

An In-Service Child Study Program

How effective is an in-service child study program? This question is posed—and answered—by these authors.

MARJORIE, would you like to go downtown and shop this afternoon? I expect to leave as soon as I am finished with bus duty at four." Emily Williams spoke as she and her good friend and fellow teacher, Marjorie Prindle, stood in the warm California sunshine watching their children play during recess.

"I'm sorry, Emily, but our child study group meets this afternoon."

"Is child study really worth all the time you put in on it?" queried Emily.

"We feel that we're really beginning to understand the children we're studying. I sometimes wonder, though, why we spend three years on something that could be accomplished in one or two," answered Marjorie.

In New Jersey, John Buckley, the new principal of a twelve-grade consolidated school, asked these questions of the county helping teacher: "Where can we find out more about this in-service child study program which you described to our teachers? How effective really is it?"

During the school board meeting for discussing the budget, T. M. Winslow, board member and prominent merchant in Magnolia City, Alabama, remarked: "I know we are all impressed by reports which testify to the value of this child study program, but do we know whether this is the best program for our money?"

In recent years in-service programs for

teachers have been initiated and carried on by an increasing number of school systems as a major effort toward improving their school programs. The efforts, time and money expended on these services are considerable. This growing trend, then, has caused educators and laymen alike to seek information which would enable them to judge their effectiveness. The results of 16 researches extending over a decade seem to provide tentative answers in evaluating one such program—an in-service program in child study.

In this one program for more than 15 years teachers, administrators and supervisors in school systems in various parts of the United States have organized themselves voluntarily into in-service groups for the purpose of studying individual pupils in their classrooms and through this to gain deeper insights into the causes which underlie behavior and development. This child study program is a three-year sequence of experiences in studying and interpreting children's behavior. It was developed initially through the work of the American Council on Education's Commission on Teacher Education at the University of Chicago beginning in 1939. Since 1947 the further development and expansion of this program has been carried forward by the Institute for Child Study of the University of Maryland and by educational institutions in other states serving teacher groups in those states.

In-Service Program

How effective, then, is this child study program in which each year approximately 5000 teachers have participated during the past 10 years? A report¹ of twelve independent researches and a co-operative project of four researches discusses the evaluation of this child study program in relation to: (a) its effects on teachers, (b) its effects on school organization and community relationships, (c) its effects on children, and (d) the factors and processes which influence teachers' learnings. All findings cited here are statistically significant.

Teachers Gain Skills and Understandings

Since participants in this program seek an understanding of behavior through writing and analyzing case records of students in their classrooms, the extent of the improvement in their abilities to write and interpret case record materials is of interest. Results of these researches show that participants do improve in these skills. Their writing becomes more objective and complete, and their analyses become more scientific. Only those teachers who have participated in the program for three years, however, achieve greater competence in using case records for recommending child guidance procedures.

Participation in child study increases teachers' scientific knowledge about human behavior and development. This is revealed by scores made on a standardized achievement test of human growth and development knowledge, by the scope of information contained in case records which indicates a greater knowledge of the dynamics which underlie

behavior and development, by the expression of scientific concepts during child study meetings, and by the higher ratings which principals gave participants in the spring than in the fall on professional knowledge.

Most important, perhaps, is the change in the attitudes of teachers participating in this program. They tend increasingly to become warmer toward and more accepting of children. The longer they participate the more their judgments regarding the seriousness of children's behaviors tend to coincide with the judgments of mental hygiene authorities. In addition, these teachers become more approving of democratic classroom practices, their descriptions of the ideal teacher show more understanding of human behavior, and they become more accepting of themselves, others, and their environments.

Observations of teachers in their classrooms indicate that these teachers change generally, from year to year, as they participate in the program. They develop more positive ways of handling children, such as praising and encouraging, to replace less effective negative ways, such as reprimanding and isolating. Moreover, these teachers utilize more human development principles in their teaching as shown by their looking for many causes of behavior and their treating children as individuals. Finally, the classrooms of these teachers change toward becoming more democratic and less autocratic as they participate in this program. It was found, however, that teachers do not improve in their abilities to make specific recommendations for helping a child adjust to his situation until after they have

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¹ Richard M. Brandt and Hugh V. Perkins, "Research Evaluating a Child Study Program." *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, Inc.*, Vol. XXI, Serial No. 62, 1956.

completed three years of child study. This finding suggests that teaching practices change more slowly and are markedly evident only after teachers have had extensive experience in studying children.

School Organization and Community Relationships Change

The influence of child study on school organization and community relationships is evident in many ways in these researches. First of all, considerably more home visitation occurs among child study teachers than among those who do not participate. Human relationships tend to improve throughout the school system between teachers and pupils, teachers and other teachers, teachers and administrators, and schools and communities.

When a high percentage of teachers in a school system participate, child study becomes a major influencing factor toward diminishing the number of children who are not promoted to the next grade, the number suspended from school, and the number sent to the principal's office. There is evidence that a school system's participation in child study is a major factor which contributes to a more significant parent education program, a curriculum which is more related to the life experiences and needs of pupils, and an increase in referral of students to guidance workers for reasons other than poor attendance. Even teachers who do not participate in child study tend to increase their home visitation and seem more understanding of their pupils.

Children, too, Are Helped

Only two of the researches studied the effects on children of their teachers' participation in child study. One study indicates that as teachers in child study increase in their use of positive ways in

handling children, these children in turn respond positively to these treatments. Teachers' participation in this program, however, does not seem to affect, adversely or favorably, the intelligence quotients and the reading and arithmetic achievements of their pupils. Since the experiences in studying children provided teachers in this program are not concerned directly with increasing pupil achievement in skill subjects, an expectation of significant gains in these areas by pupils of child study teachers may be unwarranted. If the increase in positive responses by these students is indicative of greater emotional security, social development, self-acceptance, and self-adjustment, then it is reassuring to note that, in addition to these gains, teacher involvement in child study does not lower the level of pupil achievement. This is an area where much more research is needed.

Other Effects of Program

The researches taken as a group indicate the changes in teachers occur continuously throughout teachers' participation in the program rather than as the result of specific curriculum procedures at each year level. There was general agreement, however, that maximum benefits from the program do not accrue until after three years' participation.

Leadership is a major factor influencing the learning that takes place in child study groups. More child development concepts, warmer and more objective attitudes toward children, more adequate substantiation of statements, and less tension are registered by child study groups where the leader is more supportive, clarifying, and helpful in dealing with problems than in those groups in which the leader reveals fewer of these qualities.

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current society shaping the types of personality that we cannot accept? And, if so, what is the school's role?

Can school be more than a refraction of current social trends? Can it help fill in gaps in social learning? Can it institutionalize counter cyclical thinking and develop programs that counteract social conformity, repression of individual autonomy? Can schools deal with and preserve heterogeneity in motivation, mental systems and creativity?

What in our current practice must we reconsider and reshape if education is to accomplish more than reflecting a current social trend or adding its forces to those abroad in the society?

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2. DAVIS, ALLISON. *Social-Class Influences upon Learning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948. 100 p.
3. DU BOIS, CORA A. "The Dominant Value Profile of American Culture." *American Anthropologist*, 57: 1232-39, December 1955.

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Finally, these researches show that child study is effective with both teachers and administrators and that the amount of benefit to be derived from this experience is not significantly influenced by differences in age, amount of teaching experience, grade level taught, the amount or recency of academic education completed, marital status, or race. Of the teachers who do not complete the three-year program a majority feels positive toward the program.

The results of research indicate that this in-service program of child study has been generally effective. In addition,

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10. KLUCKHOHN, CLYDE. "Student-Teacher" in *The People in Your Life*. (Edited by MARGARET HUGHES.) New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951. p. 158-81.
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12. *Review of Educational Research*. "Mental and Physical Health," Vol. XXVI, No. 5, December 1956.
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some principles have emerged from these results which may have an important bearing on the success of other in-service programs. An effective in-service program seems to be one which focuses on a real and significant problem of all teachers. Providing an organized sequence of experiences for achieving new insights and understanding, encouraging teachers and administrators to work together in groups, furnishing professional guidance through workshop experience and consultant services, and seeking continuously to evaluate and improve its procedures are factors which contribute to an effective in-service program.

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