlined by the superintendent of schools.

What Was Learned

The first and foremost "lesson" that emerges from this experience is that in order for a project of this sort to be successful, the worth of psychological services as such must first be demonstrated to the faculty and staff of a school.

A second "lesson" is that in undertaking a project of this sort, it is essential that the faculty be involved in the preliminary planning for the project. One of the more important sources of discontent on the part of the faculty members at Rye was that they felt that it had been imposed upon them.

A third "lesson" from the Rye Project is that it is essential that the attitudes and knowledge of the school faculty be accurately assessed, and that the methods used be geared to their attitudes and knowledge. One of the most frequently expressed complaints of the teachers during the first year of the project was that they felt that the material presented to them in the seminars was already familiar to them. This, however, didn't seem to be the real problem at all. The real

problem seemed to be the teachers' emotional attitudes toward the material. During the course of the first year of the project, the teachers had ample opportunity to voice their preferences with regard to subject matter, and the subject matter was selected according to their stated preferences. The problem was not the selection of the content of the seminars, but the overcoming of the teachers' emotional resistance to the full implications of the subject matter which they themselves had selected. Films, lectures and even discussions seemed to be quite ineffectual in overcoming this resistance. Presentation of school "cases" known to them and actual individual counseling of pupils and teachers seemed more effective.

A fourth "lesson" is the need to assess the community's values and to take them into account. One of the shortcomings of the Rye Project was that in the demonstration which was held in the elementary school, after which most of the difficulties began, the consultant was not prepared for the fact that many parents considered psychology to be in conflict with moral values and were suspicious of the motives and morals of its practitioners. Assuming that the parents took for granted that the motives and moral standards of the consultant were the same as their own, and not making this clear, was a mistake.

A fifth caution to those who might consider a project of this sort is that publicity and public relations are very important aspects of any attempt at preventive mental hygiene. The use of special terminology which may be misunderstood by a portion of the public must be avoided. Of special importance is the relationship of the consultant with members of other professions. The newspapers can easily—sometimes wittingly

and sometimes unwittingly—distort the actual purposes of a project of this sort in the interest of sensationalism.

Over and above these "lessons," all of which are primarily concerned with the technique of introducing a program of this sort, lies the need for a really thorough-going research project in this area. Although present research indicates very clearly that a preventive mental hygiene program of the type described here will result in greater understanding of self and others on the part of parents, teachers and children, it still remains to be proved that such a program will actually *reduce the incidence of mental illness*. To prove this would take an elaborate program extending over a period of at least a generation. In view of the importance of the problem, however, there can be no question of the need for it. Although increasing the understanding of self and others on the part of parents, teachers and children has been demonstrated to improve the mental hygiene "atmosphere" of the classroom and to result in more and better learning of school subjects, it is doubtful that programs of this sort will ever be widely and enthusiastically accepted by a majority of people until it can be proved

that these programs also result in a decrease in the incidence of mental illness. The fact that it was possible to undertake the Rye Project with some success gives hope that a community can undertake research, the results of which no thinking person could ignore.

Summary

This report has outlined a two-year school project on mental hygiene, its successes and its failures and an analysis of the reasons. The project was partially successful in giving the children in the Rye Schools opportunities for experiences in understanding of themselves and each other. There was evidence that the faculty's and administration's awareness of mental hygiene problems was increased and that the need for preventive work was brought home. The greatest amount of work, however, is yet to be done. Perhaps the results of the project can be summarized best by saying that some seeds have been sown but their fruition remains to be assessed. In addition to this, a considerable amount has been learned about launching projects of this sort which, it is hoped, will be helpful to others who might consider undertaking one of their own.

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