

Personalities, Teachers and Curriculum Change

THE prospect of the 1960s is one of great significance for American education. Psychological research into the cognitive processes is beginning to bear fruit in broadening and deepening our understanding of the learning process. A resurgence of public awareness of education and insistence on improvement in its quality is bringing about a re-examination of the organization and content of the school curriculum. In recent years national committees of eminent scientists have developed high school science and mathematics programs which have been widely adopted in the schools. More recently, national committees in the social sciences and humanities have begun work of a similar nature.

On the "firing line" in the public schools, teachers and administrators are faced with the problem of conserving the best of the "old" while adopting the best of the "new" within the context of increasing public pressure for "excellence." While it is desirable that outstanding scholars in the various disciplines play an important part in the

development of instructional materials for the secondary schools, such programs will not in and of themselves bring improved instruction. An ineffective teacher will not suddenly become effective with the adoption of new curricular materials. If instruction is to be improved, it must be through developments within each school district, in each building, and within each classroom.

Evidence of the crucial nature of local influence on curriculum changes was reported in a recent study by the NEA.¹ Elementary and secondary principals listed local school officials and faculty members as the two most important groups in bringing changes in instructional practices. There is evidence, however, that it is among these same groups that the major barriers to change are found.² Noda indicates that the most important "blocks" to curriculum change arise out of the attitudes of teachers as well as out of the nature of their rela-

¹ *The Principals Look at the Schools: A Status Study of Selected Instructional Practices.* Washington, D.C.: National Education Association Project on Instruction, 1962. p. 28-29.

² Harold B. Albery and Elsie J. Albery. *Reorganizing the High School Curriculum.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962. p. 18-19.

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tionships with administrators, supervisors and students.³ In another study, Coon found that teachers were more likely to resist significant curriculum change than either administrators, students, or parents.⁴

Resistance to Change

The question immediately arises: How can one account for this apparently widespread resistance to change which is found among teachers in our schools? Several factors should be taken into consideration in any attempt to answer this question.

First, the formal institutional patterns and organizational arrangements of the school may exert a negative influence on teachers' attitudes with regard to change. Administrative failure to initiate opportunity or provide organizational structure for the consideration of change may create a climate in which change itself is actually considered to be inappropriate.

Second, the existence of ill-defined relationships among teachers, administrators and supervisors and of conflicting perceptions of the role each sees himself and others playing may combine to inhibit the consideration of change, and may, therefore, have a negative effect on teachers' attitudes. If teachers see the principal as the leader in bringing about changes while the principal sees the stimulus for change as needing to originate among the faculty, there will likely be a "built-in" resistance to change.

³ Daniel S. Noda. "A Study of Successful Practices Used To Remove the Major Blocks to Curriculum Improvement in the Secondary School." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1952. p. 78.

⁴ Herbert Coon. "A Study of the Attitudes of Teachers and Administrators Toward High School Curriculum Reorganization." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1951. p. 298, 305.

Finally, inasmuch as a teacher's attitudes are a part of his total personality, there may be certain configurations of personality structures of individual teachers which lead them to be receptive or resistant to a consideration of change. Combs and Snygg describe the "adequate personality" as one who sees himself in essentially positive ways, is capable of acceptance of self and others, and sees himself as closely identified with other persons.⁵ The "inadequate personality" is characterized by the reverse of these characteristics. Thus a teacher who sees himself in a basically negative manner and who has difficulty in relating to those around him is likely to react in a highly defensive and resistant way to any suggestions for the consideration of curriculum changes.

Personality Structure

The crucial nature of personality structure in fostering or hindering social change has been discussed by Hagen in another context. In searching for an explanation for the inconsistency of technological progress among different underdeveloped nations, all of which possessed the economic, technological and educational prerequisites, Hagen concluded that the significant element in those countries undergoing rapid change was the existence of a large number of individuals exhibiting what he calls the "innovational personality."⁶ On the other hand, in those countries characterized by a remarkable lack of change, the preponderant personality characteristics

⁵ Arthur W. Combs and Donald Snygg. *Individual Behavior: A Perceptual Approach to Behavior*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959. p. 248.

⁶ Everett E. Hagen. *On the Theory of Social Change*. Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, Inc., 1962.

were those which Hagen classified as "authoritarian." Briefly, among the qualities which characterize the innovational personality are an openness to experience, a confidence in one's own evaluations, a satisfaction in facing and resolving confusion or ambiguity, and a feeling that the world is orderly, and that the phenomenon of life can be understood and explained.⁷ Conversely, the authoritarian is characterized by a fear of using his initiative, an uncertainty concerning the quality of his own judgment, a tendency to avoid frustration and anxiety, an uneasiness in facing unresolved situations, and a tendency to see the world as arbitrary and capricious.⁸

Moreover, personality structure or "perceptual organization" is apparently a determining factor in the effectiveness of counselors. According to Combs and Soper, it is possible to distinguish effective counselors from ineffective ones on the basis of how they view themselves, their tasks, their clients, and their clients' purposes.⁹ The perceptual organization of effective counselors, as classified by these researchers, follows closely the personality types outlined previously as "innovational" or "adequate."

Finally, Myers and Torrance studied the personality characteristics of teachers who were resistant to change.¹⁰ Among the characteristics which they identified were authoritarianism, defensiveness, insensitivity to pupil needs, preoccupation with information-giving functions, intellectual inertness, disinter-

est in promoting initiative in pupils, and preoccupation with discipline.

Within the context of this discussion, the following questions might be raised: To what extent can the rigidity of public schools with regard to curriculum change be attributed to teachers with authoritarian or inadequate personalities? Is it possible that persons who possess personality characteristics which lead to resistance to change are attracted to careers in education, or is it possible that such characteristics may arise out of the experiences which the teachers encounter in the profession? Can teachers who are willing to consider curriculum changes be distinguished from those who are unwilling to do so in any reliable way prior to actual involvement in curriculum development?

Personality and Change

A study conducted by a graduate class at Ohio State University was concerned with the relationship of teachers' personality structures to their willingness or unwillingness to consider curriculum change. Fifty-four small city and suburban school districts in Ohio which were similar in size, tax valuation, and expenditure per pupil were identified.

The principal of each high school was asked to select the two teachers on his staff whom he considered to be the *most* willing to consider curriculum change and the two teachers whom he considered to be the *least* willing to consider change. He was provided with a series of 11 paired criteria to use as a basis for his selections. For example, included among the criteria for the identification of teachers most willing to consider change were the use of a variety of teaching materials, experimentation in the classroom, the ability for realistic

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97-98.

⁹ Arthur W. Combs and Daniel W. Soper. "Perceptual Organization of Effective Counselors." Unpublished report of a study conducted during the 1961-1962 academic year at the University of Florida. p. 1, 8.

¹⁰ R. E. Myers and E. Paul Torrance. "Can Teachers Encourage Creative Thinking?" *Educational Leadership* 19: 156-59, December 1961.

self-evaluation, the viewing of others as capable of making contributions, and the toleration of uncertainty until knowledgeable judgment can be made. On the other hand, criteria for the identification of teachers least willing to consider change included the use of a narrow range of teaching materials, the following of routine procedures in the classroom, defensive self-evaluation, the viewing of others' contributions on the basis of status, and the making of quick judgments to avoid uncertainty.

Each teacher selected was supplied a packet of materials including a personal data sheet and a 100 item questionnaire composed of items from the Dogmatism Scale, the F-Scale, the Junior Index of Motivation, and the GNC Educational Philosophy Scale. An indirect approach was used in that each teacher was asked to respond to each item as he thought an "ideal teacher" would respond.

Of the original group of 216 questionnaires mailed (four to each of the fifty-four selected schools), 137 were returned: 70 from teachers identified as most willing to consider curriculum change and 67 from those identified as least willing. The personal data (sex, marital status, teaching area, educational preparation, etc.) from the returned questionnaires were analyzed and the scores for the Junior Index of Motivation and Dogmatism scales were determined. Further, an item analysis was carried out on the questionnaire, in each case comparing those teachers who were classified as most willing to consider curriculum change with those who were classified as least willing to do so.

With respect to the personal data, there were two factors which discriminated significantly between the two groups of teachers beyond the .05 level of confidence. First, 56 percent of the

teachers in the group identified as most willing to consider curriculum change held master's degrees as compared with 40 percent of those in the least willing group. Second, among the married teachers, there were more in the group least willing to consider curriculum change with no children (21 percent) than there were in the most willing group (7 percent).

When the motivation scores and the dogmatism scores for the two groups were compared, no significant differences were found.

The item analysis uncovered four items in the questionnaire which discriminated between the two groups beyond the .05 level of confidence. Considering the fact that 100 items were included in the questionnaire, at least five would have been expected to differentiate between the two groups strictly by chance, so no significance can be attributed to these four items.

For all practical purposes, no significant differences were observed in the way these two groups responded to these various items. Indeed, the general pattern of responses for the two groups was in fact quite similar. With minor exceptions, teachers who were identified by their principals as most willing and least willing to consider curriculum change agreed on the way they thought an "ideal" teacher would respond to most of the 100 items included in this study.

This observation raises certain basic questions. Are teachers learning, in their college preparation or in-service education programs, what they "ought to do" or what they "ought to say"? If we can assume that principals were fairly accurate in identifying those teachers whose behaviors were distinctly different, does the fact that these divergent groups say the same thing on pencil and paper

tests mean that what teachers say and what they do are entirely different? If this is true, attempting to assess teachers' attitudes or effectiveness or philosophical outlooks by means of conventional instruments may be completely unrealistic. If teachers have learned to "say the right things" to the point that even they are not aware of the discrepancies between their stated sensations and their actual behaviors, the problems involved in helping teachers see where they are in relationship to where they want to go are formidable indeed. This problem should be explored much more deeply and with more elaborate design and procedures in future studies.

In this study the data were collected from teachers in communities which were selected according to certain criteria and which, therefore, were quite similar in some respects. It may be that such communities attract teachers with similar attitudes toward curriculum change. Or, it may be that the communities mold teachers' attitudes to such an extent that significant differences (of the sort examined in this study) cannot be isolated. The relationship between teachers' attitudes toward curriculum change and the type of community in which they are teaching would appear to be a fruitful area for examination.

There may also be a real question whether or not principals can identify teachers as most willing or least willing to consider curriculum change on the basis of the criteria employed in this study. On the other hand, it may be that some principals are actually much more accurate than others in classifying teachers according to these criteria.

This study was singularly unsuccessful in its attempt to isolate some differences between teachers who are willing to consider curriculum change and those

who are unwilling to do so. It is hoped that this lack of success will not discourage others from studies in what may be a very fruitful area. It may very well be that the dynamics of curriculum development can only be understood by probing deeply into the personal factors involved in acceptance of or resistance to the notion of change.

Effecting Change—

Cunningham

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sponse. After a few weeks a special evening faculty meeting following a dinner might be an appropriate beginning. On such an occasion the administrator might share his concerns for the school and invite faculty and staff participation and support in a program of self study and improvement.

Recognition of a deplorable state of affairs in a building will not come as a surprise to the staff. A confident and vigorous plan for solving some of the problems may be a surprise. People as a rule are more comfortable when their personal status is clear.

A supervisor must realize that definitive sets of rules do not exist to cover all of the "hows," "whens," and "wheres" that arise in effecting changes in schools. If the supervisor approaches his problems intelligently, thoughtfully, and persistently, drawing upon the concepts described above, he should be able to effect the changes he desires. The brief example given here is not a suggested pattern; it may not even be a desirable one. It is cited only as an example of the process a supervising principal might follow as he thinks through the problems of taking a new position in what seems to be a deteriorating school.

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