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PREVIEW

OPINIONS OF FORMER STUDENTS
ABOUT
SCHOOL PRACTICES AND CURRICULUM
by
Ralph M. Marra

A THESIS
Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements For the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Secondary Education

Under the Supervision of Professor Galen Saylor

Lincoln, Nebraska

January, 1949

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The American public high school is dependent on the culture which supports it. American culture is constantly in the process of evolution or change. Naturally, then, the high school must change if it is to perform properly its functions. Unless the high school performs its functions satisfactorily, it follows that the culture will find other ways of providing the educational service needed for its youth.

In earlier days the pattern of American life was more simple. Much of the service now provided youth by the school was then provided by the home.

Factors in Building a School Program

Technology a Factor in Change

As technology increased, division of labor developed rapidly, facilities for production of wealth became concentrated more and more outside the home, until now opportunities for parents and children to work together in productive employment have rapidly approached the vanishing point, except on the farms; even on the farms, these opportunities have been rapidly reduced. So, as the cultural pattern changes, it becomes necessary for the school to change its program from time to

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time in order to fulfill its changing function.

Philosophy Also a Factor in Causing Change

Philosophy, dealing as it does with systems of thought explaining the causes, principles, and realities of natural and moral law, plays an important role in the evolution of a culture. Everyone has a philosophy, regardless of how unlettered or how well educated he may be. The thinking of one person, or his point of view, has an influence on other members of his group, whether it be members of his family, his play-group, or his work-group. It is often said that "thought is father of the deed". Thought was required to bring about the change from use of simple sleds to transport materials to the use of vehicles having wheels; thought was required to change from telegraphy using wire connections to wireless telegraphy. It is just as true that thought and the use of accumulated information and experience are used to change from the alphabet method to the word method or the sentence method in teaching reading. It is true that discovery and invention of new and better ways of getting things done in the field of mental activity occur continually, and that there is an important place in school program planning for the educational philosopher's contribution.

Research Has a Place in Educational Planning

Research is a relatively new idea in the field of education.

Research, using science, brings new strength to education in finding better solutions to problems. Just as research, in the long run, increases production in industry, and multiplies the articles and services which satisfy the wants of people, so research in education is increasing the achievement and development of learners on all levels of education. For example, it proved in the case of drill that the law of diminishing returns sets in after repetition has been carried to a definite point; and time given to continuing the repetition is increasingly wasteful.

Research in the field of learning has made a large contribution to educational psychology, fairly comparable to the contributions of research in the field of industry. Educational research provides evidence of need for change in the education program in increasing abundance.

Opinions Play an Important Role

Granting the importance of technology, philosophy and research in the fields of industry and education, it should be remembered that other factors are at work in bringing about change in the way of life of a great people. One of the most important of these is opinion.

Opinions of interested adults have much to do with determining the policies of people in democratic countries. The laws of these countries are a reflection of the opinions of the people electing the law makers.

School systems are guided by boards of education who reflect

the opinions of the people electing them. Not only do boards of education reflect the opinions of the people but also superintendents, principals, and teachers reflect public opinion. A chief executive officer is usually chosen by the board of education. He must be able to formulate policies which he in turn recommends to the board for adoption. His knowledge of the place of public opinion will help him to shape proposed policies for the consideration of his board. These policies will be broad and will need the help of parents, principals, teachers, and pupils to round them out and make them most effective. Parents, principals, and teachers can work as members of curriculum development committees whose business will include not only finding curriculum materials appropriate for the abilities, interests, and needs of the students to be served but also indicate methods involving motivation, presentation, and evaluation appropriate for use in group instruction. Pupils should participate with teachers in the day to day planning and to some extent in long time planning. It is here that pupil opinion has one of its best opportunities to function.

For example, the board of education may approve a recommendation of the superintendent that a study of the "Western movement" be prescribed for eleventh grade pupils in American history. A curriculum committee such as has just been described might well round out the unit indicated by the recommendation. But this unit will come to fruition only as boys and girls participate in working it out with the teacher and constructing concepts of their own.

In the formulation and putting of such a program into effect,

opinions of teachers and principals play an important part.

The value of opinions of adult citizens in the work of curriculum committees is not to be underestimated.

Trend Toward More Democratic Curriculum Development

Until little more than a generation ago high school programs were worked out by the superintendent of schools. Except where these were enriched by enterprising teachers in class rooms here and there courses of study were very largely determined by the content of the text book. Gradually, teachers were called upon to help with the formulation of courses of study, until the practice of developing all areas of the curriculum by means of teachers' committees, working under guidance of experts, became standard procedure.

Student participation in planning the school program has had a very small place in the high schools except in the area of extra curricular activity. Here, again, teachers who are qualified to depart from the text book have given students the opportunity to participate in planning the work of the day or of the unit. Occasionally students are allowed to participate in planning the work for the term.

Alberty says:

If the school is thoroughly committed to the thesis that the most important values in education are intimately associated with the ability and zeal to work together for the common good, and that the best way to prepare for democratic citizenship is through practicing it in the day to day life of the school, then the way

lies open to a genuine extension of the opportunities for cooperative teacher-student planning.¹

The evidence seems to indicate clearly a trend in the planning of high school experiences for youth away from that done by the few at or near the top in authority to the more democratic plan of including all interested parties, students being allowed to participate wherever possible.

Problem of This Study

What are the opinions of former students of South High School as to the relative importance of certain areas of study for a program of secondary education and what do they consider to be desirable practices in administration?

An attempt is made to determine from the reactions of representative groups of young and middle-age adults (past students of the high school) what their opinions are with respect to the value of certain areas of potential course of study materials, selected extra curricular activities, and selected administrative practices.

The study takes into consideration the fact that the school is an agency of the culture which supports it and gives it general direction. The object is not to evaluate curriculum areas, set up by adults as predicated needs of youth, but to obtain important clues from young adults, as to what are centers of interest in potential high school course

¹Harold Alberty, Reorganizing the High School Curriculum, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948, p. 340.