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A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF THE CLASS
OF 1973 IN U. S. D. #323
IN KANSAS

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Education today has been given one of the high priorities in our society. It is valuable both in itself and as a means of reaching other goals. It is, therefore, necessary that high on the list of priorities a never ending process of evaluation be carried on. This educational evaluation, in terms of the philosophy and objectives of our schools, includes academic subjects, in-service training, guidance services and other facets of our educational school system.

In a program of evaluation there are different sources of information. One of these sources is the follow-up study of graduates from our schools. The information obtained from these graduates, people in the community, professional personnel and other interested persons in the school will help in ascertaining that the school and persons associated with it meet their objectives. The follow-up and evaluation should be a part of the total school's program.

THE PROBLEM

Purpose of Study. It was the purpose of this study to follow-up the graduated seniors of the class of 1973 of the Westmoreland High School and St. George High School, both attendance centers in U. S. D. #323. The information obtained should be of value to the school, possibly improving the present school system and for use in future educational evaluation.

Importance of Study. As desirable as follow-up studies are, many schools omit them because of a lack of time, money, or personnel that are needed for that purpose. At the present time, there have been

no formal or regular follow-up studies of the graduates of U. S. D. #323. In an attempt to get such an evaluation started, the graduated class of 1973 was chosen. Emphasis was placed on feelings of the graduate, how the school prepared him for what he was doing or planned to do in the near future. The information asked was about his present job and location, how the courses offered at the school helped him in his employment or present situation and his feelings as to whether the size of the school affected his future plans.

It was hoped that this information would be beneficial to the school, staff, and future graduates of U. S. D. #323.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Educational Evaluation. To evaluate is to ascertain the value of some process or thing. Thus educational evaluation involves the passing of judgment on the degree of worthwhileness of some teaching process or learning experience.¹

Evaluation is a necessary and an important part of the total school program. Every educational institution exists to fulfill certain purposes, and evaluation enables the administration to make sound judgments regarding the extent to which these purposes are being met. It should be a continuous process, not of the guidance services alone, but of the entire school program to see that the needs, interests and abilities of the students are being satisfactorily provided for.

The major purposes of evaluation have been stated as:

- (1) to check on the effectiveness of the program,

¹Georgia Adams, Theodore L. Torgerson and Ernest Wood, Measurement and Evaluation (New York: The Dryden Press, 1956), p. 8.

- (2) to clarify and validate hypotheses on which the schools are operating,
- (3) to provide information for curriculum revision and for guidance services development,
- (4) to increase the psychological security of staff members by letting them appraise the results of their efforts,
- (5) to provide data upon which can be built a sound program of public information and public relations.²

It is generally considered by most people in the field of education that the purpose of schools is more than acquisition of factual knowledge. Most would now agree that the objectives of education go beyond this. But we sometime evaluate schools as though the academics were the only objectives of our schools. Before an adequate job of evaluation can be attempted there must be clarification and agreement on what the school to be evaluated has as its objectives. Hatch and Steffle suggested that objectives may be determined by an analysis of the experiences given children under the supervision of the school and through professional and lay committees meeting together to arrive at agreement on the purposes of the school.³

Statements of educational objectives have been proposed by the Educational Policies Commission, the Seven Cardinal Principles, and the National Associations of Secondary School Principals.⁴ Although many excellent lists of objectives are available, they tend to be so

²Raymond N. Hatch and Buford Steffle, Administration of Guidance Services (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1958), p.254.

³Ibid., p. 255.

⁴Paul Leonard, Developing the Secondary School Curriculum (New York: Rineburt and Company, 1953), p. 369.

generalized that they provide little guidance in the selection of curricular activities and the development of evaluation instruments.⁵ More important, would be those objectives determined by the staff of the particular school. Ready made objectives, such as those just mentioned, could be used as examples or guidelines.

After developing statements of objectives, there is the task of establishing criteria to be used as evidence relating to the objectives. Whatever the criteria are to be, they must be defined in terms that are measurable.⁶

Having established criteria, ways must be found to measure them. This is begun by a study of existing tests or other instruments to see whether the tools are present to do the job that is desired. If not, the staff will need to construct appropriate instruments for the particular situation.⁷

Gruhn and Douglas contend that educational aims and objectives are of no value in giving purpose to the curriculum of school unless they are thoroughly understood by members of the teaching staff. Teachers should be stimulated to study the formulated objectives, and to examine their meaning in relation to the curricular program of the school.⁸

They also feel that it should be kept in mind that a criterion for judging anything whatsoever represents only a condensation and

⁵Adams, Torgerson and Wood, op. cit., p. 491.

⁶Hatch and Stefflre, op. cit., p. 256.

⁷Ibid., p. 257.

⁸William Gruhn and Karl Douglas, The Modern Junior High School (New York: The Roland Press, 1947), p. 92.

generalization of the opinions of persons who are presumably competent to act as judges of the particular quality.⁹

To have an effective program of evaluation, Adams, Torgerson and Woods have given four characteristics of such a program stated as follows:

- 1...evaluation must...be compatible with purpose...
- 2...A program of evaluation must be comprehensive. It should not be limited to a few isolated goals, or objectives, but should include all major objectives of the institution.
- 3...for a variety of major objectives of the institution, no adequate methods or instruments for collecting reliable evidence are available. Until valid and reliable techniques are evolved such objectives must be appraised by as careful a subjective means as possible.
- 4...a variety of means and techniques must be used for gathering evidence. New techniques must be developed and old techniques must be revised and modified to meet new needs.¹⁰

Wrightstone sees four questions that are applicable in discussing the characteristics of an adequate program of evaluation in the modern school:

1. Is the design of the evaluation program comprehensive, so that it includes not only abilities, skills, and understandings, but also the less tangible objectives of learning and instruction?
2. Are changes in an individual's behavior the basis for evaluating his growth and development?
3. Are the results of evaluation organized and integrated into a meaningful interpretation?
4. Is the evaluation program continuous and integrated with the curriculum?¹¹

⁹Ibid., p. 443.

¹⁰Adams, Torgerson and Wood, op. cit., p. 9.

¹¹Wayne Wrightstone, Joseph Justman, and Irving Robbins, Evaluation in Modern Education (New York: American Book Company, 1956), pp. 21-24.

Since this paper is a follow-up and deals with one phase of the total evaluation process, it is appropriate to determine the follow-up in the total scope of educational evaluation.

The Follow-Up. The follow-up service is an organized effort to keep in constant touch with former students. It concerns itself with the total school program. It concerns itself with the successes, failures, attitudes and opinions of former students. The service applies to school leavers and may also be applied any time while the student is enrolled in school. Regardless of when the information is collected, it provides the school with that information which makes educational offerings more meaningful to present and future students.¹² Troyer's view of the follow-up is that the suggestions drawn from it can contribute to the guidance program, the general education program and the professional program. It can contribute to the staff members' understanding of in-service needs. It can help students gain a keener appreciation of what is likely to face them after they leave school.¹³

Crow, feels that the follow-up service is concerned with the impact of the guidance program and personnel on the pupil's personal social and education development. Teachers, counselors and administrators are concerned with what is happening to pupils while in school and after they leave school. Without the knowledge and data gathered from the follow-up, neither the instructional program of the school nor guidance services can be evaluated in terms of the effect they have on

¹²Raymond H. Hatch, Paul L. Dressel and James W. Costar, Guidance Services in the Secondary School (Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, 1963), p. 150.

¹³Maurice E. Troyer and C. Robert Pace, Evaluation in Teacher Education (Washington D. C.: American Council on Education, 1944), p. 233.

the lives of the pupils.¹⁴

Desirable and necessary as the follow-up is, it is all too often omitted because a school lacks the time, money, personnel or procedures that are needed for this purpose. The main reason for the failure to follow-up, as just mentioned, is that the school doesn't have sufficient resources to render continuing services to its school leavers over an extended period of time.¹⁵ It would seem many schools are undertaking guidance programs without doing the follow-up needed to appraise the program and obtain the information that may be needed to improve it.

Follow-up work is not just a haphazard service in the school program. If it is to be successful, it needs to be planned carefully so that the results will be of value to both the individuals and the school. It will include all school leavers. Follow-up studies done on a year-to-year basis will provide more valuable data than sporadic attempts at follow-up by allowing the school to determine trends in the responses or reaction of school leavers.¹⁶ Other characteristics of a follow-up plan are suggested by Traxler and stated as:

- (1) It begins before the student leaves school.
- (2) Each class is followed up for at least five years.
- (3) A representative sampling of each group is interviewed in order to obtain more extensive and detailed information than can be acquired from a questionnaire.
- (4) Responsibility for making the follow-up study is decentralized

¹⁴Lester Crow and Alice Crow, Organization and Conduct of Guidance Services (New York: David McKay Company Inc., 1965), p. 391.

¹⁵Anthony Humphreys and Arthur Traxler, Guidance Services (Chicago: Science Research Association Inc., 1954), p. 207.

¹⁶Frank Miller, Guidance Principles and Services (Ohio: Charles Merrill Publishing Company, 1968), p. 269.

so that each class adviser follows up his own class as they leave school.

5. The adviser's analysis of the data is made available to other school functionaries and is combined with those of other advisers in order to give a complete picture for the school system.
6. Conclusions concerning casual relations are drawn with caution.
7. The significant items from each individual's return are transferred to his cumulative record.
8. The follow-up plan is co-ordinated with a post school counseling service.
9. So far as possible, the cooperation of lay citizens is obtained in collecting, studying and using the follow-up data.¹⁷

Before any follow-up or any form of evaluation is done, it is suggested to proceed with specific objectives in mind. Smith has proposed such objectives to the information sought from former students through follow-up studies as:

1. To determine the holding power of schools.
2. To discover grade levels at which most drop-outs occur.
3. To learn why pupils leave school before graduation.
4. To seek information which will provide clues for identifying potential drop-outs.
5. To determine the mobility of former students.
6. To determine the percentage of drop-outs and graduates who seek further training after leaving school, and whether the secondary school should provide training of the kind pupils seek later.
7. To determine the percentage of pupils who enter college and what college.
8. To determine what percentage of former pupils who enter employment immediately after leaving school.

¹⁷Arthur E. Traxler, Techniques of Guidance (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), pp. 297-298.

9. To evaluate the effectiveness of school's placement activities.
10. To discover employment opportunities for young workers in the local community.
11. To discover the barrier to employment and occupational adjustment encountered by former pupils.
12. To obtain the opinion of former pupils concerning the efficacy of the guidance program.
13. To obtain opinions concerning needed modifications of the curriculum in light of the experiences of former students.
14. To compare the occupational interests of former pupils with those expressed by them before leaving school.
15. To compare the occupational stability and adjustment of graduates and drop-outs.
16. To identify former pupils who need further counseling to aid them in making more adequate personal, educational, or occupational adjustment.
17. To identify former pupils for whom the school might offer additional educational, training, or other needed services.¹⁸

The purposes of follow-up studies have been suggested by many different authors in the field. These purposes tend to be similar to others if the kind of information sought is used as the basis for improving the curriculum or school. Traxler has mentioned three purposes of the follow-up study. First, there is the altruistic desire to help the individual with problems of vocational, educational, and social adjustment after he goes from the school and while he is getting himself established elsewhere. As a rule, more attention is given to vocational adjustment than to other types, although not infrequent adjustment to a vocation depends in part upon the successful resolution

¹⁸ Glen Smith, Principles and Practices of Guidance Program (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1951), pp. 309-310.

of personal factors in the individual's make-up.

The second purpose is to gather data for use in evaluating the instructional and guidance program of the local school. The chief criterion of the value of a guidance program is its influence on the post school lives of the individuals who have received the counseling service.

The third purpose of the follow-up studies of school leavers is to gather information of general interest concerning those who have left. Such studies are intended to help all agencies concerned with youth to help deal with their problems more intelligently.¹⁹

Various kinds of information can be expected from the follow-up studies and have been listed as follows:

1. Reasons given by drop-outs for leaving school prior to graduation.
2. Suggestions by the drop-out as to ways of increasing the school's holding power.
3. Kinds of problems faced by former students and the grade level at which the problem arose.
4. Present location of former students with emphasis on both residence and employment.
5. Types of training taken by former students after they left the school.
6. Changes which should be made in the curriculum to bring about maximum benefits for today's students.
7. Additions or deletions needed in the co-curricular activities.
8. Kinds of problems faced by students when they first left school.
9. Weaknesses in the present school and community relationship and suggestions for improving it.

¹⁹Arthur Traxler, op. cit., p. 289.

10. Vocational data which can be used to describe local employment conditions.²⁰

It is not difficult to get the agreement of the staff that follow-up studies are important. The problem is in implementing the study. Such problems as leadership, time, money and method of sampling are a few examples of obstacles to overcome. But because so many techniques can be used in gathering information, a master plan is impossible. Hatch, Dressel and Costar suggested five steps of approach to implementing a follow-up study.

The first step in the development of the follow-up program is the identification of the staff to give the work interested and qualified leadership. Some characteristics of this leadership may be interest, willingness to help and a determination to complete the task. Once the committee has been selected, the guidance staff can furnish the necessary materials and explanations needed for understanding the technique to be used.

The second step in developing the follow-up study is to determine the sample to be studied and the method to be used. The initial study usually sets a pattern which is followed for a number of years. So certain decisions need to be made as to the width and breadth of information, which students' opinions the study should reflect, and the recentness of graduates that are to be included. If classes are small, contacting all of these is advisable, if over a hundred students, a sampling procedure is advisable.

The method of conducting the follow-up usually includes one or more of the following techniques: the interview, the postcard survey or

²⁰Hatch, Dressel and Costar, op. cit., p. 150.

the questionnaire. Each approach has certain advantages and disadvantages. The interview results in the most valid information, but it is the most time consuming and expensive. The post card is inexpensive and easy to conduct, but the results are limited. The questionnaire accomplishes some of the objectives of the other techniques and overcomes some of the limitations of the other approaches.²¹

The third step in carrying out the follow-up study is the development of the proper forms. The main forms are the cover letter, the questionnaire, and the interviewing form. The cover letter should be brief and personalized. The questionnaire should provide space for brief and objective answers. If a structured interview is planned, the questions which the interviewer is to ask should have more space for the entry of longer answers.

The fourth step in the development of the follow-up is the compilation of addresses of former students. To accomplish this task is quite a chore. The following are suggestions as means to this end:

1. Cooperate with alumni associations.
2. Sponsor contests and give awards for the greatest number of up-to-date alumni addresses.
3. Have regular meetings with school leavers to explain the purposes of the follow-up information.
4. Contact direct-mail advertising agencies for the loan of mailing lists.
5. Have each member of the succeeding class keep track of one of the graduating seniors.
6. Use the last address given by the student before he left school.

²¹Hatch and Steffle, op. cit., p. 227.

These suggestions may be helpful for recent graduates, but for those graduated or drop-outs over an extended length of time, a more effective way will need to be implemented.

The fifth step in implementing the follow-up study is that of tabulating and utilizing the results. When all the returns have been tabulated, a summary report of the findings should be prepared. The report should include a brief description of the purpose and procedures of the study, a simple table of the responses of each, and conclusions and recommendations.²²

Baer and Roeber also suggest ways to arrange various survey activities in the form of a pattern to meet the needs of the local school. These are:

1. Pre-Survey Activity and Consideration.
2. Providing the spark and leadership.
3. Determine the purpose of the follow-up study.
4. Determine the techniques and personnel.
5. Provide a budget for the follow-up study.
6. Preparing forms, letters and other contact material.
7. Obtain maximum returns. Those who performed high while in school respond better. Girls respond better than boys. Length of time after graduation seems to affect the percentage of responses. Graduates respond better than drop-outs.
8. Provide for publicity.
9. Prepare a list of school leavers.²³

²²Hatch, Dressel and Costar, op. cit., pp. 151-157.

²³Max E. Baer and Edward C. Roeber, Occupational Information Its Nature and Use (Chicago: Science Research Associates Inc., 1951), pp. 278-300.

It was with some of the points mentioned previously that this follow-up survey was undertaken. It was hoped that the results would be reviewed by the board of education, the superintendent, principals and all persons interested in the future of the students in U. S. D. #323. If this study proves to be helpful to present and future students in the district, then it has served its purpose.

The Questionnaire. In doing a follow-up study, it is necessary to determine how the information necessary for the study is to be gathered. For this study, a questionnaire was thought to be most feasible. Since most of the seniors were living and working in the area, it was decided to visit all, or at least as many as possible, of the graduated seniors of the class of 1973 and have them fill out the questionnaire while the writer was present. It was felt that this would cut down on the slowness of getting the returns back and increase the number of returns.

Many people feel that the construction of a questionnaire is simple. If it is simple, the person who constructed it took little time in formulating the questions and providing for answers. To formulate the questions, many factors are involved. Careful study and wording of the questions make the difference between a good and bad questionnaire.

Research in the field of questionnaires reveal that most authors agree to the basics about the structure and content of the questionnaire. Some of these features should be kept in mind when constructing a questionnaire.

A major consideration in planning the types of items in the questionnaire is the degree of objectivity necessary or desired in

tabulating the responses. All item forms may be divided into two main classes: (1) items to which the respondent supplies the word, number, or the symbols which constitute the response, and (2) items to which the respondents select responses from among those presented with the items. The major form of items may be classified as the free-response, open-end, or short answer, which represent the supply type; and the yes-no, true-false or multiple choice, which represent the selection type.²⁴

The free-response, open-end, or short answer form is characterized by the presence of a blank on which the respondent writes the information called for by directions. It may provide a verbal picture of how the respondent feels about a topic, what it means to him and the background of his answer. This form is often difficult to tabulate and summarize due to the variety of different answers that may be given by respondents. It is nearly impossible to phrase a free response question so that you receive the same response from all the respondents.²⁵

Yes-no, right-wrong, or true-false forms consist of a statement to be answered categorically as yes or no, right or wrong, or to be judged true or false. It is essentially a form to which only one of the possible alternatives is explicitly stated. A statement, to meet the standards of objectivity, must be so precise in phrasing and so universal in application that it requires no additional qualifications and admits no possible exceptions. Since many responses cannot be answered truthfully as being entirely this way or that way, this requirement tends to

²⁴J. Francis Rummel, An Introduction to Research Procedures in Education (New York: Harper Brothers, 1958), p. 89.

²⁵Ibid., p. 90.

limit the applicability and validity of items of this nature. Even qualifying the responses as being "usually yes" or "usually no" does not avoid a degree of ambiguity.²⁶

The multiple choice form consists of an introductory question and two or more suggested answers. It has less of the weaknesses of the preceding forms and is adaptable to a wide variety of questions. In this form a respondent merely checks the suggested answer that applies to him. It is the easiest to use and most objective for tabulating results.²⁷

To get the respondent to cooperate in answering a questionnaire requires a little skill. Most respondents are not thrilled with the idea of filling out a questionnaire. In an attempt to establish the "desire" to fill out the questionnaire, the following characteristics have been suggested.

First, the content of the questionnaire should appeal to the less successful school leaver as well as the more successful school leaver. The content of the questionnaire should appeal to men as well as women, to drop-outs as well as graduates.²⁸

It has been suggested by Rummel that "warm up" questions be included at the beginning of a questionnaire to (1) get the respondent's mind on the topic. This type of item should be entirely neutral with respect to the respondent's emotions. (2) To allow the respondent to "let off steam." These items are for the purpose of getting the respondent

²⁶Ibid., p. 91.

²⁷Ibid., p. 92.

²⁸Baer and Roeber, op. cit., p. 290.

in a better mood for the rest of the questionnaire, and (3) to avoid the respondent's opinion that the questionnaire is not adequate. It is not desirable to ask questions to which answers can be found elsewhere. But, in some instances, they are included only for the purpose of eliciting responses to the entire questionnaire.²⁹

Second, the questionnaire should be reasonable in length. It should be short enough not to be rejected completely or take too much time of the respondent, but it should be long enough to include the information essential in the study. The length of the questionnaire depends entirely upon the extensiveness of the data required. Sometime the length of the questionnaire will appear to be long or short. Printed forms appear shorter than typewritten or mimeographed forms. Also, in regard to appearance, it may be desirable to group the items into sections and begin numbering them in each section starting with number one. In this way the last item on the last page will not have a large number.³⁰

Third, the questionnaire properly spaces the items in it. It is better to shorten the questionnaire and improve its appearance than to crowd more items together and thus decrease participation in the survey.³¹

Fourth, the questionnaire should be relatively easy to fill out. Questions which can be answered as multiple choice or suggested answers,

²⁹Rummel, op. cit., p. 93.

³⁰Rummel, op. cit., p. 107.

³¹Baer and Roeber, op. cit., p. 291.