



## *About Education*

# *The Eight Year Study*

*Occasional Paper No. 2*

*March 15, 2015*

The Eight Year Study was led by Ralph Tyler at Ohio State University during the period from 1933-1941. At that time, there was a “lingering doubt” among educators about the extent to which success in college depended on the conventional pattern of subjects required for high school graduation.

The study was framed around the view that:

- High schools needed to rediscover their “chief reason for existence”
- Life in school “should conform to what was known about the way in which human beings learn and grow
- The basis of study should be found in the “problems of living”.
- Optimal development is to be encouraged ‘not only because it is the inherent right of the individual, but because individual maximum development contributes to the common good”

Thirty schools were selected for the study. The selection process included a number of private schools and school systems that were “unchained” from conventional college preparatory thinking, allowed to organize activities that, in the view of the school, best represented the thinking of the day about the way in which human beings learn and grow; graduates were followed in their journey through college. Thirty schools and school systems representing both public and private secondary schools, accepted the invitation; although schools were given freedom to be innovative, not all took up the challenge. Two hundred and fifty accredited colleges and universities agreed to suspend their time-based subject centered admission requirements for graduates from participating schools.

Each school both determined and developed their own curriculum. Absence of requirement for a course did not mean that a subject was not offered or studied. Work with the study is said to have given impetus to the “Objectives movement and also of formative evaluation. Objectives for each course were formulated and refined for later classes in the same subject said by some to have an impetus

Aiken (see reference 5 below) reports that the “College Follow-up Staff” analyzed the results and found that the graduates of the “Thirty Schools”, as compared to comparison group:

1. earned a slightly higher total grade average;
2. earned higher grade averages in all subject fields except foreign language;
3. specialized in the same academic fields as did the comparison students;
4. did not differ from the comparison group in the number of times they were placed on probation;
5. received slightly more academic honours in each year;
6. were more often judged to possess a high degree of intellectual curiosity and drive;
7. were more often judged to be precise, systematic, and objective in their thinking;
8. were more often judged to have developed clear or well-formulated ideas concerning the meaning of education especially in the first two years in college;
9. more often demonstrated a high degree of resourcefulness in meeting new situations;
10. did not differ from the comparison group in ability to plan their time effectively;

11. had about the same problems of adjustment as the comparison group, but approached their solution with greater effectiveness;
12. participated somewhat more frequently, and more often enjoyed appreciative experiences, in the arts;
13. participated more in all organized student groups except religious and “service” activities;
14. earned in each college year a higher percentage of non-academic honours (officership in organizations, election to managerial societies, athletic insignia, leading roles in dramatic and musical presentations );
15. did not differ from the comparison group in the quality of adjustment to their contemporaries;
16. differed only slightly from the comparison group in the kinds of judgments about their schooling;
17. had a somewhat better orientation toward the choice of a vocation; and
18. demonstrated a more active concern for what was going on in the world.

Unfortunately for education, the study results emerged while the US was gearing up for WWII and did not receive the attention it deserved. Interestingly though, this writer found a couple of references to the Eight Year Study in recent articles about education.

Questions/issues for discussion:

1. What do you think should be the role of public education?
2. Are you aware of evidence that refutes findings of the Eight Year Study?
3. Would you let your child enrol in an innovative school as described in the Eight Year Study?
4. Which conclusion is most at odds with your thinking?
5. What part of your high school studies was most useful to you during your university studies?

References:

1. Aiken, William, [Full text of “The Story Of The Eight-Year Study](#)
2. Bullough, Robert, [Professional Learning Communities and the Eight-Year Study](#),
3. Ritchie, Charles C, [The Eight-Year Study: Can we afford it-ASCD](#)
4. Stor, **What Did the Eight-Year Study Reveal?**
5. Watras, Joseph **The Eight-Year Study: From Evaluative Research to a Demonstration Project, 1930—1940.**

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