

## A Modern Program for a Modern Day

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THERE IS ABUNDANT evidence from recent studies of the growth and development of children that the program of the school should be designed largely to deal directly with the concerns of childhood and youth. The usual concept of education, however, is that in any given grade level the teacher's main task is to prepare the children for some imagined, future need. For example, many think that the kindergarten should prepare children for the first grade, that the elementary school should prepare pupils for the secondary school, and that the chief purpose of the secondary school should be to prepare students for college. With this concept in mind, teacher-education institutions have influenced their students to follow certain patterns of teaching which would lead children safely and sanely toward beautifully-phrased, teacher-made goals. These *systems* of teaching reading, art, numbers, spelling, geography, music, English, science, and other subject fields have developed a lock step in public education which has failed to minister to the concerns of "all the children of all the people" who are found in public schools today.

Schools and colleges must join forces in providing a framework for public education which permits pupils to have experiences that are purposeful, dynamic, *alive*—experiences which help learners to live broadly, deeply, and abundantly today. Those who believe in this purpose of education would have pupils delve into the heritage from the past whenever backgrounds are needed in solving the significant problems

of the present. Individuals thus challenged and educated in public schools will be able to cope with the growing edge of social change which follows in the wake of scientific advance. Schools educate for the future by educating adequately for today.

### Research Studies Contribute

Gradually in American education there have been introduced certain practices which have recognized the rights of childhood and youth. Over the last quarter of a century, results of research studies of early childhood have influenced materially kindergarten and primary education. Within the last fifteen years, studies of adolescence have added to the fund of information pertaining to the nature of our secondary-school youth. Here and there efforts are being made to provide school experiences which are designed to help adolescents better to understand themselves and their problems.

Within the last decade many important findings pertaining to human growth and development have been made available which are applicable to adults as well as to children and youth. School systems which have recognized the basic needs of teachers, as well as of pupils, have made educational progress as teachers have been *liberated* to initiate improved ways of teaching. With all the convincing facts before educators concerning what the schools should do for all who attend and with all the values clearly understood which result from permitting teachers to use their creative abilities as they work with children, there is no longer excuse for the great impotency which exists in many public school programs today.

### General Education Offers an Answer

School systems are slow in introducing new procedures in instruction, and often rightfully so. However, nothing is as certain as change, and teachers above all other persons must be kept aware of this fact. Opportunities must be provided within the working

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*In planning for general education in the schools it is necessary to re-examine the organization in which such a program is to function and the goals toward which it is striving. Gilbert S. Willey, assistant superintendent, Denver Public Schools, Colo., emphasizes that modern methods must be used in the classroom to insure an intelligent approach to living in this age.*

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day to permit teachers to have a vital part in planning for improved educational programs. Classroom teachers, themselves, have had an important part in developing the general concept that a major part of the education for any group of learners from kindergarten to adults should be based primarily upon the *common* needs, interests, and concerns of those being educated. This is known as *general* education as contrasted with departmentalized education in the elementary schools, or special and elective subjects offered in the secondary school. The commonality of an interest for all members of a group of learners is general in nature for that group—hence the term *general* education.

Many educators agree that teaching in nursery and kindergarten rooms, and in some primary rooms, has excelled the teaching usually given to older children and adolescents. To provide an environment in which children of preschool years have opportunities to learn, it has been necessary to start with the nature of the children. Teachers of primary grades, of first grade especially, have violated this psychological approach by insisting that children should read before they are ready, by attempting to “prepare” children for the next grade instead of helping them to grow normally in their emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development. The better primary schools today provide environments which stimulate children to grow wholly and naturally, keeping an eye on the individual’s total growth in light of his own potentialities, instead of insisting that all children read the same books at the same rate, and do other similarly imposed unnatural things. Stimulating environments for the development of pupils must likewise be provided in all elementary school grades, and throughout the junior and senior high-school years. A continuous program of general education throughout the twelve to fourteen years of school gives much promise for providing stimulating experiences which are based upon the common needs, interests, and concerns of childhood and youth.

### Elements for Success

A few important factors must be present if a general-education program is to realize some of the claims that are made for it.

*Teachers who work in general education must be willing to study the nature and*

*needs of pupils.* Progress in the development of such a program will be made mainly by teachers “on the job” working cooperatively toward better teaching. In addition to becoming acquainted with growth and development of children, teachers must be imaginative in seeing how to apply this knowledge to classroom procedures.

*The life concerns of pupils should have a central place in the curriculum.* Such subject fields as arithmetic, music, spelling, history, and English have importance, in the main, as they contribute to the solutions of problems relating to the common concerns and interests of the pupils.

*Unified learning experiences for pupils should be provided for all or part of the school day.* Having one teacher with the same group of pupils throughout the school day provides the best arrangement for helping the learner to see relationships and to grasp the meanings of his various school experiences. However, this is true only to the degree that the teacher is competent to direct learning experiences which are based upon the *real* concerns of pupils. In many school situations several teachers may have the same group of pupils throughout the school day. It is possible and desirable for these teachers to meet periodically to plan most of their work around a central or dominant interest which is being studied by the group of pupils.

*Functional guidance should play a prominent part in the program.* Guidance, to be most effective, must be centered with the classroom teacher, who, of all educational workers, knows the pupils best. Provisions must be made for teachers to become well-acquainted with pupils. This means that teachers must have relatively fewer pupils per day, must remain with them for longer periods each day, and must have teacher-learner relationships with these same children over an extended period of time—for two or three years if possible.

*Flexibility of the curriculum is extremely important.* There can be no static, printed courses of study for use in schools in a world in which the interests of children are changing so rapidly. Wartime activities of school children have helped us to understand how important needs and interests may be utilized in the program of the school. Post-war conditions are generating even more problems which impinge upon the lives of

children of school age. The schools need further to learn how to utilize these immediate concerns and interests of pupils, and at the same time achieve the goals of education which society is demanding.

*Continuous evaluation of pupils' progress toward commonly accepted goals is fundamentally important.* It is possible for teachers and pupils cooperatively to set specific goals to be achieved within a given period of time. An evaluation of the degree to which chosen goals have been achieved will be a check upon the teaching as well as upon the learning process. Desirable goals or objectives of modern education are expressed in terms of pupil behavior. When realized, they become the "warp and woof" of the individual's living and control his conduct of thinking, acting, and feeling. An excellent statement of objectives for modern education, along with means of evaluating growth in these objectives, is well described by Wrightstone in the February, 1946, issue of *The National Elementary Principal*. The list which he proposes is as follows: functional information, work-study skills, attitudes, interests, critical thinking, and personal-social adaptability. This list is practical in that it has only six items which can be recalled and used and is sufficiently broad in scope to include total behavior. This list is practically the same as others which have evolved from cooperative national studies within the last several years.

Teachers and pupils together may determine ways to evaluate growths toward objectives which have been agreed upon. Participation of pupils on all grade levels in goal setting and goal checking has proved to be a powerful motivating force in improving the quality of learning and teaching in public education.

#### **Administration Must Pave the Way**

The major purpose of school administration should be to clear the way for educational procedures to flourish which have been agreed upon cooperatively. The following chart has been designed to indicate the portions of time which might be given to an individual's general education in a typical school system as he progresses from the nur-

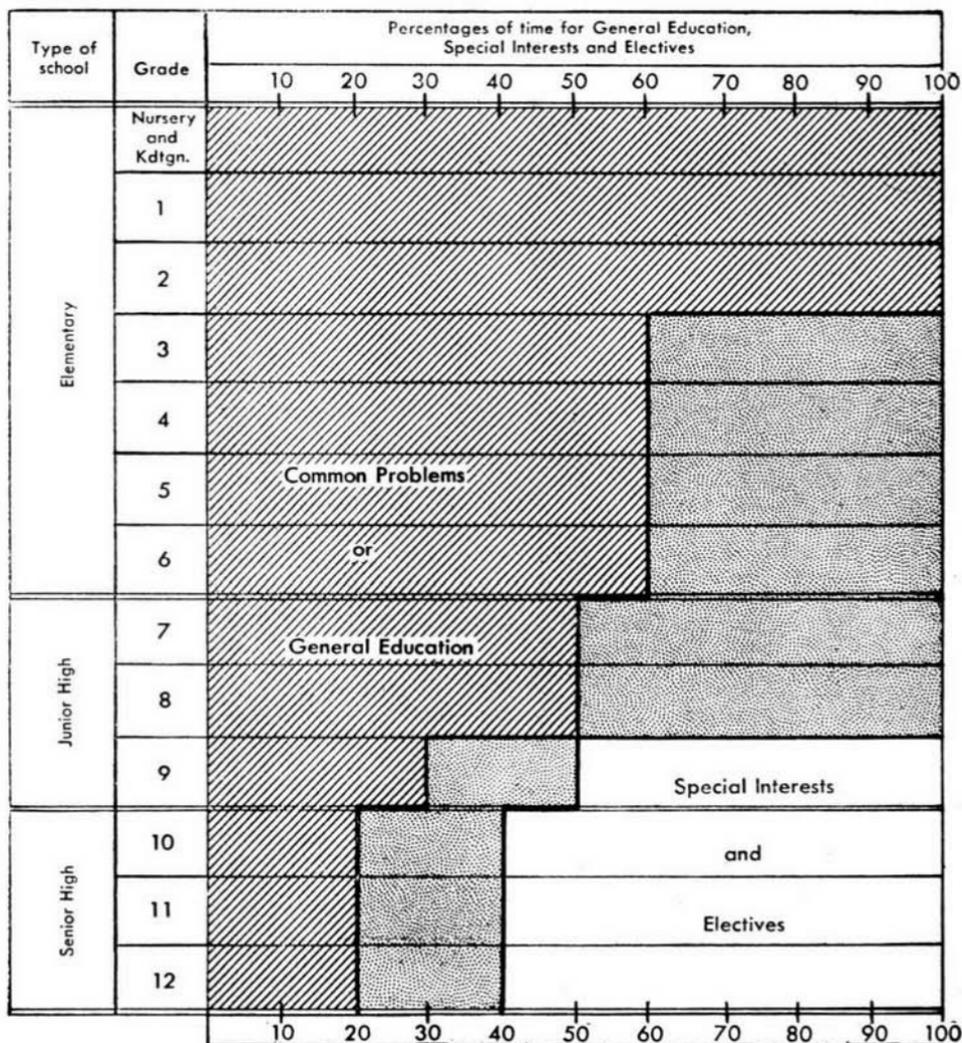
sery-kindergarten level through the following twelve years of public education. From the chart one can see at a glance that this writer believes that practically one hundred per cent of the program of the elementary school and grades seven and eight should be of a general-education nature. Approximately fifty per cent of the ninth-grade program should deal with common problems of youth and from twenty to forty per cent of the senior high school program should be based upon common needs, interests, and concerns of high-school youth.

The elementary school as it exists today should examine the validity of its departmentalized program, the junior high school should question the provision for so many specialized offerings and electives, and the senior high school should not only do all of these, but should also study the reasons why so many youth drop out of school. The extension of a vital, well-planned, general-education program as indicated in the chart should enable schools to interest and challenge youth in a manner which has not been accomplished with traditional programs and offerings.

#### **Public Education Must Face the Future**

Public education in the future must meet a present-day challenge of the public, namely, that the schools must educate for an enduring peace. This means that we cannot use the same old methods and keep the same old goals. Education for childhood and youth must be purposive, dynamic, meaningful. The framework for instruction must permit flexibility if the schools are to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. The ends of education remain as always—a well-developed and adjusted individual, but the means of education must be constantly changing. The time is at hand for educators everywhere to give serious thought concerning how to educate childhood and youth for the decade that lies ahead. We should not be content with a program designed for the years past. A twelve-year program of general education gives promise of becoming the best present answer for schools as they seek to provide *a modern program for a modern day.*

## Percentages of Time for General and Special Education in a Twelve-year Program



- Minimum amount of time for general education
- Desirable increase in time for general education
- Time for electives and special interests

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