

NEWS NOTES

by Bob L. Taylor and Robert C. McKean

TV vs. Homework

In a 1976 survey by National Assessment of Educational Progress of 10,000 17-year-old students, those doing more homework and watching less TV outperformed on assessment instruments those who spent less time on homework and more on TV viewing. More than 60 percent of the surveyed 17-year-olds spent less than five hours on homework each week.

The study was based on a questionnaire administered following a routine mathematics assessment. The instrument was concerned with afterschool student activities primarily viewing TV and doing homework. The primary question on TV watching was "How much television did you watch last night?" The survey was conducted during March, April, and May, and was concerned only with the school days, Monday through Friday.

Of the students reporting, somewhat under half watched either no TV or less than one hour on school nights, 35 percent viewed from one to three hours an evening, 12 percent spent three to five hours viewing, and 5 percent saw more than five hours an evening of television. The survey was nationwide in character and represented a wide sampling of racial and economic groups. About three-fourths of the reporting students were juniors in high school.

With respect to homework, the students reported spending from none to more than ten hours per week on it. More than 50 percent reported doing less than 5 hours

of homework per week, 30 percent reported doing from 5 to 10 hours weekly, and 6 percent did more than 10 hours per week. It is interesting that 7 percent admitted being assigned homework and not doing it while 6 percent reported they had no homework assignment.

NAEP reported that in general those students who were claiming to do the most homework and the least TV watching performed best on the assessment. The poorest performance was by students who did no homework regardless of TV watching.

Eight Traps in Competency-Based Education

Many opinions regarding competency-based education have been aired in the past months. One article emphasized the traps that are believed to be hidden in the movement. In a report contained in the *Colorado School Board Bulletin*, Eugene R. Howard, Director of Accreditation and Accountability Services, Colorado State Department of Education, presented eight traps that seem to him to be embedded in the competency-based education effort.

• *Trap #1.* Further strengthening of state control at the expense of local control. If the competencies are defined at the state level, control of the portion of the curriculum related to these competencies is lost at the local level.

• *Trap #2.* Trivializing the curriculum and confusing minimums with maximums.

"Teaching pupils to balance checkbooks, fill out application

forms, and read bus timetables, for example, may take the place of teaching some higher level skills and more academically-related concepts." Minimum competencies may be interpreted by pupils as being maximums.

• *Trap #3.* Nonpromotion of pupils failing to meet minimum standards at each grade level.

"Some school districts have interpreted the competency-based education movement to mean that minimal requirements should be set for promotion at each grade level. Pupils failing to meet minimum standards in accordance with some preestablished criteria would not be promoted."

• *Trap #4.* Failure to provide remedial instruction.

"Failure to provide remedial instruction for pupils who fail all or portions of the test is, perhaps, the biggest trap of all. Such a failure will result in the school district having to deny diplomas to large numbers of pupils who, if given help, could have mastered the required competencies."

• *Trap #5.* Proliferation of behavioral objectives writing.

Requiring detailed behavioral objectives for a wide variety of minimal competencies may "quickly exhaust the patience of faculties as they feel that they are generating syllabi that will, for the most part, be ignored by their fellow teachers. Typically this is exactly what happens."

• *Trap #6.* Setting the minimal competency levels too high.

This may contribute to two problems: (a) In some districts such a practice may result in a disproportionate number of minority

and disadvantaged students failing the test; and (b) Setting standards too high may create a substantial discrepancy among districts."

• *Trap #7.* Permitting pupils to leave school early on the basis of test results.

Such a practice "tends to downgrade the value of a high school education because it is based on the assumption that the contents of the test are equivalent in value to three years of high school learning." Other related concerns are added financial problems resulting from numbers of pupils leaving school early in addition to the already declining enrollment situation and the need to decrease staff in the middle of the year.

• *Trap #8.* Measuring all competencies by a minimal competency test.

"Many competencies are more appropriately verified in real performance situations rather than by pencil and paper tests."

The competency-based education movement provides us with the opportunity to develop curricula that are individualized and that contribute to each pupil's ability to function in an adult society. "Let's help our young people improve their competencies in important ways. But let's resist turning our schools into factories and our curricula into assembly lines."

AERA Evaluation Awards Competition

Division H of AERA is announcing the 1979 awards competition for reports on evaluation conducted by or in public schools. The purpose of the awards is to grant professional recognition to the written work of this segment of the AERA membership. Categories for competition include:

- Best writing style
- Best research design
- Best test profile publication
- Best evaluation report brochure

• Most unique reporting technique

• Best summary or abstract of a study

• Most communicative evaluation report

• Best graphic displays of data, including tables, figures, cover, and so on.

• Report resulting in most definitive action taken by board/administration (to receive award with author; narrative summary of resulting decisions to accompany report).

All reports submitted must be studies completed during the 1977-78 school year, with a publication date of July 1, 1977 to August 30, 1978.

Write for more information, or enter by sending three copies of each report clearly marked for the appropriate competition category, together with two cards for each entry with the name of the submitter, agency, title, and the name to whom the award is to be made if different from submitter, to: Dr. Frank L. Vicino, Department of Research and Evaluation, Mesa Public Schools, 549 N. Stapley Drive, Mesa, Arizona 85203

No single report may be entered in more than one category. The deadline for submissions of entries is December 16, 1978. No entries will be returned. Awards will be announced at the AERA Annual Meeting, April 8-12, 1979, in San Francisco, California, and award-winning reports will be displayed in the Division H exchange center.

Special School Discipline Projects

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has selected eleven school districts in that state and two intermediate units to receive funds for developing projects planned to reduce school violence, vandalism, and disruption. Reported in *Pennsylvania Education*, the awards were to be from \$12,000 to \$50,000 depending upon the

scope of the project. The projects included in-service education programs to help teachers deal more effectively with disruptive and delinquent youth, alternative school programs for disruptive pupils, school security programs, and counseling programs.

Proposals were requested after the Department of Education received \$380,000 from the Governor's Justice Commission to work on the problem of school disruption. In awarding the grants, the proposals were rated on a set of criteria that took into account the size of the district to ensure that at least three districts in each size category (small, medium, and large) would be selected.

Think Positive in Hastings

Improving the climate in which problems are attacked is the goal behind the effort of Thomas Jorgenson, school board president, to encourage the school staff and the board to think positively as efforts are made to solve the daily and long-range problems of the school district. According to an article in *Newslink*, published by Hastings, Nebraska, Junior High School, "By emphasizing and improving on what is good about the Hastings School System, it is hoped that positive attitudes will lead to better solutions of the problems."

Teachers and administrators have been making positive contacts with students and parents. "A number of parents of junior high students have received *Happy-Grams* announcing some happy accomplishment of their students. Some parents, students, and staff have received Warm and Fuzzy awards, and some parents who have performed some service to the school have received awards elevating them to *Associate Faculty Member* status."

"Angel Dust" Again

Recently an *ad hoc* committee was convened by the Los Angeles Superintendent of Schools to re-

view procedures for dealing with the increased use of phencyclidine (PCP) by students. As reported in the May 10, 1978 *Spotlight*, the committee recommended that new guidelines be developed for teachers, principals, and school nurses.

In addition to developing guidelines, materials on PCP will be provided for school nurses, and in-service education programs will be set up for all school personnel. The program is aimed at creating a districtwide awareness of the dangers in using PCP. The new guidelines were called for because of the hostility and the "super strength" experienced by users of PCP. Specialists reported that a low dose of PCP acts as an intoxicant, while a high dose can produce schizophrenia.

Supervision Program Provides Counseling for Teachers

A new service has been provided by the Los Angeles City Schools aimed at aiding any employee who has a problem affecting his job performance or his physical or emotional well-being. Details of the "Employee Assistance

Program" were reported in the Los Angeles City Schools' *Spotlight*.

Dr. Mollie K. Bersin, coordinating medical examiner for the Employee Health Services, said, "We recognize that the needs of the employee, as well as those of the district, will be fulfilled in this way." It was stipulated that no employee would have his or her employment security threatened by a request for counseling through this program. Dr. Bersin also emphasized that any information divulged by an employee would be kept strictly confidential and would be completely separate from employee health records.

Further information may be secured by writing Dr. Mollie K. Bersin, Coordinating Medical Examiner, c/o *Spotlight*, Los Angeles City Schools, 450 N. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90012.

Innovative Teacher Education Programs

Needed—information on innovative teacher education programs. The Council on English Education of the National Council of Teachers of English has ap-

pointed a Commission on Alternative Models for preservice and in-service teacher education. Please send the following information about innovative programs: descriptions of teacher education programs being implemented, standards and competencies for teacher education, and other relevant material. Address: Dr. Gillian E. Cook, College of Multidisciplinary Studies, University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas 78285.

Correction: The February 1978 issue of *Educational Leadership* carried a photo credit on page 380 that read "Photos: Herb Snitzer. Living at Summerhill. New York: Collier Books, 1968." In Mr. Snitzer's Letter of Agreement, he asked that the credit read as follows: © 1964 by Herb Snitzer from *LIVING AT SUMMERHILL* (Collier Books). Mr. Snitzer also requested that the credit appear on each page that one of his photos appeared. Another photo appeared on p. 381.

We regret any inconvenience that may have resulted from this inadvertent error in the printing of this photo credit.

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