THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Lawrence College Bulletin

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The broad facts about the National Survey of Secondary Education are well known. The survey was undertaken in accordance with Congressional authorization given in 1929; it was under the direction of Commissioner Cooper and Professor Koos; it is now in process of publication in twenty-eight monographs, with a total of approximately 4,000 pages. Eighty different forms were used and 200,000 copies of those forms were sent out; two thirds were filled out and returned. Eight hundred fifty visits were made to five hundred fifty different high schools involving travel of 200,000 railroad miles in forty-one states and the District of Columbia. The cost was slightly under a quarter of a million dollars.

Five general fields were studied—organization, student personnel problems, administrative and supervisory problems, the curriculum, the extra-curriculum. These major fields were broken down into various projects. In the curriculum, for example, seven separate subject fields were studied. Each project had four main states—first, the choice of schools with outstanding or innovating practices; second, the state of inquiry, through forms, in an effort to identify those schools which should be visited; third, visitation and study on the ground; and fourth, tabulation and drafting the report. Those are the major facts with reference to the study.

It would be possible, in the time at my disposal, to lay out a study program for high school faculties to follow. If this survey is
not studied, and studied intensively, it might better never have been made. Manifestly, however, you can lay out such a study to meet your own local situation very much better than I. Instead of following such a plan, therefore, I propose to give certain reflections upon this survey, after having looked over the monographs as they arrived, from time to time, at my desk.

The first of these reflections is that I find myself in a somewhat peculiar, and some might say, an alarming situation, particularly after the somewhat sinister reference to armed force in the resolutions just adopted. To begin with, I represent a college of the liberal arts. All too frequently it has been asserted that colleges of that type have outlived their day and generation, that their eyes are turned backward. It is charged, also, that their requirements for admission have put a damper upon educational experimentation and have blocked significant developments within the field of secondary education.

In the second place, I am, for this year, an officer in the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Not infrequently, it is asserted that the colleges have used that agency to work their will upon the secondary schools.

With reference to the first of those limitations I must say that the colleges have been in as great an educational ferment as the secondary schools. The reorganization of their aims and methods, and changes in the content of their curricula have been going forward at an enormously rapid pace. In a recent volume published by the National Society for the Study of Education, 1,389 changes and experiments at the college level were listed, and 128 outstanding changes were discussed. It is true that the colleges have had relatively few of the radicals who
would create a new curriculum by some type of legislative fiat. Colleges have not been hospitable to those who would attempt to bring in a new system of education without cultivating the ground, sowing seed, and giving it time to germinate and develop. It is equally true, however, that the sturdy conservatives who feel that changes are not desirable have had no opportunity to dominate the situation in the last five years.

While the colleges have been putting their own houses in order, their influence upon the secondary schools has been waning. It now approaches total eclipse. It is an interesting and striking thing that this tendency comes to its culmination at a time when a larger and larger number of high school students go on to college. The percentage of those who go forward from secondary schools to college has held fairly stable. It has even shown some tendency to advance. That in itself is a marvelous manifestation in the light of the fact that the number of students attending secondary schools has grown so tremendously. There is some danger, now, that in the place of the colleges dominating the high schools, the high schools will by their independence of action substantially dominate the colleges. From the standpoint of retribution that might be a just visitation upon the colleges for their arrogance in the past. Looked at from the point of view which must be maintained, that of the interests of the students, it would be wholly undesirable.

The colleges and the secondary schools have been participating vigorously, and sometimes acrimoniously, in the age-long discussion as to which was first, the hen or the egg. The secondary schools say that they are inhibited from free development by college entrance requirements; the colleges insist that they are inhibited from satisfactory
work by the poor preparation of students. It is a characteristic of war that propaganda and abuse rise to their shrillest treble just about the time the war is over. That is true with reference to the controversy between colleges and secondary schools on the matter of admissions.

One of the survey studies dealt with articulation of high school and college. Great progress has been made in achieving flexibility in requirements for admission to the colleges; there has been a marked recession from previous prescriptions of traditional subjects. That recession, it seems to me, will be enormously accelerated in the next two or three years. I am ready to predict that colleges will abandon most of their substantive requirements, no longer stipulating what subjects shall be taken in high school, but making their selections on the basis of achievement in what high school offers. It might be pointed out in this connection that in this state this movement has already gone farther than in many. Foreign language has, for many years, now, been off the list of absolute requirements. The amount of mathematics required is less than in many parts of the country; even that small amount is likely to disappear as an absolute requirement.

The survey makes it plain that this futile and long drawn-out war is about over, that colleges and secondary schools ought now to join together. This whole issue ought to be approached from the standpoint of a coherent educational experience for the student. Secondary schools and colleges alike ought to adapt their administrative and curricular programs to this end.

With reference to my second disability (as an officer of a standardizing agency) this may be said; with all its faults we would not long want to do without some sort of standardizing agency. There
are many reasons for that point of view. One is very simple and funda-
mental. American education is organized locally. We have, properly
speaking, no national system of education, nor do we have any state
system. Not only do we have private colleges and universities along-
side of teachers colleges and state universities, but we have, with
the parochial schools, a tremendous number of private secondary, primary,
and grammar schools. These local educational units are subject to every
type, kind, and description of pressure—pressure of a financial kind,
pressure of religion and of other organized agencies, and pressure of
a political nature. They are governed by an almost infinite number of
individuals with an amazing collection of prejudices, interests, abilities,
and tastes.

This might not have so much importance if a child were born and
brought up in one community, but one of the characteristics of America
is the extreme mobility of our population. Many a student has the ex-
perience I had. I went to public school in no less than four cities,
moving from one to another, sometimes in the middle of a school year
and having to accommodate myself to a new situation on an average of
once in three years during the twelve years of my primary, grammar, and
high school training.

Until the advent of the junior college it was impossible to go
beyond high school under uniform supervision. Except for a very few
municipal universities, of which we have none in this state, one can-
not go from kindergarten through college under the supervision of one
system. These things being taken into account it is essential that
there should be enough uniformity amidst this amazing diversity to
make a coherent student experience at least possible if not probable.
It is for that reason, primarily, that voluntary associations have sought to establish minimum standards.

Doubtless they have served as a barrier to many developments; their rules have sometimes been mechanical and their application stupid. Like other rules, they have not changed as rapidly as the times. When all that is said, however, two facts remain beyond controversy. The first is that confusion is not as badly confounded as it would have been without such agencies; the second is that they have not stifled experimentation. For the great, the overwhelming characteristic of American education, which differentiates it from education in England, France, Germany, or Italy, is its enormously diversified experimental program. The evidence of the survey is decisive on this point.

Whatever their attitude may have been in the past, moreover, it is apparent that the standardizing agencies have sensed the fact that this experimental zeal cannot and must not be confined by mechanical limitations. Three or four years have passed since the North Central Association set out to revise the standards for colleges. It now appears that the whole conception of standards is to be so profoundly modified that one has to redefine the word in order to recognize the newly proposed standards as standards at all. The movement toward the redefinition of standards for secondary schools had its impetus sometime ago, but was postponed until this survey was ready to serve as a foundation for the reorientation of standards for secondary schools.

Even before all the monographs were published the North Central Association established a committee for the study of new standards for secondary schools. Happily, the burden of this great experiment and
the necessity for group thinking is not to fall upon any one region of the country. Through the initiative of the present Commissioner of Education, Dr. Zook, who deserves, I believe, recognition as a genuine educational statesman, provision was made for carrying on this study not merely upon a regional basis but upon a national scale. During August, a conference of representatives of all the regional accrediting agencies was called in Washington to make plans for a nation-wide study of the revision of secondary school standards. Our own state representative Mr. Giles, was put upon the executive committee.

Therefore, the National Survey of Secondary Education becomes the foundation for a fresh study of secondary school standards and for a new definition of the criteria of a good secondary school. From this point of view, it is impossible to over-emphasize the significance of this survey to the secondary schools. If this restudy is to be effective it cannot be left to a small group of people. The survey itself represented a tremendous co-operative enterprise. It mobilized not only a staff of experts who had the matter directly in charge but enormous numbers of schoolmen and even pupils. The executive committee for the national study of new standards has high school men within its membership, and if the study is to be fruitful of best results, the high school administrators who live directly with the problem must have an important voice. It should not be managed entirely by university men no matter how sympathetic to your problems, nor by representatives of State Departments of Education. If a broad participation is to be achieved, it must be done by having those in charge of secondary schools as familiar with the data spread out in the national survey as are those who are in universities and in offices of public instruction. The mere publication
of this mountain of material will in itself achieve no end. Only if it is used and used actively will it prove to be fruitful.

The survey approach to problems has become enormously fashionable. Like the word "research", the word "survey" has been so used and abused that it is almost bereft of meaning. We ought, therefore, to recognize both the values and the dangers of this kind of enterprise. I am acutely aware of both. Within the last five years Lawrence College was surveyed by a group of outside experts. At the same time the college participated in a joint survey with thirty-four other colleges. We have had, therefore, first-hand and intimate experience of the nature and effect of such a survey. Its first effects are very discouraging, for one expects the survey to do what it cannot do; it cannot give you ideas. It is no substitute either for a study of the literature of research or the literature of opinion, nor is it a substitute for your own direct and local experience. It can bring you a mass of facts, facts without number, facts, however, which need care in their interpretation. If you are not careful in its use, the survey will lead to mere imitation of the procedures there described.

Every educational expert will agree that imitation is a poor kind of teaching and a poor kind of learning. Yet the American schools have developed their practices all too largely on the basis of imitation. True educative activity proceeds from within, and is the expression of one's own mental and physical and emotional life, directed to some degree by the teacher. In precisely the same way, the educational procedures of the schools should be the manifestation of ideas, experiences, and researches in which they participate. They should not be mere gestures in conformity with some pattern set up in a survey. The survey will have
been in vain, therefore, unless it is approached as a mine wherefrom valuable ores may be drawn, but those ores must be stamped, separated, and refined in your own minds before the material is at all valuable.

No survey gives a rounded picture. It always has certain characteristics which are inherent in the plan upon which it was conducted. This national survey was not designed as a guide to standard practice. It is no common denominator of American secondary education. Its function is precisely opposite. The directors consciously set out to emphasize innovating practice. That is a sound idea, for only in that way can it serve as a stimulus. We must never forget, however, that there are innovators who innovate for innovation's sake. The world of education is full if distinctions with different names, which totally lack the differentiation of substance which should exist between two separate plans. This fatal multiplication of names is revealed in the study of unit assignments. It was found that many schools reporting the use of specific plans used procedures which do not conform with the specifications of their authors, and many schools using separately named plans were doing substantially the same things.

Recognizing the dangers of mere survey descriptions, the specialists in charge of the several projects did what they could, in the midst of the avalanche of data, to appraise the practical value of specific innovations. Those appraisals, however, must not be taken as authoritative. They constitute no reason why, in the study of specific projects, we should not subject them to the most rigid scrutiny and analysis and adapt them very freely to our own situations.

All of us are interested in what the survey reveals regarding the curriculum. It emphasizes, first of all, the continuation and
acceleration of the tendency recognized for sometime to carry the ma-
terial of the high school back into the grades, primarily through the
organization of junior high schools, and also the tendency to bring
material customarily taught in colleges down into the field of secondary
education. This represents, in many respects, a round trip. The tra-
ditional American college—the college of fifty or one hundred years ago—
was teaching a good deal of secondary material. When the high schools
developed, the colleges continued to teach the secondary material and
still do to too great an extent. The survey shows, however, that the
high schools are taking over the function to a greater and greater degree.
There are some features, however, of this thrusting of material back into
the younger years which must be given earnest consideration as we rebuild
the secondary curriculum.

The findings of the survey will support the statement that there
is a tendency when these subjects are put back into the lower years, to
teach them substantially as the college subjects were taught, only
thinned out and diluted. That is not the way it should be done. The
adaptation of subject matter to younger students should not be by way
of dilution, but through a fresh approach. Perhaps I can illustrate
what I have in mind by a brief discussion of styles in educational thought.

One may almost say that educational thought moves in cycles. We
are a critical profession. We are always dissatisfied with the present
status, as, of course, we should be. Having determined that the status
is inadequate, reform takes command. It takes so much propulsive power
for reform to overcome the status that often it overshoots its objective.
Thereupon the deficiencies of the new status appear, and reform begins
again. One of the principal reforms emphasized in the survey is the
present trend toward generalized courses. If you will look in the
catalogs of the older colleges you will find that many years ago they
taught "Natural Philosophy". It was the introduction to natural science;
at one time it was all the science there was. It was a discussion of
the meaning of science for those who did not know any. It disappeared
from the Lawrence catalogue in 1873--sixty years ago. It was super-
ceded because of the amazing developments of modern science. Reform
insisted that the philosophical approach was too generalized, that it
bore too little relationship to the specific revelations of the so-
called exact sciences. Reform having broken down natural philosophy
went forward to such an extreme that the colleges offered introductory
courses in chemistry, physics, zoology, botany, geology, and astronomy.
These courses later appeared in high school curricula with substantially
the same names, and in much the same form as in the colleges. Mean-
while, science itself became dissatisfied with its fractional knowledge.
Scientists attempted some syntheses. They sought to discover certain
fundamentals, and the moats between the various fields of subject matter
were bridged by a series of hyphenates, such as physical chemistry, bio-
chemistry, and astro-physics.

This search for fundamentals led the scientist to ask not only
for more data but also for meanings and significances. Our most modern
scientists, those at the very forefront, have become philosophical in
outlook. Thus the cycle is completed, for the present trend is to throw
emphasis upon the general outlook rather than upon specific introductory
courses. The objective today is, in very truth, to introduce the student
to natural philosophy. Of course, the natural philosophy of today is
not the natural philosophy of sixty-five or seventy years ago. Nevertheles
its point of departure, and its objective are substantially the same as those of the earlier course. We seek the correlation and interpretation of all available data for a general view.

This new effort at a general view represents a sound tendency. It is at precisely this point, however, that some of the hardest thinking about the survey must be done. Unfortunately, the people who are apparently equipped to make this new synthesis seem all but incapable, for they have been trained in science and were trained too specifically. Too many of them think only in terms of observation and direct inference. They have not accustomed themselves to attempt generalizations, and their capacity for generalization has atrophied. When they talk about a course in general science, they tend to make it broad by giving sample data from various fields without adequate coordination and without any philosophical unity. That is one reason why so-called "survey courses" often fail in college and why so many courses in high school are regarded as utterly inadequate.

If our science teachers do not have the philosophical outlook, the rest of us, who do not have the scientific training, are seriously handicapped in making this generalization at the present time. The survey makes it clear that a good many people have failed to distinguish between re-arrangement and re-organization. Re-arrangement takes the same old materials and marshals them in a different order, but no re-organization of the curriculum which is limited to that can be regarded as fundamentally sound. Thus far there has been vastly more re-arrangement than re-organization. If we are to attack this problem successfully, we who are not scientists must discipline ourselves in the sciences, and those who are scientists must discipline themselves in the forms of
philosophical approach. Thus we may achieve a combination of philosophical and scientific competence. Then the new approach to the introduction of science will be genuinely effective.

The second point regarding the curriculum has to do with the multiplication of courses. The survey gives ample evidence that the obsolete philosophy of formal discipline has been effectively overthrown. So far as secondary education is concerned, there is no danger whatever from that outmoded bogey. It does not give us like assurance with reference to the equal and opposite fallacy of specific skills. You will find in these monographs both in the multiplication of courses, and in many other ways, ample indication that there are still those who believe that students can acquire only those specific skills which they have been specifically taught. The doctrine of non-transferability, upon which the dogma of specificity was built, has been greatly modified, but the drift toward specificity initiated by the adherents of that philosophical dogma has not been altered to a like extent. The originators of the idea have changed their minds, but the lesser lights who have interpreted them and have written the text books still labor under the curse of the initial pronouncement.

The plain fact--patent to one's common sense and now supported by research--is that as long as you make your educational procedures narrowly specific you will get specific results, and the transfer from one subject to another will be negligible. When the emphasis is changed, when teaching is emancipated from its confining shackles, when education is conceived not as the aggregate of specific skills, but as discrimination among values, then transfer values increase. I do not know to what extent inspired teaching, with genuine philosophical foundations, may not carry this transfer value.
Once the later modifications of the dogma of no transfer have been grasped, the over-multiplication of courses will cease, and curricula can take on more defensible proportions. None of these criticisms of differentiation and specialization are to be taken as a defense of the old curriculum. If I believed in the old curriculum with its standard academic pattern, this would not be the time or place to argue for it. In point of fact, I am shedding no tears whatever for its passing, but I am trying to emphasize the fact that reform tends to overshoot its mark, and has almost indubitably done so at this point.

It must not be thought that I am assaulting either the doctrine of individual differences or that other shibboleth of the schools, democracy in American education. Both doctrines have my wholehearted and undivided assent. Manifestly, however, those ideals must be maintained without going to the logical extreme of a separate and specific course for each individual student. Indeed, they may be fully maintained while greatly simplifying the present diversity.

Not all the additions to the curriculum revealed by the survey are open to criticism by any means. With the tremendous influx of students there came a certain inevitable diversification not only of abilities but of interests, tastes, and needs. Those differences had to be ministered to through curricular changes. Moreover, it became growingly important that secondary education, at least, be given to people in the lower intellectual brackets and to persons who came from "socio-economic levels" (as they are called in the survey) below those which had theretofore been accustomed to high school training. Their needs in like manner required curricular adjustments. The developments of science and changes in environment compelled other additions.
The increase in number of courses in the last twenty years has been marked. In a group of schools selected for study the number of courses increased in twenty years from fifty-three to three hundred and six. When each individual school was taken by itself it was found that the number of courses had more than doubled, from about twenty-four to forty-eight. These figures give overwhelming evidence of individualistic tendencies in the high schools, each school following its own pattern rather than any standard pattern. They also give clear evidence that the specialization which proved the undoing of the college curriculum has been making too great strides in the high school curriculum.

We have not reached the end of curricular changes—far from it. On the contrary, we are entering into what I hope will be a very much more significant phase—a phase wherein our readiness to minister to diverse needs will be manifested in somewhat less naive ways, when through analysis and research we can reduce the enormous complexity of our offering at a saving in costs and without affecting adversely the service we are pledged, in the name of democracy, to render.

The survey amply confirms the fact that provision for individual differences can be made within a narrower curriculum than some schools have adopted. Three elements are said by the survey to be at the core of the program of serving the needs of individual differences. The first has to do with homogeneous grouping according to ability; the second, special classes for the gifted and for the very slow. In this connection, it is perhaps a reflection upon the quality of our democratic thinking that provision for the very slow occurs nine times as often as for the very bright. We seem to be paying more attention to the achievement of a minimum level of competence within our citizenship
than to the development of adequate leadership. Viewed logically, of course, these two provisions which I have mentioned are one. They are differentiated in the survey because they are handled somewhat differently in actual practice. The third provision is the unit assignment carried under a long list of names and descriptive titles such as the contract plan, the problem method, the project method, the Winnetka technique, etc., etc., though the survey finds many of the things done under different names to be substantially identical. In the light of the current economic situation, the hints as to the manner of simplification of the curriculum deserve the most eager and active study on the part of all of us.

The library has been too little considered in connection with the curriculum. In this whole problem of providing for individual differences and taking care of people of various intellectual and socio-economic levels, the library may play a tremendous part. Having been engaged in experimentation with a college library for some time, I found this portion of the survey of particular interest and significance in my own thinking. The library, if properly managed, makes possible the enrichment of the curriculum without the addition of new courses. Its proper use enormously facilitates grouping according to ability. It gives a much freer rein for the gifted, and it makes the unit assignment gain greatly in significance.

One conclusion of the survey was that a combination of library and study hall is better than a separate library. College experience supports that view. We do not ordinarily think of the reading room of a college library as a study hall, but in reality it is just that. The colleges, therefore, have long been operating upon the principle which the survey now finds to be best for high schools. In the course of
the survey it was discovered that where the library and study hall were combined, the use of the library was twice as large as where they were separated. Interestingly enough, we have found in college work that the more use the library gets as a study hall, the more outside circulation is also stimulated. Circulation of books has shown extraordinary growth, so that last year, at Lawrence College, we attained a library circulation of 75.6 volumes per student—37.7 being inside circulation and 37.9 being outside circulation. That growth in the use of the library developed in connection with plans for individualized instruction. It accompanied a marked reduction in the number of courses offered in the curriculum.

I have time to discuss just one more reflection upon the curriculum. It has been developed—and properly developed—to take care of physical education. The health program in connection with the schools has gone a long way. Therefore, the intellectual life and the physical life are both given fair consideration. In the whole educational scheme of America, however, emotional life is too little regarded. The survey brings into clear relief the essential inadequacy of the work in music and art. The relationship of aesthetics to emotional balance, the relationship of creative work in art and music to poise and adequacy in self-expression, have been too little regarded.

If music and art have been denounced by the politicians as frills, it is because we, as educators, have treated them as marginal subjects within the curriculum. The work in music is vastly more adequate than the work in art. It is founded upon truer perspectives, more adequate knowledge and research, and its results have been correspondingly more significant.
The fine arts have been treated as a step-daughter in the scholastic world. Where work has been done, it has often had a cast too vocational, too practical, in character, and has been treated as an economic rather than an emotional asset. The enrichment of life, as we all know, comes to some extent through economic enrichment, but it is a truism to say that one may be wealthy in the world's goods and yet poverty-stricken in ideas and feelings. The enrichment of the mind contributes even more to the good life, but so far as joy and satisfaction and poise and personal effectiveness are concerned, the enrichment of the emotional life is just as significant.

The monograph which combines the study of music and art is one of the slenderest of the twenty-eight, and the section which deals with art, as such, has only twenty-three pages. When one contrasts that with the monograph on "Provision for Individual Differences" of 472 pages, he has a fair reflection of the time, thought, and energy which have been given to this significant subject. In the second volume of the report on "Recent Social Trends" this significant sentence occurs: "At not a few points formal education has risen to its opportunities, but broadly speaking, it may be said that so far as the arts are concerned, it has, to borrow the Londoner's expressive phrase, 'missed the bus'. During the five years to come we may expect the bus to be caught."

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I have saved this aspect of the survey until the last, that I might emphasize the necessity, in the studies which you are certain to undertake, of giving more nearly adequate consideration to the contribution which the curriculum should make to the enrichment and training of the emotional life.

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