

EDUCATION

High School Courses Termed "Inappropriate" in Report

Pupils Given Neither Adequate Vocational Training Nor Real Cultural Background, Declares Committee

IF YOU complacently suppose that United States high schools are doing a super-job of educating young America, prepare to be shocked.

Recommending sweeping reforms, a 36-page bombshell report, *What the High Schools Ought to Teach*, by a special committee of ten American educators, has just burst on the educational world. The report was prepared for the American Youth Commission appointed by the American Council on Education.

It appears that we have come a long way since wise Ben Franklin in 1749 wrote his historic appeal for an Academy to teach youth "useful" subjects. But we have got on a deceptively smooth-looking detour.

Here is where we are: 6,500,000 boys and girls enrolled in high schools in 1939, most of them preparing for white-collar jobs, while outside the school windows—if students could see them—ranks of unemployed America include 4,000,000 young people 15 to 24 years of age. That is one danger sign.

But even cultural education that the young scholars are getting is not adjusted to their needs, grave criticisms disclose. "Inappropriate" is the committee's term for the curriculum as a whole. High schools now emphasize the wrong things, judging by plain facts of student ability and the sort of future that the majority of young Americans face.

Criticisms of American high school teaching include these:

Algebra and geometry, required of most pupils, are stumbling-block courses for many. Benefits they confer—such as learning to think in abstraction and to form broad generalizations—might better be taught by extracting important principles from the usual mathematics courses and teaching those, the report suggests.

Similarly, foreign languages are said to teach how language is constructed, and to awaken appreciation of other cultures. A course in general language would meet these particular needs, the educators point out, leaving students who are not going to specialize in lan-

guages more time for new courses of greater personal usefulness.

Courses in natural sciences are criticized for being crammed too thickly with encyclopedic facts of discoveries already made. Too seldom they are directed by teachers who stimulate pupils to vital, effective scientific thinking.

English courses, required universally in secondary schools, emphasize composition writing, which often degenerates into "formal exercises in the course of which pupils are drilled in the trivialities of verbal expression." Declaring that such courses do not produce masters of writing techniques, the educators advise stress on reading. Poor reading is now a common handicap, they warn, and high school English teachers can make a contribution of top value to general education by teaching teen age Americans to become fluent and intelligent readers.

More instruction in social studies is needed, the report continues, though introducing these important studies into public schools is more difficult than introducing any other subject except religion.

This need is called urgent: "The obligation of finding some way of preparing young people for citizenship, for intelligent social attitudes, and for effective participation in community life has become a public obligation which must be met if social chaos is to be avoided."

Teaching young Americans a useful craft or trade, and teaching habits of work and how to get along with other

people are practical needs not being widely met either at school or at home. Work is recommended as part of a high school education.

Revision of the curriculum depends on individual schools, the educators conclude. Class rooms should be "centers of vigorous experimentation." But to speed improvements, they urge leadership by central agencies, such as the National Association of Secondary-School Principals and the U. S. Office of Education.

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BOTANY

Little Ragweed Pollen In Air Over Atlantic

SNEEZE-provoking ragweed pollen is scarce in the upper air over the ocean, but there are plenty of mold spores, which also cause hay fever, Oren C. Durham, chief botanist of the Abbott Laboratories in North Chicago, Ill., reported to Science Service when the Bermuda Clipper landed in New York on Thursday afternoon, Aug. 22.

Mr. Durham made the round trip on the Clipper, exposing sticky glass slides to catch pollen grains, fungus spores, and whatever other particles might be adrift in the air. He examined them at once under a microscope on the Clipper's cabin table, made available by the commander, Capt. C. A. Lorber.

As the Clipper climbed, over Long Island, he caught plenty of ragweed pollen grains, but after that there was no pollen, only mold spores. As the plane glided down to landing in Bermuda on Wednesday, and climbed for the clouds again on Thursday, there were only traces of the spores, but at the 8,000-foot level of most of the return flight there were spores in abundance.

No pollen was encountered until within 80 miles of the mainland, at 4,000 feet altitude. From there on in the slides were well spotted.

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