Hyde Experiment Worked

PPH 11/21/1977

. . . But Tea Planning N

By TIM ELLEDGE
District Reporter

BATH — Right from the beginning it was an unusual experiment. And it worked — mostly.

Take 135 elementary school kids of all shapes, sizes, colors and intelligence, put them together with a couple of dozen prep school students, three public school teachers and four private school teachers. Give them six weeks and see what happens.

Two summers ago, Hyde School opened an informal summer recreation program for about 35 public elementary school students. They gathered a few volunteer teachers interested in the project and spent six weeks trying a variety of programs.

That was the prototype. Last summer, they went all out, with 135 youngsters, a paid professional staff and a $22,000 budget.

AN EVALUATION prepared by Hyde and released recently says the program was an overwhelming success, something that should be incorporated into the public school system's regular activities.

The public school teachers who participated in the six-week project, however, are more cautious.

It was a good program, they say, one that benefited a lot of children, taught teachers and parents some valuable lessons and probably should be continued. But it should be done carefully, with better planning and a few alterations.

Hyde headmaster Edward Legg said the idea is to "focus on each boy and girl individually, find out what their best was. Get them to bite off things they haven't done before, things they might have thought they're not capable of. Get them to help each other.

"In order to do that, we got the parents and the teachers and older students involved. We wanted teenagers working with the younger children. And I think we were successful.

"AT FIRST, THERE were a lot of parents skeptical of the whole thing. But at the end, 90 percent of them said they'd like to see it continued next year," Legg said.

Directed by Ann Legg, the summer recreation program's goal was to help children "grow in both self-confidence and concern for others."

Each day all the children participated in a track program, and there were swimming lessons twice a week. Both, the evaluation said, helped to develop physical self-confidence and courage.

The kids also spent part of the day working on art projects, making puppets, pantomiming, story telling and participating in group discussions. Another big chunk of the day went into preparations for "Johnny Appleseed," a musical production put together by everybody — students and teachers alike.

At the end, parents filled out a questionnaire asking whether the program should be continued, what aspects of it should be carried over into the public schools, whether their children had grown in self-confidence, whether it helped them as parents and what changes should be made.

MORE THAN 90 percent said it should be continued. About 84 percent said some aspects should be adopted by public schools — especially, most of them commented, the involvement of older students with the elementary school youngsters.

One suggested: "I would like to see the public schools be more interested in the children themselves than in how much knowledge they can cram into their heads."

Most said their child's self-confidence did improve.

"D. is more willing to try new things instead of saying right off the bat, 'I can't do it'," a parent commented.

Another said: "S. has always been pretty confident and quite independent. Now he is specializing in it. I don't know if I am pleased with his increased confidence. It made him a little more aggressive and a little too headstrong."

"The summer experience can and should be carried over into the public schools. Starting such a program does not need experience and time as much as desire, commitment and the courage to take risks," said director Ann Legg.

IT COULD BE THE beginning, she said in the evaluation, of an opportunity for the public school system and Hyde School to work together.

In the community, Hyde's summer program got off to a controversial start. It asked for and won a $1,000 grant from the Bath school board — but over objections of one board member and superintendent Clifford Tinkham.

Nearly $15,000 was provided by Hyde. The Davenport Foundation put up another $6,500.

Fisher-Mitchell principal Audrey Alexander acted as liaison between the public schools and Hyde.

"Overall," she said, "it was worthwhile. But there were some problems, mostly in the way the program was explained to the parents and to us. We'd expected it to be similar to what had been done during the first summer. It wasn't. This year, it was much more structured.

"And Hyde had expectations of the parents that weren't explained in the beginning. They'd planned for a lot of parent involvement. Parents were supposed to participate in 'encounter' type evaluation sessions. They were supposed to write papers explaining their feelings

– Mostly

chers Urge Better ext Time Around

Each day all the children participated in track, art projects, making puppets, pantomiming, story telling and group discussions. A big chunk of each day was put into the preparation of "Johnny Appleseed," a musical production put together by everybody — students and teachers alike.

"Last year we got a Davenport Foundation grant which gave the program a year to prove itself to the town. Then, hopefully, Bath would take over sponsorship — not necessarily by providing all the money, but at least token support."
Ann Legg

bout the program, and they were supposed to be an active part of the experiment.

"THAT'S ALL OKAY — If parents had been told that's what was expected of them. They weren't. I wasn't even told about it. And to many parents, participating in encounter sessions was a scary idea. They weren't ready for that kind of thing.

"When I found out about it, I threatened to withdraw my support for the program. I didn't want to have anything to do with it if that kind of participation was required. So [illegible] they offered parents the 'opportunity' to participate. And that was fine. I had no objections as long as they were given a choice."

There were also conflicts in the beginning between the public school teachers and the program director, Alexander said, but those were worked out and most of the six weeks went smoothly.

WHETHER THE SUMMER program has a future depends upon community support, according to director Legg.

"Last year, we got a Davenport Foundation grant which gave the program a year to prove itself to the town. Then, hopefully, Bath would take over sponsorship — not necessarily by providing all the money, but at least token support. The same contribution made last year — $1,000 — might be enough. It at least shows cooperation between the private and public sector. With that, we might be able to get federal money."

She said Hyde's trustees aren't likely to put up as much money next summer as they did last summer. That $16,000, she said, is too much to contribute every year.

"So if the town thinks it's worthwhile, we'll have it again. If not, then I guess it dies," she summarized.