

Concerns of School People

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IN JULY 1969, the New England Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development held its biennial conference at the University of Vermont. The conferees were invited to respond to a questionnaire which was developed for the purpose of identifying some areas of concern in education. While the respondent group represents a small (34 percent) portion of the attendants, it is felt that the responses received may be of value to other educators who seek dynamic methods for identifying problems.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts as follows: Part I. Areas of Concern; Part II. Related or Causal Factors; and Part III. Related Action.

Certain identifying information was solicited from the respondents. Tables 1, 2, and 3 present these descriptive data.

The data presented in Table 1 reinforce a historic fact—the New England ASCD

membership is traditionally one of school administrators. The data also point out that attendance at the conference was swelled by educators from the host state.

Many of the current social problems suggest alternative solutions which are unacceptable to both younger and older persons. This difference in points of view is popularly attributed to the inability of successive generations to communicate with one another. Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents by two categories—those under 35 years of age and those who are 35 or older.

State	Adminis- tration	Higher Education	Classroom Teaching	Totals
Connecticut	4	1	1	6
Maine	3			3
Massachusetts	1	1	2	4
New Hampshire	1	1	1	3
Rhode Island	4	2	1	7
Vermont	10	1	1	12
Totals	23	6	6	35

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by State and Position

Age	Number	Percent
Under 35	6	17
35 or older	29	83

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age

From Table 2 it is clear that the majority of the respondents are mature individuals. In other words, they are the "over 30" group with whom many young people feel it is not possible to establish communication or, in fact, a positive level of rapport.

A final identifying factor is the nature of the community in which the respondent

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works. Table 3 shows the distribution of the respondents by community.

From Table 3 it becomes obvious that the respondent group is, in the main, actively participating in school work in suburban (52 percent) and rural (37 percent) New England. The remaining 11 percent are associated with urban school systems in the six states.

Type of Community	Number	Percent
Rural	13	37
Urban	4	11
Suburban	18	52

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Community

Part I. Areas of Concern

In Part I three areas of concern were identified: societal, professional, and cultural concerns. Each area consisted of four topics which are of current interest. The respondents were asked to rank the topics in the order of their critical importance. Table 4 shows the distribution of topics from the most (rank 1) to the least (rank 4) critical.

Area	Topic of Concern	Critical Rank Order
Societal	The changing value system	1
	The generation gap	2
	Student unrest	3
	Drug abuse	4
Professional	Relevance of the curriculum	1
	Community involvement in the schools	2
	Teacher militancy	3
	Role of the paraprofessional	4
Cultural	Individual self-determination	1
	Minority group treatment	2
	Alienation from the culture	3
	Communication between parents and educators	4

Table 4. Distribution by Area of Critical Concerns

From Table 4 the foremost problems in three areas can be determined. In the societal realm, the most critical problem is the changing value system. In the professional

Rank	Topic of Concern	Weighted Score*
1	Minority group treatment	222
2	Student unrest	210
3	Individual self-determination	186
4	Relevance of the curriculum	184
5	Community involvement in the schools	171
6	Teacher militancy	170
7	The changing value system	160
8	The generation gap	156
9	Alienation from the culture	150
10	Role of the paraprofessional	100
11	Drug abuse	91
12	Communication between parents and educators	83

* Highest possible weighted score (perfect consensus) = 232.

Table 5. Distribution by Rank of Critical Concerns

realm, the most critical problem is the relevance of the curriculum. In the cultural realm, the most critical problem is individual self-determination. It is interesting to note that so few topics were written in the space allowed for that purpose, that one is led to assume that the questionnaire was comprehensive enough to satisfy the respondents.

When the responses are weighted mathematically the critical rank order is altered appreciably. The weight describes a factorial relationship between a value given to the topic by the respondent and the number of respondents. Table 5 shows the topics of current interest with the weighted scores.

Table 5 reveals a high degree of consensus among the respondents concerning the relative importance of these topics of concern. It also isolates three topics of concern with very low weighted scores, that is, items 10, 11, and 12. This could be interpreted to mean that the respondents concur in the opinion that the role of the paraprofessional, drug abuse, and communication between parents and educators are considerably less critical problems than the other topics.

Part II. Related or Causal Factors

In Part II of the questionnaire, 38 statements were listed and described as possibly related to or causes of the areas of concern.

The respondents were asked to judge the relevance of these factors to the areas of concern. There is a high degree of polarity in the responses. In other words, the respondents indicated considerable agreement on the relationship between the topic of concern and the suggested related or causal factors. Two exceptions are noted. Drug abuse and the role of the paraprofessional evoked minimal consensus. There was a broad scatter of opinion on these two topics, with the result that the degree of consensus was only 32 percent on drug abuse and 20 percent on the role of the paraprofessional.

Table 6 shows the percent of consensus on the relationship between the topic of concern and the related factors.

Topic of Concern	Related Factors	Percent of Consensus
Minority group treatment	Minority frustration Lack of black/white dialogue	92
Student unrest	War in Vietnam Students for a Democratic Society	90
The generation gap	Parental apathy Lack of parental discipline	87
Relevance of the curriculum	The curriculum lag Over-structured curriculum	84
The changing value system	Sexual freedom Breakdown in morality	81
Community involvement in the schools	Inadequate local funding Fear of change	79
Communication—parents/educators	Parental apathy Administrative inaction	72
Individual self-determination	Freedom of choice A negative personal image	67
Alienation from the culture	A lack of involvement Disillusionment	61
Teacher militancy	The labor/education movement Administrative dominance	57
Role of the paraprofessional	Impact of technology Administrative inaction	32
Drug abuse	Peer group pressures A negative personal image	20

Table 6. Distribution of the Degree of Consensus on the Relationship Between the Topics of Concern and Related Factors

Part III. Action Proposals

In the last section of the questionnaire, Part III, the respondents were asked to rate a list of activities. These activities suggest some ways in which schools and colleges might contribute to easing the areas of concern. The rating scale ranged from 0 (none) to 4 (very much). Table 7 presents the order and degree to which the respondents indicated the schools and colleges could help with these critical problems.

Rank Order	Activity	Contribution
1	Change teacher education patterns	Very much
2	Teach children how to solve problems	Very much
3	Develop minority group leadership	Very much
4	Educate parents	Significant
5	Involve students in curriculum planning	Significant
6	Involve the community in curriculum planning	Significant
7	Expose teachers to minority group culture	Significant
8	Involve experts from other behavioral sciences	Significant
9	Initiate school/community programs	Significant
10	Remove the pressure on students to go to college	Significant
11	Provide more vocational programs	Marginal
12	Promote urban/suburban teacher exchange	Marginal
13	De-emphasize academic programs	Marginal
14	Develop a value system for youth	Marginal
15	Balance the new with the old in the curriculum	Very little
16	Teach world religions in the school	Very little

Table 7. Ways in Which Schools and Colleges Could Contribute to Easing the Areas of Concern

Recommendations

1. There is substantial evidence that the respondent group represents educators who work in suburbs and rural areas. If the NEASCD wishes to provide meaningful dialogues for its members, the topics explored should meet their interests—those of suburbs and rural areas. If NEASCD wishes to use its resources to improve education in urban

areas, then it should move to recruit new members from cities.

2. The high degree of consensus that Minority Group Treatment and Student Unrest are critical problems indicates that NEASCD might serve its members well by planning future activities to explore these topics.

3. It is interesting to note that the two problem areas judged most critical, that is, Minority Group Treatment and Student Unrest, also had the greatest degree of polarization on the related factor judgments. It is recommended that NEASCD continue to explore ways in which dialogues with students and minority group persons may lead to positive action.

4. Special attention should be given to the activities designated in Table 7 as those which hold great promise for contributing to the easing of the areas of concern. It is reasonable to interpret the selection of the first

one—Change Teacher Education Patterns—to mean that the respondents have at least two very significant observations to make. The first is that through change in teacher education, the profession can make a significant contribution to solving some desperate social problems. A second interpretation could lead to the conclusion that change in teacher education is the most needed of all of the selected activities.

In conclusion, it is the opinion of the reporter that a study of this kind can be replicated with beneficial results. This study illustrates that it is possible to assess opinion and bring about consensus while avoiding the ill-feeling generated by confrontation. The statistical techniques are relatively simple but effective. What NEASCD has gained by sponsoring this project may be summarized by pointing out that by this means the association can learn quickly and accurately what its members are thinking. □

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