

IS YOUR SCHOOL SICK?

by

IAN F. KILPATRICK

St. Francis High School, Calgary, Alberta

1. Does your school lack meaning for the teachers and students?
2. Are the students at your school apathetic toward the school and its activities?
3. Is your intramural program "lacklustre" or non-existent?
4. Does your school have a high drop out rate?
5. Do your school teams finish last or out of the play-offs?
6. Do you have poor fan support at school games and activities?
7. Do the teachers beat the students out of the door after last period?

These represent a sample of the symptoms of a sickness which is spreading throughout the high schools in our country. What has happened to the "old school spirit" that once instilled pride and enthusiasm in the student for school traditions? It would appear that this spirit that allowed for maximum identification with the school is fading and is only a ghost of its former self.*

Some people do not realize that there is a problem at all. They feel that society is in one of its cycles and this low period is only transitory in nature and will disappear if it is ignored. (Head in sand technique). Others deny the existence of any problem at all and hide blissfully in their own ignorance. Still others blame the students, because they just are not making the students the way they used to.

The problem, it would appear, has its causal roots in the very fabric of our social existence. In periods of rapid social change especially in the areas of values and social institutions a normless condition of anomie occurs where reality testing on an individual basis

becomes difficult and vague.* The person becomes disoriented and has trouble defining his social self. Alvin Toffler(1) defines this feeling as "Future Shock" which he defines as "The shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time." The same situation occurs in relation to the social institutions inherent in our society. The school is a social institution which also is not immune to the effects of change. The school it would appear, like the individual, is facing a type of institutional future shock.

Traditionally the school is a bastion of institutionalized norms and values. Because of its conservative approach there usually is a cultural lag between it and the ongoing society. The students on the other hand are more dynamic and enthusiastic about emergent values and ideals. Consequently the "future oriented" student is usually in value conflict with the school's more conservative approach. Because the schools exist for the students they are in a dilemma — they suffer a "relevancy gap" between the expectations of both students and school.

According to Daniel W. Rossides, "The first function of education quite obviously is to transmit the socio-cultural personality system from one generation to the next (pattern-maintenance)." (2) Seen in this context, the school should provide the students with a normative pattern (a way of life) in which to view

* Social institution is defined as a complex normative pattern that is widely accepted as binding in a particular society or part of a society. Thus a social institution provides a set of role expectations for incumbents within that system.

(1) Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Random House, New York, July 1970.

(2) Daniel W. Rossides, *Society as a Functional Process: An Introduction to Sociology*, McGraw-Hill Company of Canada Limited, Toronto, 1968.

* Identification is used here in the sociological group reference. One is said to identify with a social group if one internalizes the role system of the group and considers oneself a member of it.

the world. Unfortunately the school due to cultural lag and other factors does not reflect the true picture of society for the students. The students generally are aware of the values and ideals that are present in society and see the school clearly as an antiquated institution espousing outdated values and ideals.

From the foregoing it would be logical to assume that relevancy (closeness of "value fit") and identification would be highly correlated in a positive direction.* That is, if the "value fit" was close then the students would tend to identify with the school and conversely if the value systems do not compliment each other then minimum identification would occur. It would appear then that identification is the key to success for the school as a social institution. Higher identification leads to higher internalization of values, attitudes and ideals, whereas lower identification leads to a lower ratio of value internalization.

How does one accomplish maximum identification with the school? The logical answer of course is to provide activities and learning experiences related as closely as possible to the student needs. In any event you must have an evaluation of student wants both academically as well as socially. Academically the society sets certain basic requirements — whether it is university entrance or some other job requirement, the student must be able to express himself both verbally and in written form as well as understand basic mathematics. Vocational education also equips the student with specific skills which are transferable to the work world. Students generally will admit and agree that these are important, however in the area of social activities there is less than total agreement. The latter is usually considered the student's personal prerogative just as the former has been the school's responsibility. The students usually run the social activities through their student councils, which set up dances, intramural events etc. Frequently the student expectations and those of the schools do not mesh. Cole-

man(3) found that when the status systems of the student were studied the informal adolescent sub-culture did not compliment the academic climate. Instead the boys favoured interscholastic sport and the girls, popularity more than they did academic areas even when they had the academic ability. The conclusion that can be drawn here is that students with ability are most likely to achieve only when there are social rewards from their peers. It might be noted that Coleman's study was done in 1956 and could be outdated. Karen G. Hillman, found that ten years later the value preferences in the schools she studied, favoured academics over all others. She traced the shift to three main factors:

1. the growing competition among students for admission to college
2. the rising level of training and competence required by the ever more technical structure of society
3. the decline of unskilled work.(4)

In short to succeed in or even fit into present day society, the high school population of the late 1960's preferred values which held more promise of insuring their place in the future. Today, with increasing difficulty in finding work in highly skilled areas, it would be interesting to ascertain if the students values have changed again. In relation to the Hillman study it would also be interesting to find out how long it took the school system to realize that the basic orientation of the student had changed and if this change occurred smoothly without frustration on the part of the school and students. In any event, the informal social structure of the school is of prime importance in determining the needs and desires of the students. An evaluation of the informal social structure and concomitant status systems must be made by each individual school in order to plan specific activities to meet

(3) James S. Coleman "The Adolescent Subculture and Academic Achievement," in *American Journal of Sociology*, (Vol. 65, No. 4, Jan. 1960) 337-347.

(4) Karen G. Hillman, "Student Valuation and Academic Achievement" in, *The Sociological Quarterly* (Columbia Mo. The Midwest Sociological Society) Vol. 10, No. 3. Summer 1969, (384-391).

* Value fit is defined as the extent that two value systems compliment each other.

the changing needs of the students. Evaluation here would have to be continuous and its administration would require trained personnel.

One of the most frightening facets of our educational system is that the schools do not realize what is happening to them. They are a large static self-perpetuating bureaucracy, with fixed roles and positions that stifle initiative and leadership. The unchanging hierarchical pattern has promoted inflexibility in the school systems. The executive positions and responsibilities of the principal and vice-principals have not changed to any extent. The principal's position still entails responsibility of the overall organization and functioning of the school. The vice-principals either look after time tabling, or discipline and attendance problems. I am sure that these functions could be adequately handled by most competent secretaries leaving the vice-principals free to handle more important matters. Realistically the role of the vice-principal will have to change. There will have to be at least one full time vice-principal or activity director in charge of student activities. This area is just too important to be approached in a "helter-skelter" manner. The job description of this position would have to include complete responsibility for all co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that occur in the school. He would be responsible for obtaining qualified coaches for sports, organizing intramural programs, school clubs and related activities, as well as constant evaluation of these sponsors and their programs. If they are not fulfilling the requirements, then they should be replaced. This person should be qualified through training and experience in his related field. Considering the requirements, the co-ordinator of Physical Education could be the best person to fulfill this task. Elevating this job

in the line authority to a vice-principalship would allow his influence to be felt on staff hiring policies. It might be noted that teachers as well as students should also identify with the school. The committed teacher is one whose obligation does not end at 4:00 p.m. He is one who cares enough about the students to spend extra time with them in informal contacts outside the classroom. The activity director should be in a position to obtain these kinds of teachers for his school program.

The previously mentioned Coleman study pointed out that the adolescent subculture sometimes works in direct opposition to the formal learning climate. Adverse as this may appear, the students still passed and the same percentage went on to college in spite of this subculture. This is an important point as it appears that if the school utilizes and maximizes the students status system regardless of what structure it assumes, identification with the institution is still maintained and the students benefit. Then by tailoring the informal activities to meet the needs of the students, these subcultures would not be pressured into existence.

The following conclusions summarize the main points in this article:

1. Identification is the key to school involvement and school relevancy.
2. The informal environment is too important to be left up to chance. An activities director's position must be included in the school to handle this area.
3. The school must continually evaluate the student's needs and be prepared to gear co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities to meet these needs. (even at the expense of existing structures and organizations.)

It's a Well-Known Fact in Sporting Goods
JACK WATSON SPORTS INC.

30 MOBILE DRIVE, TORONTO 16, ONTARIO — 757-2844

Carry Quality Sports Equipment at Low Prices

4. The most complete learning situation would be one where the informal climate complimented the formal learning situation. However even under adverse conditions identification still takes place and students still appear to benefit by this identification.

You can tell when a school fosters maximum identification, you can feel it as you walk in the front door. The excitement and enthusiasm of the students is readily apparent, the halls are lined with posters of up-coming events and the intramural schedule is visible and up to date. Now — **what about your school?** Do you have **maximum identi-**

fication? Does your school feel **alive?** If not, isn't it time **something was done?**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Johnson, Harry M. *Sociology A Systematic Introduction*, Harcourt Brace and World, New York, 1960.
- Parsons, Talcott. "The School Class as a Social System: Some of its Functions in American Society" *Harvard Educational Review*, Fall 1959.
- Rossides, Daniel W. *Society as a Functional Process, An Introduction to Sociology*, McGraw-Hill Company of Canada Limited, Toronto, 1968.
- Toffler, Alvin C. *Future Shock*, Random House, New York, July 1970.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Edmonton, Alberta

Faculty of Physical Education

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

1. One position is expected at the assistant professor level.
2. Ph.D. with an academic concentration in one of the following areas: History, Kinesiology, Anatomy, Philosophy, Motor Learning. Competency in one or more physical activity.
3. Teaching in the undergraduate and/or graduate program in the area of competency. Coaching in one activity would also be expected of the appointee.
4. Maximum of second step of the assistant professor scale. (Base of assistant professorship \$11,855 + 1973-1974 adjustment).
5. **Dr. R. G. Glassford, Chairman, Department of Physical Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.**
6. July 1, 1973 (12 month appointment leading to tenure).
7. April 30, 1973.

The manner of a vulgar man has freedom without ease; the manner of a gentleman has ease without freedom.
Lord Chesterfield

* * *

Some people can stay longer in an hour than others can in a week.
William Dean Howells

A hole is nothing at all, but you can break your neck in it.

Austin O'Malley

* * *

Beware that you do not lose the substance by grasping at the shadow.

Aesop