

A class discusses

Continuity Between High School and College

A CLASS in American Educational History at the University of Texas was assigned the topic, "School Continuity Between High School and College." Groups were formed to do research on various aspects of the subject. The professor met with each group to discuss the general background and important aspects of each subtopic. He advised on the selection of library materials. Group reports were prepared and shared with the entire class. The following class discussion took place after the completion of all assignments.

Professor: Our American schools have been praised for their open-door policy. Our late school-leaving age, our school holding power, varied curriculum, and comprehensive high schools have all been complimented. But just as often, they have been criticized. Proud as we are of our attempt to give full opportunity to all American youth, some observers at home and abroad think this is a weak goal which we may some day regret pursuing. They say that in the present world struggle there is mounting evidence that our schools have seriously fallen down in quality. We should by all

means look critically at ourselves. What, specifically, do the critics say?

Student 7: The main things mentioned as wrong with our schools are low quality and duplication of subject matter. Lowered quality in terms of the average is said to be a by-product of the large numbers we educate. Repetition of some subjects is often mentioned, especially an overlapping between high school and college.

Professor: Let us examine these charges. What is the evidence for the criticism? What do the studies show? After we have looked into this, we can try to find the reasons behind the charges and see what the schools are doing to correct faults they may have.

Student 13: Well, I reviewed for my group the studies on duplication of school work. Leonard Koos (8), who is an authority on the junior college, found as early as 1924 that more than one-third of high school work was duplicated in college. English was repeated more than any other subject. Most of the studies made since then have substantiated this charge of duplication.

Student 21: I read four studies made in the last fifteen years, each showing that regular college instruction could be successfully given to superior high school

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students in advanced algebra, chemistry, United States history, and French. This shows that superior students are the ones who are hurt most by duplication.

Student 7: The superior student who is not challenged does not contribute to the fullest. In this way we lose the talent we need. Until a few years ago we tended to neglect our most valuable national asset, the gifted student.

Origins

Professor: If these findings are true and duplication does exist, what conditions are responsible?

Student 11: Well, I followed your suggestion about looking into the origin of our schools. Our kindergarten came from Germany, our elementary school came from Prussia, our high school grew out of European models, our college came from England, and our graduate school came from the German university ideal. We put these schools one on top of the other and are still trying to connect them efficiently.

Professor: You have put your finger on one important problem of continuity—how to move students efficiently through separate schools that originally served different purposes and grew out of different philosophies. We adapted these schools to the American democratic ideal of free and universal education. It is understandable that there should be some difficulties in their smooth continuity. At this point your reports on how our elementary and secondary schools have evolved might pinpoint the difficulties that have arisen.

Student 3: On the elementary level we inherited from Europe separate reading and writing schools, Dame schools, monitorial schools, one-room ungraded district schools, and other variations. There

was no uniformity. Horace Mann's seventh annual report of 1844 critically compared our ungraded and non-uniform elementary schools with the superior Prussian ones. Mann's criticism was answered in part by John D. Philbrick, principal in Quincy, Massachusetts, who organized a model eight-year graded elementary school in 1848. This model was quickly imitated in cities but was slower to catch on in rural areas where most children went to school.

Professor: And our secondary schools?

Student 18: We experimented with three kinds. The Latin Grammar School trained upper-class boys for entrance to the Colonial colleges, just as it had trained European boys for university entrance since the Middle Ages. The Academy made a departure in offering practical courses of a terminal nature while also offering college preparation. Neither the Latin Grammar School nor the Academy was free or universally attended. Girls were largely neglected.

Student 17: I studied the background of the high school. The first one in Boston in 1821 was called the English Classical High School. It took a few years for the word "Classical" to be dropped from the title and a few more years for the word "English" to be left off. High school growth was small because some property owners and other citizens would not vote to tax themselves for its support. A Michigan State Supreme Court decision, known as the Kalamazoo Case of 1872-1874, gave legal status to the high school by approving community property taxes for its support. After that case, the number of high schools and the size of high school enrollment grew rapidly.

Student 7: The high school seems to draw a lot of criticism. Maybe we expect it to do too many things. Colleges depend on it for academic preparation. The state

wants it to prepare good citizens. Parents see it as a way to lengthen their children's education close to the home. For most towns it is a community center. In terms of democracy, it is a kind of people's college. Under one roof it is required to offer general education, academic specialization, vocational training, and recreation to all youth of a wide range of abilities. In attempting to do so many things, it has, in the eyes of many critics, fallen down on quality education. There just isn't enough time for the high school to be all things to all people.

Improving Continuity

Professor: The other side of the picture can be expressed in the title-phrase of Columbia University historian, Henry Steele Commager, "Our Schools Have Kept Us Free." His inference is that our public schools have Americanized millions of children of immigrant parents and helped to weld different classes and groups into one nation. He would say that our public schools have been a balance wheel of progress—economic, social and political. We are now ready to have reports on continuity—articulation is the old term—between high school and college, where overlapping is said to occur.

Student 2: I looked into how the curriculum of the four-year high school became standardized for college entrance. This was worked out in several stages. About 1870 the state universities of Michigan, Indiana and other states formed faculty committees to judge the academic work of high schools in their states. Graduates of approved high schools were permitted to enter the state universities without taking entrance examinations.

Next came the report of the National

Education Association's Committee of Ten in 1893 which standardized the four-year high school curriculum in terms of college entrance. About 1900 when our high school enrollment began increasing greatly, more attention was paid to terminal, vocational, and general education. Any course that was well taught was given equal weight toward graduation. A system of units for courses completed grew out of the New York Regents' use of "counts" to tally high school credits earned. When the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching financed studies in this area, its definition of a unit became the accepted standard. In time, 15 to 16 Carnegie Units, in a combination of required subjects and elective subjects, became the standard for high school graduation. Regional associations of colleges and secondary schools, together with state departments of education, became the chief agencies to accredit high schools. Many colleges and universities have their own entrance examinations. The College Entrance Examination Board, the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey, and a few other private testing organizations have developed national examinations for college entrance which many colleges and universities now use.

Professor: With this background we can now hear reports of recent studies and experiments to improve school continuity and academic quality.

Student 21: The Ford Foundation's Fund for the Advancement of Education has sponsored important experiments to aid gifted students, reduce overlapping, and improve articulation between high school and college.

Student 14: The Andover study of 1951 (3) was the Fund's earliest investigation. The subjects were 344 Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville graduates enrolled at

Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Good articulation supposedly existed between these selected preparatory schools and colleges. But undesirable duplication was found in American history, English literature, and beginning courses in physics, chemistry, and biology. Three kinds of waste were uncovered: undesirable repetition, dropping a subject before mastering it, and spending too much time on less important parts of a subject at the expense of more important parts.

Professor: What suggestions for improvement came from this study?

Student 14: The Andover committee proposed for gifted students a seven-year high school and college program integrated in the area of general education. It was hoped that superior students might skip their senior high school year and enter college early or finish their senior high school year and enter college with advanced standing.

Professor: Have these recommendations been followed anywhere?

Student 14: Yes. Since 1954 three colleges in Atlanta, Georgia (13), have successfully integrated their freshman year with the last two years of co-operating high schools. The results have been good.

Student 18: Enriching the curriculum for gifted high school students has also worked well in Portland, Oregon (2). From 1952 to 1957 faculty members from Reed College taught special high school seminars for gifted pupils. These students were found to be better prepared for college. They were also able to take a more exacting program of studies.

Professor: Besides enriching high school subjects and early college admission, what other way has been tried to improve continuity and quality at this level?

Student 14: A third method, by advanced standing college examinations, was sponsored by the Ford Fund for the Advancement of Teaching from 1952 to 1955 (11). Able high school students were given college-level work. Those who passed examinations on this work were given college credit and placed in advanced college courses in these subjects. The College Entrance Examination Board, which made out the examinations for this experiment, voted to continue giving the examinations. In 1960, 10,500 students from 890 high schools took 14,300 advanced standing college subject examinations. This may indicate how popular this method is with gifted students (9).

Student 16: Advanced standing examinations are not new. The universities of Buffalo (1) and Chicago (12) have used them for more than 20 years. In the late 1930's President Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago created a junior college which combined the last two years of high school and the first two years of college. The B. A. degree was earned by college-wide comprehensive exams rather than by accumulating course credits. Great books were a distinct feature of this program, which was modified somewhat in 1953.

Professor: The search for smoother continuity and better quality has been a long one—at all levels.

Student 4: Yes. The elementary-junior high school link and the junior-senior high school link are both important. The key to improvement seems to revolve around joint planning by teachers at various levels to eliminate duplication and enrich courses (7). California teachers (6) have been trying to do this for more than 20 years. A bold new experiment sponsored by St. Xavier College in Chicago (10) completely integrates a

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liberal arts curriculum from primary school to college.

Professor: We need to conclude with some evaluation. What does your research show has happened and is happening in American education?

Student 4: As in other countries we started by educating an elite for leadership and followed this pattern long after the American Revolution.

Student 11: The big change came after 1830 when we gradually decided that public schools were essential to perpetuate the kind of democracy we wanted.

Student 7: We permitted, encouraged, and finally required school attendance for all right up through age 16 or 18. This helped make us one united nation but it also meant diffusing our educational aims to meet many needs and many abilities.

Student 16: I think the price we may have paid for these opportunities has been well worth the cost despite what the critics say.

Student 2: Yes, but it was time for us to be shocked into re-evaluating our schools. Sputnik and the cold war have hurried long overdue school reform. In the long run, it will be a healthy spur.

Professor: Let's end on that note of challenge.

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