

News Notes

by Robert C. McKean and Bob L. Taylor

Ethnographic Research Can Improve Instruction

"Many of our educational ills are caused by those educationally innovators who are personally committed to pet programs which simply change the *status quo*," contends Thomas L. Dynneson writing in *In-ed*, a publication of the University of Texas of the Permian Basin. Instead of continuing to use psychological research techniques that have traditionally been applied to the educational setting, Dynneson proposes that "ethnographic research performed by specialists trained in education and anthropology will open new horizons into the problems of educational institutions."

Ethnology may be a powerful tool for research in education, for it involves a systematic, objective observation of human behavior in its natural setting. Dynneson suggests that this research technique be utilized to explore the following kinds of questions:

1. Effects of schooling on culture, for example, the role of school as a transmitter of cultural values, norms, practices, and technology; the effects of schooling on social mobility and occupational status.
2. Effects of culture on schooling, for example, the school as a custodial institution; the influence of society's economic and political needs on the curriculum.
3. Culture of the school and classroom, for example, subcultures contained within the school; classroom interaction among students and between students and teachers.
4. Articulation between

school culture and the broader culture, for example, conflicts among minority cultures, backgrounds of students, and the dominant culture transmitted by schools; conflicts between the "culture" of professional educators and the culture(s) of the community.

Back to Basics?

Should schools emphasize the basics? Based on data compiled by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the answer is yes and no.

NAEP assessed educational attainments of 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, 17-year-olds, and young adults across the country. Surveys conducted during the past six years on reading, writing, science, and math show the nation's youth to have mastered some basic skills and to have deficiencies in others.

In math, students could add, subtract, multiply, and divide, but they had trouble with percents, decimals, and multi-step word problems.

In writing, they handled adequately mechanical tasks such as spelling and punctuation, but there was an overall decline in the quality of essays written by both 13- and 17-year-olds.

In science, 13-year-olds could answer questions on human physiology, green plants, and the solar system, but they fell short in the areas of health and nutrition. On the other hand, 17-year-olds did well in the areas of nutrition and disease, but faltered on the subject of human reproduction.

In reading, 17-year-olds were more successful with questions illustrated by pictures or signs and less successful with tasks

testing an ability to use a reference book, for example, a dictionary or a telephone directory. On specific skills tested, students were more successful in determining the meanings of words and less successful in drawing inferences from the information.

While teachers do not need to go back to the basics, there is need for a selective approach to the basics. Teachers need to identify the basics that selected students need to go back to.

Gateways for the Talented

"Traditionally, the construction of new schools includes beautifully designed symmetrical patterns for sidewalks. And equally traditional, by the end of a month or two, very clear and concise dirt paths have been etched in the recently laid sod," said Tim Gavigan, writing in *Feedback*, a newsletter published by the Wisconsin ASCD. "Often-times, it is these paths that, while not necessarily symmetrical or beautiful, prove to be the most functional walkways."

So it is that educators may lay out programs that are not relevant to the needs of the gifted. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that often we have "laid out programs for convergent rather than divergent goals." In doing this, several basic "untruths" of programming for the gifted may be involved.

First Untruth: There is just one area of talent. Actually, there are at least six areas: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability.

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Second Untruth: Talented students are the enemy. Actually, their involvement is essential as a resource in designing their programs in order to establish, if nothing else, the ingredient of relevance.

Third Untruth: All talented students are alike. Actually, we know that gifted students are more dissimilar as a group than other children.

Fourth Untruth: The curriculum is the key to planning for talented students. On the contrary, the only effective program that can be developed must first include a commitment to and a focus on the individual student.

Gavigan proposes a program dubbed Generating Appropriate Talent Education With Alternatives for Your Students (GATEWAYS) based on the assumption that "developing a program for a talented student is a process that must include the stu-

dent, a commitment, and a willingness to tap all possible resources."

Music and Language Development

Five days a week, teacher aide Lorraine Louvat sings her songs and accompanies herself on the guitar in front of a semi-circle of youngsters at the Hope Training School for Retarded Children in Mexico, Maine. After finishing a verse, she poses a singing question and waits for the answer before continuing the song.

The program—with its musical approach and emphasis on complete sentence response—has yielded surprising results since it was implemented at the Hope School more than a year ago. It is primarily designed, however, to reinforce the work done by other teachers to improve the auditory,

manual, and visual skills of the children.

The program is geared to the needs of the individual child, since the Hope School deals with children ranging from the profoundly retarded to the educable retarded. Music helps these children to remember things and grasp things more fully. Children who stutter answer perfectly to the rhythm of music.

For further information about this language development program, contact: Laura Dubois, Director, Hope Training School for Retarded Children, Third Street, Mexico, Maine 04257.

New Saleable Skills

Oak Park and River Forest High School (Illinois) will put greater emphasis on career education next year. A study committee report has resulted in recommendations for the development of a coordinated career

education plan. The committee found that students expect to be prepared to enter society and the world of work and to acquire saleable skills to be used both during and after schooling. They expect to develop a positive self-image regarding their employability and to understand the role of work and labor in their lives.

Students need to be able to establish the relationship between schooling and life experience and to establish personal values and goals regarding earning a living. The high school should lay the foundation for the advanced study required for career specialization. The expectations of the community are that students will be prepared to enter the world of work and become productive members of society.

The program should include not only vocational preparation for students who enter the job market right after graduation but should also provide counseling and information to help students discover what careers exist, how to prepare for them, and what jobs are available in the fields of interest to them.

Regardless of career choice, students should learn some skills and attitudes, such as promptness, accuracy, good work habits, and the ability to foster successful interpersonal relationships. Teachers in all subject areas will be

encouraged to stress these skills and attitudes in the classroom.

Since many of the graduates go to nearby community colleges, greater emphasis will be placed on coordinating programs of the high school with these post-secondary institutions. In addition, increased attention will be given to job placement for students, and greater effort will be put into helping students find jobs.

Supervisors Help with Mainstreaming

"The current emphasis on mainstreaming the handicapped poses a special set of problems and conditions for supervisors and administrators," according to George J. Rentsch writing in a recent issue of the *Newsletter* of the New York State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. "The major supervisory problem in mainstreaming will not be found in materials use, activities design, or class scheduling. Instead, the major problem will be recognizing and dealing with the attitude of teachers toward the concept of mainstreaming."

Supervisors who are serious about helping teachers face the task of organizing and directing classrooms with such students will:

- Through serious intro-

spection, examine their own beliefs and attitudes toward mainstreaming;

- Become aware of the current legal, personal, and instructional bases of mainstreaming;

- Make certain that their beliefs about mainstreaming reflect new knowledge and directions;

- Insist on adequate in-service experience for teachers prior to and during mainstreaming;

- Organize classrooms that will force teachers to confront new situations in order to identify actual problems rather than theoretically based fears;

- Recognize that the instructional concerns identified by teachers involved in mainstreaming may, in reality, reflect an attitude of opposition to the concept;

- Utilize values clarification techniques to assist teachers in self-analysis and problem identification;

- Provide supportive personal and direct help to individual teachers as part of any in-service.

"In this way," notes Rentsch, "supervisors will be taking steps to deal with an attitudinal disease rather than with its instructional material-method-organization symptom." ²¹

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