

"Will I Know Enough?"

Two teachers give results of their study of pupils' own responses to the provocative (yet central) question of education, "Will I know enough?"

IN RECENT years the adult population has been stimulated to greater awareness of the problems and issues in American education. An inter-related chain of events has grown in magnitude to awaken parents to inquire about the conditions of public school education. Many issues reflected in mass media help make the American public aware of the emergencies that are being faced in providing adequate education for the younger citizens of our country.

In these anxious times parents are informed about a variety of conditions and factors that influence public school education. Some know very little about what they can do about the situation. Others think that they are paying dearly to have their children attend public schools. Most parents, however, are wondering whether their children are getting an education adequate for admitting them into college and for helping them to become mature citizens.

The study reported in this article was an attempt to obtain a partial estimate as to whether a sampling of students in public schools think they are being educated adequately. Approximately 100 tenth grade students were asked to respond to the question, "Will I know enough?"

Immediately, of course, the students wanted to know how they should answer this question. They were asked to re-

spond in a manner that would not be trying to satisfy the teachers', parents', schools', churches' or community's expectations.

Students Ask

When a teacher questions a group of students he, too, usually is questioned. So it was with the group responding to the query, "Will I know enough?"

Some questions related to the students' concerns for getting along well with others. These concerns included queries on sex, marriage, dates and love. The questions, "What should I expect on a date?" "Do I love anyone really, or is it love of myself?" and "Do I have the right attitude toward marriage?" illustrate the students' concerns in these areas.

"Do I know enough about myself that will enable me to look at myself without bias?" and "Do I know why I act and think as I do?" are examples of other questions showing students' concern about knowing themselves.

Still other questions by students involved inquiries about the future. "Do I know enough to earn a living?" "My main concern is: how will I go about applying my knowledge to everyday work?" "Do I know enough to get some form of higher education?"

The comments revolved around unanswered and unresolved questions which the students thought must be

answered by the school or by themselves before they believed they would know enough.

Students Speak

Some students were more forceful and determined in their responses. They voiced criticisms, suggestions and statements of approval concerning their educational program.

Students pointedly criticized their education. Quotations taken from their responses show their feelings about their need for individual attention. "I think it is only fair, however, that each child be allowed the same amount of attention to grow to the best of his ability—however poor this may be. This is not followed carefully by our school." "I feel that the teachers do not give enough attention to the kids who need help. Once in awhile I find the teachers teaching only a few kids who are smarter than the rest and are able to pick up the work right away. Then, the less bright students are left way behind."

Other quotations express students' needs for a more meaningful education. "The training that I have received here would not be sufficient for me to lead a happy productive life because they teach no moral ideals and stress nothing other than studies." "The only things we learn in school are mostly things we'll never use again in our lives. We don't really have an understanding of the more important things in life." "I think we're learning more what other people want us to learn than what we want to learn." "Perhaps, the least contributing factor has been the curriculum itself. If that were the sum total of school life, I might have parroted answers for years while trying to 'get by' on as little work as possible and graduate an 'educated' fool."

A number of comments were made

about evaluation. A student's written response illustrates this: "I think I am getting quite a bit out of school, but I think too much emphasis is placed on passing tests and getting good grades rather than learning for the sake of knowing something."

Many responses suggested pupils' thoughts on and feelings about improving their education. One student responded, "It is important for us to learn something more than to memorize something and then forget it." Another student responded philosophically, commenting on the constant need for more learning. He wrote, "People are always developing new ideas that will become part of our life and we must always want to further our learning. Everywhere one goes there always will be a need for further knowledge. In order to get along in life, you must always stress your learning."

A number of students expressed concern for being helped by the school. "Teachers can help students to probe into situations further than the surface by giving them goals to strive for. Some teachers have done this by discussing problems in class and others have done it on a personal basis after school." "Much of learning comes through practice and I feel that a high school education does a lot to help you face your own problems and to conquer them." "I feel I have learned enough to carry on an intelligent conversation with people my own age and with older people. I have learned to solve problems that arise, but yet, not major ones." "My schooling has done much for me, and not just along academic lines. I've learned to work hard

CONSTANCE and HAROLD BISCHOFF
*are teachers in the public school system
of Chappaqua, New York.*

and to work honestly, and, also, to play hard and to play with good sportsmanship. More important than this is the fact that I have learned to understand myself and my fellow students."

A few wanted closer identification with teachers. One student commented, "This year I have tried to get to know some of my teachers better, as they can help me to do more than the required work and they can help me in certain problems."

When members of a group are asked to react to a question, their responses are likely to result in a continuum from criticism to approval. Insightful comments by the pupils approving of the instruction and curriculum of their school give evidence of how their school affected them individually. Some write that they are now prepared academically for the future and that they have achieved a better understanding of themselves. "School is really a pretty wonderful place, and more of us realize it than adults give us credit for. And we get a lot more out of school than you can imagine. Maybe you don't realize it, but most of us really worry about our future. Not just dates, parties and sports, but what is going to happen when the parties are over and when we have to go out on our own bothers us." "The responsibility of going to school, getting my work done on time and done well—has helped me to be responsible in life—to take responsibilities seriously."

Reflecting upon his past four years of high school, one interviewee made this response: "Although I do not have a natural liking for math, I feel that algebra, trigonometry and geometry have all been excellent disciplines for me. Chemistry, which I was afraid of before I started it, has turned out to be a subject for which I have a great liking. English,

which I always liked, means more to me now than it ever has. Spanish falls under the same category. I do want to stress the value of practical courses such as typing and driver education, which have given me skills that will serve me for the rest of my life."

Students Look to the Future

Some students were stimulated by this question to be reflective and philosophical. The importance of knowing oneself is vital to some students. "As far as knowing myself goes, I'm just at the beginning. It will take many more years than this to know myself. Right now, I'm lazy and I'll admit it." "I want to become an interesting person. If I am interesting, have a sense of humor and am not intolerant, I can get along with others." "I wish I could know whether I know enough. Right now, I am going on my parents' and teachers' say-so. I have learned many things by probing my interests, mechanical and intellectual. I have learned to wonder at the world's every little event. I have a sincere respect for nature." "I grow up a little each year with this learning and become more adult in my thinking, actions, and what I say. I am learning more and more to make decisions for myself and also to form my own opinions rather than depending on others. I am learning to take responsibility through work I must do. I am learning to recognize things which I don't like in myself, and I am beginning to try to overcome them. If I keep learning and maturing at a rate about the same as in the past, I should be pretty ready to take my place in whatever I will do."

Some responses seem to indicate a skeptical reaction to the past and to the future. "The school has a lot of expectations for me, but actually I expect twice

as much from myself. School teaches me all the fundamentals I need to go on, but I do feel that school fails to create interest in many things and I feel as though I am working hard with no real set goals to work for. If there were something to really work for the results would be much more fruitful." "I feel that most students have no real love for their country outside of their home, family and community. They have learned the facts of history, the dates, what different presidents did and in some cases why, but they don't realize the personal toils and troubles the great men went through to achieve what they dreamed of."

Other pupils thought that the curriculum should make additional provisions. "No, I will not know enough because the subjects taught are not the subjects I am interested in. The fields of industrial arts and practical math and other subjects are missing so that when I do get out of high school I will have no education that can be used other than to get into college." "I think some special courses should be given for people who aren't going to college—courses that teach more basic things, useful in life." "The population is becoming so great throughout the world that it is very hard for one to enter college without having above average grades. There should be something done so that the average kids could enter a school to make good use of their intelligence."

Reflections

Many types of analyses could be drawn from this variety of quotations. Many interpretations could be proposed which might reflect what each interpreter would read into the students' written

comments. Because this is not a statistical analysis, simple and direct observations seem to be more appropriate.

A number of students said that they were glad they were asked to write about the question, "Will I know enough?" They felt that it was the first time they had really tried to look at themselves. Some found that it was very difficult to express anything that seemed important to say. Others could not respond because they felt they had no opinion. Some wrote almost an essay. Some were cynical and critical. Some were quite appreciative. Many were very philosophical. They were questioning themselves about their values, purposes, achievements, failures and difficulties. Many seemed to find that stating their own opinion was too difficult, so they used "you," "we," "your," "our," "in the opinion of some people," "one may" and other impersonal forms.

More specifically, these adolescents were inquiring about knowing themselves and the implications of self-concepts. They seemed to know that maturity demands this kind of personal understanding. To be happy within, they seemed to be saying, there first must be acceptance of one's self as a responsible, worthwhile, productive, trained and skillful person. There seems to be no doubt that they will have acquired sufficient academic knowledge from their formal education. They do question whether they have sufficient practical experiences. Also, they are questioning how to get along with others. Many seem to feel that if they had a closer relationship to their teachers, then they might receive more personal direction and understanding.

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