

School Time—Quantity and Quality—

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If given the chance, youngsters will appraise their way of learning and will, in most instances, give intelligent suggestions for improvement in the method. Margaret Lindsey, associate in curriculum and teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University, N. Y., presents a study of comments made by the children in two typical schools and outlines the resulting observations made by those educators who reviewed these criticisms.

"I NEVER LIKED it and I never will."

"This class was very boring."

"I didn't enjoy it."

These and similar comments were made by fifth and sixth grade children on diaries they kept of their activities in school. How did these children spend their time in school? What kinds of experiences were they having to make them as unhappy and dissatisfied as their comments would indicate?

In another school, children were keeping similar records. Reactions ran as follows:

"It was fun."

"This was what I needed."

"I wanted to learn how to do it."

What were these children doing in school to bring them the pleasure and satisfaction implied in their comments? What would one find were he to accompany these children throughout a day in school?

A study was made recently of these two schools evaluated so frankly by the children attending them.¹ They were among five schools selected for a study of how children actually spend their time in school. The investigator relied on four techniques for gathering data

on the question: (1) children in each of the fifth and sixth grades of the five schools kept records for five days of what they did from the time they entered school until they left in the afternoon; (2) two kinds of observation were used: (a) observers spent full days in classrooms taking running notes of class activities and as many small group and individual activities as possible; (b) at other times observers selected a child at random and made a careful record of his occupations; (3) both children and teachers participated with the investigator in discussions concerning their school program; (4) teachers submitted records of their plans for the days during which children kept records of their activities.

What Are the Needs?

The data collected were analyzed to arrive at possible answers to such questions as:

What patterns of time allotment seem to be typical for the different schools?

How many and what kinds of opportunities for learning are there in broad areas of experience?

Are the school experiences of children interrelated?

Is there a reasonable amount of balance in the program?

How often do children have opportunities to make choices?

Is evaluation an integral part of the program?

¹ Margaret Lindsey, *Children's Records of Their Use of Time in School as a Means of Evaluating the Program of the Elementary School*, Ed. D. Report, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, N. Y., 1946.

What kinds of human relationships exist?

What is the quality of children's experiences in these schools?

Within the limits of this article it will be possible to report only a few of the interesting results obtained. These results will be confined to opportunities for learning and balance in the program in two of the schools studied that presented the most striking contrasts.

A Look at the Two Schools

The first, Smith School, has a program developed under rigid requirements of distribution of time and activities. It is a large elementary school in a city system. Here there are courses of study in each of the content areas. There are other factors which limit teachers and children in opportunities to plan their program together—status people who make demands on them, and inadequacy in materials of high quality. But Smith School is reputed to be a model school in this large city—good physical plant, large play areas, good supply of recent textbooks. An intelligent professional staff works in this school with children of above average socio-economic background.

In the same large city, is another school of outstanding reputation as a model school. Here the program is developed in a framework of freedom for teachers and children to plan cooperatively their use of time in school. Only one factor seems to operate to control program development—a fixed schedule of services of specialists. Even this arrangement is flexible in that each group may choose to use or not to use a specialist at the assigned time. Wilson School also has an intelligent profes-

sional staff working with children of above average socio-economic status.

Children's Accounts Tell the Story

The children's records revealed significant differences in *variety and quality of opportunities for learning* in the two schools. Even within the areas of experience that were common to both schools there were differences in the number and the quality of opportunities afforded children. Some quotations from the records of fifth grade children illustrate kinds of opportunities reported in three such areas:

WILSON SCHOOL

Quantitative Experiences

Took inventory test
Worked in arithmetic workbook
Worked on multiplication of fractions with the teacher
Made a graph
Took mastery test
Made time schedule
Helped measure for a mural
Got my bond selling book checked
Took final test in fractions

The Arts

Worked on my bookends
Helped fix stage for the play
Drew pictures
Played records
Practiced music
Read for fun
Made book cards
Took part in a play
Made frame for mural
Saw slides
Learned to knit
Played the piano
Learned to crochet
Worked on party decorations
Took flute lesson
Made bulletin board letters
Worked with clay
Sang songs
Painted shelves
Finger painted
Wrote a story
Wrote a poem
Made a silhouette
Danced

Physical Activities

Went to nurse's office
Rode bike
Rode wagon
Played football
Played tagball
Played soccer
Played prison ball
Played bombardment
Played catch
Played volley ball
Played kickball
Played chess
Played checkers
Ran relays
Rested
Was referee
Was captain
Was leader
Cleaned desk
Played in the park
Took a walk
Danced

SMITH SCHOOL

Quantitative Experiences

Diagnostic arithmetic test
Worked in workbook
Made up problems from the newspaper
Took weekly test
Flash cards

The Arts

Studied a song, *The Cloud*
Learned first stanza of *Robinson Crusoe*
Started learning a poem
Glee Club
Started cartoons for the paper
Painted a picture
Finished a slide
Worked on illustrations for diary

Physical Activities

Delivered milk
Was on the clean-up squad
Virginia Reel

Not only were the children in Wilson School having a greater variety of opportunities in the three areas reported on in the records quoted; they were likewise having experiences of higher quality. No child reported all of the number experiences listed. Rather it was obvious that individuals were pursuing

a course laid out cooperatively with the teacher—a course to meet their own individual needs. Quite the opposite was true in Smith School, where every child in the group reported having done the same thing at the same time.

The same contrast was true in the arts and in physical activities. All the children in the group at Smith School carried on the same activities. They did not have the opportunity afforded the Wilson children for individual choice and exercise of creative powers. Their chances for recreation were extremely limited. With the increased amount of leisure time in our society it seems important that children have opportunity to experience a wide variety of activities which might be pursued in leisure time.

The Contrast Continues

Some important areas of experience were almost completely disregarded in the program at Smith School. For example, only very limited opportunity was offered in such activities as *cooperative planning, in making choices, and in evaluating*. Children reported once having had a discussion about "should we have units?" and if so, "what should we do with the twelve children who accomplish nothing during unit period?" They recorded also having "helped to plan the agenda." Observation showed this to mean a mere acquiescence to the teacher's plan with an occasional suggestion from the children for distribution of time among the listed items. Evaluation, where referred to, was in terms of the teacher's evaluation of children's work, usually in terms of numerical grades.

In contrast, the records from Wilson

School showed that the children there participated regularly in cooperative planning and evaluating, and that they had many chances to make choices. Some typical examples from Wilson School will illustrate the kinds of experiences children had in these three areas.

cooperative planning

- They discussed what were desirable activities for free work periods and finally set up standards for those periods.
- They talked about the values of visiting other groups in their school and planned a number of such visits.
- They discussed what they needed to put in their program for the day and then planned that program.
- A committee studied the situation in the art room and presented a report to the group. The group discussed the report and made plans for improving the situation.
- A committee on movies reviewed possible pictures relating to the work of the class and then reported on these. The class discussed possibilities and selected two movies to see.
- Individuals discussed their own creative writing with the teacher. They made plans together to clear up matters pertaining to grammar. They constructed a spelling list and made plans for mastering that list.
- There was to be a party. The nature of the party was planned by the whole group. Smaller groups took responsibility for the entertainment, decorations, and refreshments.

evaluating

- "We evaluated what we had done for the last few weeks and planned our work for next week."
- "We evaluated our excursion and set up things we need to remember for the next trip."
- "I told what I liked about the play."
- "We (teacher and child) evaluated how much and how well I read."

making choices

During a free-work period the records of the fifth grade group showed the following activities. The list of activities in this period illustrates only one of the many kinds of opportunities afforded this group to make choices.

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Number of children reporting</i>
Read a book in the library	5
Worked on decorations for a party	4
Play practice	3
Worked with "water supply" committee in library	3
Tried to find something about "parks" for my report	1
Made a mask	2
Worked on our map	3
Did arithmetic	2
Worked on a written report on "subways"	1
Talked with the teacher about our class meeting	1

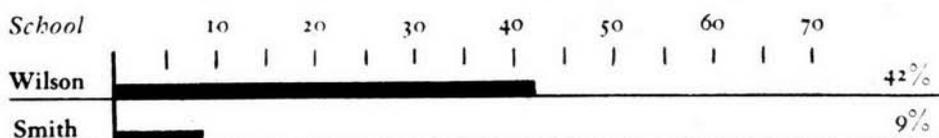
What About Balance?

A study of the percentage of time devoted to various activities in Wilson School revealed three kinds of balance present in their program: (1) balance among verbal, manipulative, and physical activities; (2) balance between active and passive occupations; and (3) balance among individual, small group, and class activities.

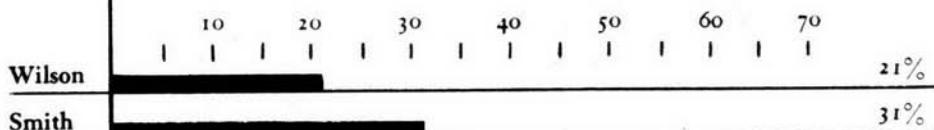
Verbal, Manipulative, and Physical Activities. The two graphs opposite show the relative emphasis on these three areas in Wilson and Smith Schools. The children in Wilson School spent fifty-seven per cent of their time in experiences involving verbal learning such as reading and writing. Children in Smith School spent seventy per cent of

A. ACTIVITY PERCENTAGES

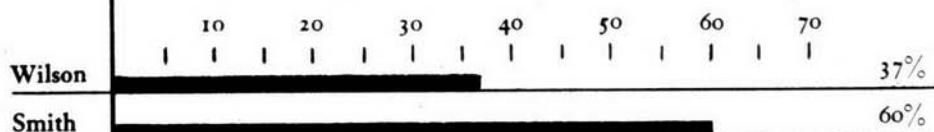
Per cent of total time devoted to individual activities



Per cent of total time devoted to small group activities

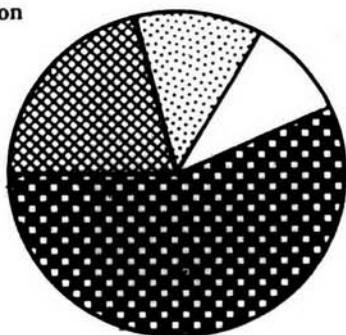


Per cent of total time devoted to class activities

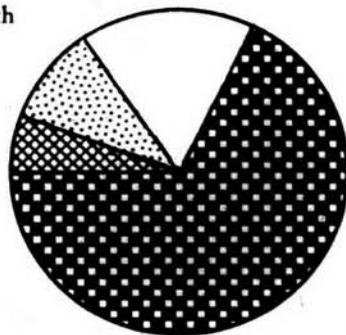


B. LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Wilson



Smith



Key Verbal learning
 Physical needs

Manipulative experiences
 All others

their time on such activities. Naturally the latter situation made it impossible to give adequate attention to meeting other needs of children. For example, only five per cent of the total time spent in school by the children was devoted to

meeting their physical needs, while twenty per cent was devoted to this purpose in Wilson.

Active and Passive Occupations. If the physical needs of children are to be provided for properly, children must

Balance Between Active and Passive Occupations
Class Program for One Day — Wilson School

<i>Hour</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Passive</i>	<i>Active</i>
9:00	Discussion and Planning		
10:00	Recess		
10:30	Milk and cracker		
10:40	Arithmetic		
11:45	Language arts		
12:30	Lunch		
1:00	Free Activities		
2:00	Play		
3:00	Work period		

have a rhythm of active and passive occupations. A typical day with the children in Wilson School illustrates a program with a rather desirable balance between active and passive occupations.

The above chart was constructed on the basis of observation. The vertical bars indicate the relative amount of physical activity involved in the different parts of the day's program.

The daily program in the Smith School presents a picture of imbalance in the direction of passive occupations. A large number of the children sat in their seats all day with the exception of lunch, and an occasional drill such as Simple Simon.

Individual, Small Group, and Class Activities. Still another kind of balance essential to a good program for children is achieved through providing op-

portunities to work alone, in small groups, and with the total class at different times during the day. The activity graph at the top of page 155 shows the percentage of total time in school during one week devoted to these three kinds of activities in both Wilson and Smith Schools.

American schools differ widely in the number and kinds of opportunities for learning they offer children. Those interested in developing better programs in our schools must continuously examine present programs as a basis for improving them. This study illustrates one way in which school offerings may be analyzed. If a school faculty were to use similar techniques as a basis for study of their children's curriculum, they might well discover the need for some rather important changes.

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