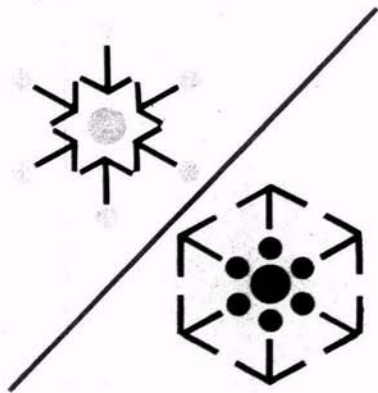




The Eight-Year Study:

A CAREFUL consideration of research studies in education having a far-reaching influence on the public schools of America cannot ignore the tremendous impact of the Eight-Year Study initiated in 1932. This study was sponsored by a group of educators, each of whom has earned lasting recognition in his own field. Buros, Raths, Taba, Alberty, Traxler, French, Corey, Ryan, Mackenzie, Harap, and Tyler represent the deep thinking and thorough planning which served to make the Eight-Year Study a classic in the field of education, and which distinguished the thirties as an exciting and pioneering period in American education.

The titles of the five volumes which describe the study in detail are included in footnotes in this article. Although this review makes reference to these sources of information, a full appreciation of the work of these men and women can be realized only through a firsthand acquaintance with their writings.

In the Eight-Year Study 30 secondary schools in the United States were chosen to demonstrate fully the effects of a variety of programs of instruction planned and initiated to emphasize many different avenues of study and experiences which could result in satisfactory achievement at the college level. Unfortunately this massive research project was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II in the early 1940's. Because of this interruption, we have not been able to witness within our schools the full impact of the first—and possibly last—comprehensive re-

construction of the secondary school curriculum.

One of the factors which influenced this landmark study was a doubt in the minds of many educators that later college success of young people in high school depended upon the study of certain subjects for a certain length of time. Therefore, an agreement was reached with accredited colleges and universities to release selected secondary schools from the usual subject and unit requirements for college admission, and to permit these Thirty Schools to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own instructional programs.

Two major principles guided the administrators and teachers of the Thirty Schools in their efforts at curriculum reconstruction.

The first principle was that the general life of the school and methods of teaching should conform to what is now known about the ways in which human beings learn and grow. . . . The second major principle which guided the work of the participating schools was that the high school of the United States should re-discover its chief reasons for existence.¹

The schools in the study were in agreement that the subject matter analysis approach of teaching presented students with an opportunity to obtain a good grasp of the scope of the field and to gain limited control over an area of knowledge. Yet, when these

¹ Reprinted by permission from Wilford M. Aiken. *The Story of the Eight-Year Study*. Volume 1 of *Adventure in American Education*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., © 1942.

Can We Afford To Ignore It?

CHARLES C. RITCHIE*

same teachers attempted to follow through on the assumption that the basis of the curriculum is to be found in the problems of living, they found it difficult, if not impossible, to stay within the boundaries defined by the subject-centered curriculum.

Core-Type Programs

These teachers found at least seven valid reasons that core-type programs were more suitable than traditional approaches in meeting the objectives developed by the schools. These programs:

1. Cut across subject-matter lines
2. Frequently called for cooperative planning and teaching
3. Called for exploration of a wide range of relationships
4. Provided for experiences valid for large groups
5. Dealt with subject matter which did not require extended drill in specific skills (such as the operations)
6. Used larger blocks of time than a single period
7. Used a wide range of source material techniques of gathering information and classroom activities.

The objectives developed by the schools of the Eight-Year Study were in full agreement that the educational program of the school must meet the needs of adolescents

and seek to preserve and extend democracy as a way of life.² In a democracy, they asserted, one value is held paramount above all others: regard for the integrity and worth of each individual. The individual possesses importance as an entity, is unique and not capable of duplication. This optimal development is to be encouraged and fostered, not only because it is the inherent right of the individual, but also because individual maximum development contributes to the common good.

The assumption was that in a democracy significant personalities can only be developed through the mutual sharing of interests and purposes. Unrestrained individualism is inconsistent with democratic values since it will not guarantee others the realization of their potentialities; a sharing of responsibilities is essential for the maximum development of personalities. The group must accept the realization of the concerns of its members as its highest value, recognizing that such an end requires the participation of the individual in making choices and in determining policies that affect him. Individuals must learn that there are responsibilities as well

² H. H. Giles, S. P. McCutcheon, and A. N. Zechiel. *Exploring the Curriculum: The Work of the Thirty Schools from the Viewpoint of Curriculum Consultants*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942. pp. 33-34.

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as advantages in the sharing of concerns involved in group living.

Did the Students Succeed?

In the area of evaluation, the staff as a whole decided what to evaluate, what kinds of evidence to secure, and how to go about securing and using the evidence. Where there was conflict between the appraisal of the school-wide objectives and those held by individual teachers, it was understood that the first responsibility of the school was to its general objectives.

While the principle was never abandoned that the school as well as the individual teachers should do all they could to study growth toward the objectives unique to the specific courses, the larger principle usually prevailed that the study of the most important aspects of human development as expressed in the general objectives should be the major concern of the school.³

Of general concern were objectives usually limited to one or more phases of critical thinking, social attitudes, certain work habits and study skills, interests and appreciations, social adjustments, and certain types of functional information. Since detailed appraisal was usually given to objec-

tives which were easiest to appraise, or in which instruments were readily available, it seemed wise to ensure that some of the important intangible objectives for which no refined techniques or instruments were as yet available would not be overlooked. Too, most schools had considerable evidence on information and skills acquired by students, but little or no evidence on their growth in various phases of critical thinking.⁴

Recognizing that one of the purposes of the study was to find out how well the graduates of the selected Thirty Schools did in college, a follow-up study was conducted. The follow-up study indicated that these individuals performed as well as did members of a comparison group in every measure of scholastic competence. In the many aspects of development considered to be more valuable than marks, they did better. The further a school departed from the traditional college preparatory program, the better was the record of the graduates.⁵ The researchers also found that secondary schools in the Eight-Year Study were stimulated to develop new programs which were better for young people, for their success in college, for success in life, and for the future of society.⁶ □

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 442-44.

⁵ Dean Chamberlin, Enid Chamberlin, Neal E. Drought, and William E. Scott. *Did They Succeed in College?* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942.

⁶ Wilford M. Aiken. *Thirty Schools Tell Their Story.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943. p. xvii.

³ Eugene R. Smith, Ralph W. Tyler, and the Evaluation Staff. *Appraising and Recording Student Progress.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, © 1942. p. 441. By permission.

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