

# How About the Junior High School?

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The establishment of the junior high school in the American system of education presupposes specific needs of youth in these schools. However, too often, administration of the junior high schools has negated the meeting of these needs. The authors, Robert C. Hammock, associate professor of curriculum and instruction and assistant to the dean, Division of Extension, University of Texas, Austin; and T. P. Baker, principal, Senior High School, Austin, point up the concept of grouping which will lead to the attainment of more effective learning in the junior high school.

THROUGH THE YEARS, many junior high schools have gradually forgotten some of their chief reasons for existence. In such schools, preparation for the senior high school crowds out recognition of the fact that for many pupils the junior high school is the end of formal schooling. Such schools devote so much attention to the academic curriculum that only a little time, nearly always "extracurricular," is left for activities in which citizenship, personality, and social consciousness are directly developed. In such schools, the lower grades are organized and taught as though they were still parts of the elementary school, while the upper grades become actual parts of the senior high school; the relentless pressure of college entrance requirements is still strong. This pressure is so strong in one area that even though at least one college catalogue states that students will be accepted with twelve credits of senior high school work, when such a transcript is presented, it will not be accepted. The organization may be 6-3-3 or some other triple arrangement, but concepts are still 8-4 in these schools.

Important among the factors leading to the creation of the junior high school was the desire to group together children of the "middle years" so that their

particular needs might best be met. They were grouped together because they are changing so rapidly that their characteristics and needs require particular study and attention. It was in this school that these children, neither elementary nor senior high school pupils, were to receive "junior high school" education.

The scene is set for any number of approaches toward a solution to the problem of attempting to vivify the concept of the "real" junior high school. No panacea is offered here. The problem can be solved only through a concert of points of view of psychology, curriculum, teaching, methods, philosophy, supervision, and administration. This article is concerned with grouping as it may contribute to the ends of education in the junior high school. These may be thought of in these categories, not mutually exclusive: (1) the aims of the junior high school everywhere in America as a part of the total elementary and secondary curriculum, (2) the aims of the one junior high school in its community, and (3) the aims of education as they apply to one particular pupil at one particular time.

The junior high school itself is a result of grouping. All these children are about to pass, are passing, or have just

passed through the door which leads from childhood into adolescence. Because they are alike in this way, they have been put into a school for folk of their ages. This likeness, however, is a fiction: the most striking likeness among them is that they are highly unlike. They are unlike in a score, a hundred, a thousand different ways cast together into a bewildering multitude of combinations. Putting them together in a separate school is only the beginning of the effort to group children for achieving the ends of education.

The school is then divided into grades with academic attainment the usual determining factor in the rate of progress. Homerooms may also be established, usually with children of the same grade.

Grouping is carried this far in almost every school. It is at this point that the pupils themselves take over this matter of grouping. Inside and outside the school they get together in groups and cliques based upon all the factors so far overlooked by the school—social standing, degree of physical maturity, neighborhood, race, sex, degree of emotional maturity, economic background, special interests, and scores of others. Group membership is fluid, dependent to a great degree upon the changes which occur in the children themselves. The rapidly changing junior high school pupil moves from one group to another, always fitting in because of his fluidity of movement as his personality and frame develop. Not only does he move from group to group but also he is a member of several groups at the same time. Some of the groups serve education well; some perform a disservice.

The first grouping administratively accomplished within a grade has usually

been on the basis of intelligence as measured either by tests or by the quality of academic progress. This is the familiar "homogeneous" grouping, which by many has been found wanting. It groups on one basis, intelligence, and only heightens other differences among children. It bears little relation to the large aim of the junior high school in developing citizens who are socially adjusted. Aid in achieving this large aim is our concern here.

Academic instruction is an important concern of any school, but it is also of transcendent importance that children learn the ways of successful group living. Given adequate academic knowledge, an individual usually succeeds in life in proportion to the *degree* of his success in his relations with others. *We are concerned, then, with getting every child into the groups in which he can learn best the things that he is to learn.*

This concept of grouping to improve the development of the pupil in junior high school calls for many groups, and for each child to be in many groups. It is a concept which can easily be defeated by the difficulties in administering a program in which a pupil belongs to many groups formed on many bases and moves from one group to another frequently and at odd times throughout the year. These difficulties of administering a completely flexible program designed to contribute to the total aims of education probably are the reasons that the concept of the junior high school has been achieved too seldom. Administrators of junior high schools could perform few greater services than to show how a school can be managed so that administrative convenience or "necessity" does not con-

flict with the fundamental purposes of the junior high school.

#### WHAT ARE THE GUIDES?

In setting up the following criteria for grouping in a junior high school, it is presupposed that there will be many kinds of groups formed on many bases to meet the complex needs of junior high school pupils. The overall aims of education underlie these criteria; well-adjusted personalities as well as adequate acquisition of the cultural heritage are aimed at. The demands of modern group living are the sources of these criteria.

*Grouping is directed by the ends of education.* Adherence to this criterion implies that pupils will be placed in groups because the purposes of the school will consequently be served best. It further implies that the purposes of the activity constitute the basis for the grouping. Pupils are placed in a group because it is felt that factors militating against their development will be reduced to a minimum by the grouping chosen. The second criterion grows naturally from the first.

*Grouping is based upon the characteristics which are important in the activity in progress.* To group students on one basis and to leave that grouping in effect throughout all activities of the day is administratively convenient but could never be assumed to be educationally sound. If pupils of like general intelligence are put together in a physical education class, the fallacy inherent in the disregard of this criterion immediately becomes strikingly clear. *The fallacy is present but less openly evident* when children of like intelligence but wide divergence in social maturity

or adjustment are put together in a class in English or social studies.

What characteristics of children are basic in physical education activities? Physical maturity, social maturity, size, and general health are four outstanding ones. Group children accordingly. What characteristics are basic in activities in an English class? Size, physical maturity, and general health, except as they appear in their extreme manifestations or in certain poorly adjusted individuals, are of minor concern. Knowledge of the mechanics of the English language, ability to read, emotional maturity, general intelligence are some of the factors basic to success in a class in English. What characteristics of children are important in social activities? In homerooms? In mathematics? The answers are easily found in a study of the activities themselves in the light of their purposes.

The implication is clear that there will be many groups and that each pupil will be a member of several different groups each day; his group membership is not static. Criterion three follows logically.

*Grouping may be easily changed, and is often changed.* The junior high school pupil is in a period of rapid change in a multitude of ways. To even an observant teacher, he may appear to have changed so rapidly that he is a completely different person one morning from the individual that he was the afternoon before. Of course, penetrating study of a child will prepare his teachers for characteristics which appear as he develops. For our consideration here, the important fact is that grouping based on factors in the child as they relate to factors inherent in the

activities of the group must be flexible to be honest. With rapidly changing characteristics in the junior high school pupil, changes in group membership must be easy to make if the ends of education are to be kept reasonably attainable.

Practical agreement with this point of view does not mean that the pupil is moved from one group to another so frequently that he has no feeling of belonging, that he feels a dangling individual. It means that, with all pertinent factors considered, *he will be shifted to a group of his peers when it is apparent that he will progress better and that perhaps his group will do better if he is moved to another. It means that he will not be compelled to wait till the end of the semester to be moved when it is clear that he has developed qualities or abilities which will cause him likely to do better in another group.*

This criterion of flexibility applies also to the pupil who has been placed with a group of "slow" individuals for, let us call it, rehabilitation. When recovery is well advanced and it seems that he will do better in a "normal" group or that the "slow" group will do better without him, it should be possible for him to be shifted immediately. *Administrative convenience must not take precedence over clear needs.*

*Grouping naturally effected by pupils should not be changed unless it interferes with the ends of education.* The natural predilection of the junior high school pupil to "gangs" needs no pointing out to teachers of the middle grades. Grouping for regular class instruction usually is not effected by the

pupils themselves; but in much of the "extracurricular" program the children's own grouping has much in it that is good. For example, boys usually get together in sensible groups for sports.

Much of the grouping naturally effected by adolescents not only fails to serve the ends of education but also defeats much of the good attempted in groups set up by the school. The cliques based on social position of parents, on antagonism toward minority groups, on exhibition of prowess through destruction of property—all these are of the same kidney and call for tactful attack relentlessly sustained. The fraternity, sorority, or any group with self-perpetuating membership has no place in American high schools devoted to protecting democracy through helping to develop citizens worthy of and capable of democratic government. Such groups not only fail to serve the ends of education in their philosophies and activities but also destroy much that is good in the regularly constituted groups of the school.

No worse in philosophy than the social, self-perpetuating groups were two groups of recent occurrence in two different schools: in a senior high school a Convertible Club was formed of pupils who owned convertible automobiles; in a junior high school there was a club with a fearsome name and with this requirement for membership—the applicant had to tear a seat from the floor in a city bus.

Snobbishness and destruction are equally undemocratic, antagonistic to the purposes of education, and wholly without justification. Schools are inherently dedicated to the production of good citizens.

*Grouping demands much data on pupils, but data should never get in the way of common sense.* Always to have every pupil in the group where optimum results can occur obliges teaching personnel to know as much as they can discover about him. A sound testing program, including data-gathering instruments applied at irregular times for special purposes, is presupposed in a flexible grouping plan.

Education is the better for having adopted scientific procedures, such as testing; but the teacher must always remember that teaching is still an art. So long as we deal with human beings, science alone cannot reveal them. It will never be possible to study even complete records on a boy and pronounce for his good without knowing the boy firsthand. Common sense must always temper recorded data, and a large component of the common sense referred to is contact knowledge of the pupil as a living individual. It is better for teachers to devote much time to the study of their individual pupils than to be overwhelmed with great numbers of tests whose results are of doubtful value and too seldom used.

*Materials are constantly being developed to fit the purposes of the junior high school and to fit the interests, abilities, and ambitions of junior high school pupils.* When pupils are put into groups for instructional purposes, it is mandatory that what happens to them in these groups be affected fundamentally. The materials used in one group are not always those which will do the job in another. Supplied with data about his pupils, the teacher is under compulsion of honesty to provide materials which will be adapted to his group of pupils.

The textbook is only the beginning. Sometimes it does not fit a group at all. Whether it does or not, the teacher must be ever alert to find and create good instructional materials and to stimulate his pupils to aid in the development of such materials. The differences among materials used in various groups are not always those of quantity or difficulty; they are perhaps more often differences in approach, content, quality.

The teacher who squarely meets his obligations to fit materials to his group's interests, abilities, and ambitions is a very busy person. His time is well spent.

*Especially designed activities are provided to develop non-academic qualities which are the special need of junior high school pupils.* In classes as well as in other activities of the junior high school there is much more to be accomplished than the transmission of the cultural heritage and the learning of so-called fundamental skills. The junior high school pupil has already been described as an individual who is changing rapidly. As such, he is dynamic in the true sense of the word. In addition he is frequently bewildered and, as frequently, bombastic and antisocial. There are many things that he needs to know, most of which he wants to know. These questions concern himself, his relations with others, his social behavior, his ethics and philosophy, his future—a thousand things. To insure his being a worthwhile citizen and a well-adjusted personality is as much a prime end of education as is to insure his being literate and able to do arithmetic. As well as materials, activities must be designed to develop the qualities of personality and citizenship that are especially needed by the junior high

school pupil. Examples of this kind of activity found frequently are hobby clubs, assemblies, student councils, music activities, athletics, and the like.

*Traditionalism in grade placement of materials consistently yields to the developing character of the junior high school pupil.* Let anyone look at the pupils in any eighth grade, or seventh grade, or ninth grade. Let him compare them as to size and other obvious evidences of physical maturity. The wide differences are so well known and have been pointed out so often that there is no need to dwell upon them. How many more differences in social and emotional development, for example, are not evident?

The idea that there is a certain body of content in each subject that belongs in each grade is blessedly losing its hold. If we are to group pupils because we recognize that, because of differences in development, some of them need to do different things from what others do, then we can hardly maintain a stand that such and such subject matter *belongs* in a certain grade for everyone in that grade. Inflexible grade placement of subject matter must yield to the idea that a pupil will study subject matter when he is ready to study it, when he needs to study it, and in the group where his studying it will result in optimum gain on his part.

*Low intelligence groups are maintained in which academic work is set at a challenging but not bewildering level, and in which aims of developing citizenship and personality receive heightened emphasis.* Grouping as discussed in this article means much more than classification of pupils for academic instruction. That is evident. Little or nothing has

been said so far about ordinary ability grouping, except to point out that intelligence grouping maintained for *all* activities of the curriculum is *inadequate*. No departure is made from that point of view when it is suggested that low intelligence groups be formed for academic instruction.

A pupil may excel at a non-academic activity and be hard pressed to keep from drowning in an academic class. To be trite, it is better for him to acquire a little mathematics, a little reading ability, a little of the effective use of English, a little science, a little geography than for him to be able to learn none of these things. Always bewildered in a group that "runs away from him," he learns little except that he does not fit in and that society is to be fought.

Special groups can be set up for pupils of low intelligence to learn academic parts of the curriculum as well as they can and at the same time these students may be in other groups for other parts of the curriculum. In at least one junior high school such a program is in the making this year. On account of age, pupils have been brought into this school from elementary schools in the system and have been grouped for academic instruction. They are in other groups for other activities.

Advocated here is only an application of the general thesis: when optimum learning demands a certain grouping, provide it. Criterion ten follows naturally and requires no comment.

*High intelligence groups are maintained for certain academic parts of the curriculum as well as for other activities.*

The two types of groupings immediately preceding are insufficient in a program whose purpose is to provide

fully for junior high school pupils those experiences which will best aid them in their development. An organization posited on a philosophy implied by the idea that they are sufficient would be a negation of this entire discussion. And so the final criterion must accompany them and, in a measure, sums up the entire discussion.

*Pupils are grouped on bases other than intelligence for other activities (social and physical), since leaders and followers must associate with each other to develop best the qualities of satisfactory leading and satisfactory following.*

#### WHO WILL CONTINUE THE JOB?

There is nothing new in these eleven criteria of a program of grouping in junior high school; no one knows that better than the writers. In fact, the ideas contained here could have been set down thirty-five years ago when the junior high school was beginning to stand alone but was still found only here and there. This article is frankly a plea for a return to the fundamentals of the urgency which made the idea of the junior high school catch on throughout the country. In this school pupils were to be treated as individuals, were to be provided with those experiences which folk like them needed, were to be handled neither like elementary school children nor like high school children. Emphasis must be returned to the individual pupil and his group relationships. Not college entrance requirements nor demands of the senior high school nor administrative convenience nor lack of specific training of teachers for junior high school education must

continue to bar the way to achievement of the "real" junior high school.

The suggestions given here for grouping are difficult for the administrator, who must make schedules, use the school plant which he has, and utilize the faculty of his school to best advantage. Some of them appear impossible. If they are worth doing, they are worth trying to do, even though they seem impossible. Somewhere there must be a junior high school principal who has worked out or who will work out a fully flexible program which permits environmental adjustments for the good of his pupils. He will write the article which should accompany this one and which will answer the question: "How can you do these things?"

Someone else, versed in the intricacies of testing and guidance, will write the article which tells how to organize a data-gathering program, sets down criteria for its formulation, indicates how to administer the program, and suggests ways to see that teachers use the data well.

And a third person will accept the challenge provided by the fact that most teachers in junior high school learn how to teach in junior high school only by teaching in junior high school. This person will write the third necessary accompaniment for this article—a clear discussion of the ways in which the principal can provide leadership in a program designed to develop his teachers in service.

Grouping of pupils is one large way by which junior high schools can do what they originally set out to do. It is imperative in a school which wants to develop contributing citizens as well as potential college freshmen.

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