

## Guidelines for Evaluating Core Programs

CORE programs in general education have sought consistently to achieve a wider range of educational values than is normally ascribed to a curriculum characterized by a sharp separation of disciplines. In clear contrast to such an approach, some of the current proposals for the secondary schools seem to reflect quantitative requirements in class periods and academic years in special subjects. Such proposals remind us of a continuing need for emphasizing the broad behavioral goals of general education that are identified with core programs of the high school.

### Critical Areas of Behavioral Competence

Recognizing this challenge, the Commission on Core Teaching of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is currently engaged in a study designed to encourage evaluation in several areas of behavioral competence held significant as goals for general education. In designating its immediate role in the study, the Commission has assumed the task of preparing a series of guidelines to assist persons interested in evaluation of this kind. Although specific direction of activities has focused on the evaluative aspects of the problem, the scope of the current study could be inter-

preted to serve the additional ends of stimulating program development, experimentation and theorizing about curriculum organization.

The ultimate purpose of the Commission's study is to help determine the extent to which core programs are achieving four of the major goals implicit in general education.

Specifically, the Commission is asking: How effective are core programs in . . .

- . . . developing skills and attitudes involved in *critical thinking*
- . . . helping students develop consistent *value systems*
- . . . establishing skills and understandings for *social living*, and
- . . . fostering the fullest development of students' *personalities*?

In this effort, Commission members hope to find what teaching-learning processes, resources, and organizing elements in the curriculum contribute most to achieving the goals under study.

Steps taken by the Commission to arrive at a statement of proposed guidelines have included:

1. Identification of four critical areas of learning of high priority in a core situation
2. Analysis of these areas in terms of descriptive behaviors and specific assumptions related to curriculum experiences provided in the core

3. Examination of existing research in education for cues to profitable directions for study.

The current stage of progress places its members at the point of formulating general and specific designs for assessing the core curriculum in respect to the selected areas of competence. Explorations in that direction have led to tentative hypothesizing about such programs, an example of which is offered in the area of value acquisition.

### **Toward Consistent Value Patterns**

One of the provocative avenues of studying the effectiveness of schools at all levels today has been the research on student values. The Commission's interest in the problem centers particularly on finding ways to evaluate core situations as to their potential for helping students develop consistent value patterns.

Current research on the problem suggests at least two major processes by which a student acquires his values. Psychologists support the theory that the most significant process for acquiring values is that of *identification* with a personality model who reflects certain values. For the student this model may be the teacher, a popular hero, a parent, or a member of his peer group. A second process, described by Louis Rath of New York University, is that of *valuing*; that is, an individual achieves his values through the experiences of discriminating in the face of choices, through prizing, rejecting, and clarifying.

Working from this conceptual framework, the Commission has hypothesized that students develop more consistent value patterns in classes (a) where there are increased possibilities for identifying with a teacher representing such consistency, or (b) where they have in-

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creased opportunities for engaging in value clarification. In making an application to core programs one might inquire whether or not the longer block of time with a given teacher, the broader scope of problems, and the situation of interaction or of establishing relationships between or among fields of knowledge do contribute to greater *identification* or to increased *valuing* by the student.

Within these broad characteristics of a core program the investigator might locate a range of experimental situations which would offer useful comparisons. For example, an interesting comparison could be made between those programs where the scope is defined rather narrowly by the fusion of language arts and social studies and those incorporating problem areas of wider interdisciplinary relevance. Furthermore, it would be possible to study the significance of the extended block of time for instructional improvement.

While focusing its attention on the four areas mentioned, the Commission assumes that such programs will be evaluated continually along more traditional lines, that is, on their effectiveness in helping adolescents achieve competence in subject matter. Omission of such goals in the current study is premised on a belief that sufficient evidence has already been collected on this concern by numerous investigators. Reviews of recent research involving comparative studies of core and departmentalized programs of general education indicate rather clearly that the more experimental programs are quite satisfactory in this respect. In summarizing pertinent research, Alberty concluded that "few significant differences in student achievement as measured by objective tests have been found between students in core programs and those in

other types of curricular organizations."<sup>1</sup>

Most studies suggest that the comparative advantages of a core program over more fragmented approaches are seen primarily in the realization of the behavioral goals of general education. The Commission hopes to mark out more distinctly the guide lines for evaluating core programs in these respects.

—VICTOR B. LAWHEAD, *Assistant Dean, Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana; and Chairman, ASCD Commission on Core Teaching*

<sup>1</sup> Harold Alberty. "Evaluation of Core Programs." *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, Third Edition. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960. p. 339.

### New Mathematics

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dividual about organizational patterns and the joy of understanding.

Testing of students who have completed the new courses shows that the students score quite satisfactorily on standardized tests of computation and reasoning based on traditional materials. Reports of teachers hold almost unanimously that the interest of students in the new mathematics is much greater than in the old. Too, it should not be interpreted that "new" neglects the social applications. The "social" is interpreted more broadly as, for example, in the introduction to probability and also the many more applications in the sciences.

The SMSG and Maryland 7th and 8th grade courses were written for all students in these grades. Experience with these courses to date seems to show that the same basic content and organization are appropriate for all ability and interest levels, when an appropriate adjustment is made so that those of lower ability and interest can cover the material more slowly.

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