

of the local newspapers has gone out of its way editorially to discredit the McKinley program. Others have criticized the program on the ground that it has neglected "the fundamentals." Here again standardized tests in reading comprehension, English usage, mathematics, and in certain other areas, have indicated that, on the whole, our students have continued to make normal progress through the high school years.

But the interesting thing about these criticisms is that *no one has found fault with our program because it is not do-*

*ing a good job of helping our young people to learn about and to practice democracy.* As the McKinley program stands today no one associated with it claims that it is perfect. There are many problems that continue to challenge our study. We are especially concerned over the problem of understanding and managing the psychological aspect of human relations. But I believe we are in agreement that we are to go forward creatively, cooperatively, using our best intelligence and the results of research elsewhere in the progressive improvement of our program.

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## Unity in Planning

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ARNO A. BELLACK

**That there are many stumbling blocks in the way of planning a program of education which will be unified is pointed out by Arno A. Bellack, junior high school teacher, Tenafly, N. J. in this article describing many of his school's experiences in trying to effect this change. Mr. Bellack does suggest, however, some methods of approach which should be good guideposts toward increased improvement and understanding of the modern curriculum.**

IN HIGH SCHOOLS today there are almost as many varieties of the "core curriculum" as there are Heinz's products. Educators will usually agree that the "core" of a school program should consist of a large block of time during which one or more teachers plan with a single group of students "common learnings" considered necessary for desirable growth at their particular age level. But there similarities stop. Differ-

ences are evident in *ways* of developing the program and in the *kind* of experiences finally selected.

This article describes the approach used by a group of teachers of seventh and eighth grade students in Tenafly High School, a six-year secondary school. We hope that a description of our experiences will help other teachers who are planning a similar program to anticipate some of the difficulties which

arise in a change from a traditional departmental curriculum to one which is unified in its organization.

#### **Farewell to the Checkerboard Pattern**

A system-wide survey of the Tenafly schools in 1944-45 by a survey staff of Teachers College, Columbia University, pointed out that the instructional program as then organized in the seventh and eighth grades was not meeting adequately the educational and personal needs of early adolescent boys and girls. For example, each group of students changed classes thirty-five times each week with a different sequence of studies practically every day. Each group had eight different teachers. Obviously such a checkerboard program lacked unity and provided little time for guidance of individual students.

Acting on the recommendations of the survey, the administrative officers and faculty decided to organize a unified course which would serve as a core around which the other school activities could be planned. Some preliminary arrangements were completed during 1945-46, but it was recognized that the major share of the planning would have to be undertaken during the following year because of expected turnover in personnel.

Certain administrative aspects of the program had to be worked out before the opening of school in September, 1946. The two hundred and twenty-one students registered in the seventh and eighth grades were divided into eight core groups. Assignment to the classes was made on an alphabetical basis in accordance with school policy which does not favor any kind of

homogeneous grouping. The weekly schedule provided twelve periods of fifty minutes each for the seventh grade and ten periods for the eighth grade. On the students' records the course was to carry credit for English and social studies. Four teachers were given responsibility for this course, with each teacher assigned two core groups.

#### **Time Out for Teacher-Planning**

With the administrative organization completed, actual planning of the instructional program began with the opening of school last September. The schedules of the core teachers provided time for staff meetings during the regular school day. These meetings, scheduled for Thursday of each week, are also attended by the special teachers and the coordinators of curriculum and guidance.

These regular staff meetings have proved invaluable in planning and developing the course. Generally the first half of the meeting is devoted to exchange of ideas and sharing of information about individual pupils or groups of students. The remainder of the meeting consists of discussion of particular units, problems of teacher-pupil planning, selection of materials, use of the library, or arrangements for field trips. Here the special teachers have an opportunity to become acquainted with the areas of study and can plan ways of contributing to the core work.

The first few meetings in September were devoted to a consideration of the over-all instructional aspects of the program. There was general agreement concerning the purposes and responsibilities of the course:

- (1) This is a basic course in the school's program of general education and is therefore required of all students.
- (2) Learning experiences are to be selected which will aid in the personal and social development necessary for effective citizenship in our democratic society.
- (3) Specific content of the learning experiences will be determined by the teacher and students. However, it is suggested that "America in Which We Live" serve as the general theme for three semesters and "Living in One World" for one semester.<sup>1</sup>
- (4) Pupils will share in setting goals, planning activities, and evaluating progress.
- (5) This course will have major responsibility for the development of the communication skills.
- (6) The core teachers have responsibility for the individual and group guidance of the students in the core classes.

### No Two Groups Take the Same Road

With agreement reached as to the general framework within which the core groups were to function, each class selected problem areas of common concern and planned units of study. One group began with a heated discussion of a newspaper article which reported the landing of a ship from Europe with refugees aboard. This led to a discussion of the various racial and national groups in the United States. Students were concerned about the position of the Negro in the South and

<sup>1</sup> This very broad framework was selected after consideration of the content of the Social Studies courses in the elementary grades and in grade nine, and after examination of the materials which would be available for this year.

the treatment of Japanese-Americans in internment camps during the war.

Another group got started by talking about religious beliefs. Each student prepared a list of questions he wished to have answered concerning the doctrines or practices of various denominations. Students belonging to the various religious groups took responsibility for answering the questions. These interests and concerns opened up the area of intergroup relations.

A third class chose an entirely different approach. An examination of the Westward Movement in American history was their area of study.

Concern with what they considered were inadequate recreational facilities in their own community was the point of departure for a fourth group. Soon they were deep in a study of recreational opportunities for all youth.

### Dark Spots in the Picture

In the course of transition from one type of program to another, difficulties almost invariably arise. And so they did in Tenafly. Change did not come as if by magic and without accompanying problems.

There was waste of time and misunderstanding on the part of some students who, because of previous school experiences, preferred a specific textbook assignment rather than reference work in a variety of sources. Teachers soon realized that close guidance would be necessary until students felt secure in the new kind of activity. One teacher worked out a record sheet with his class on which each student keeps a careful record of all his activities in carrying out a particular aspect of the work. This form was mimeographed

and is now used in several of the classes. Students have found that the forms help them clarify their particular responsibilities in relation to the work of the entire group.

Students were not slow in discovering that the resources of the school library were limited and that adequate materials for reference were not always available. This difficulty was partially overcome by the resourcefulness of the school librarian who helped students locate a variety of materials in current periodicals and pamphlets. In addition, students were encouraged to write letters to various agencies and companies in order to secure information.

And again, because of the inexperience of the students in organizing materials from a variety of sources, many of the early reports were superficial in nature. Here, too, the teachers recognized the need for careful guidance, and as the school year has progressed, considerable improvement on the part of many students has been observed.

As an aid to teachers in improving their techniques in cooperative pupil-teacher planning, a bulletin was prepared by the coordinator of instruction. This bulletin explained a variety of techniques that could be used effectively in teacher-pupil planning, helpful suggestions for directing group discussions and committee work, and various methods which could be employed in presenting reports.

#### **Communication Skills Are Not Forgotten**

A functional approach is followed in teaching the communication skills. Attention is given to clarity of expression, coherence, and sentence structure

in connection with all written work and oral reports. Writing for information, interviewing, and dramatization present excellent opportunities for developing competence in the communication skills. In some core classes special emphasis is being placed on creative writing with opportunities for writing short stories, poetry, and radio skits.

Time is also provided for group and individual reading. Students are aided in the selection of books, and an attempt is made to help them widen their horizons by choosing books on a variety of subjects.

Spelling words are taken from the writings of the students. Drill and practice in spelling and sentence structure are provided according to individual needs. Standard tests were given early in the school year to discover the language difficulties of individual students.

In all phases of the work much attention is given to the use of the library facilities. At the present time the librarian, teachers, and students are making selections of books for next year.

#### **Guidance Is a Major Task**

In Tenafly High School the guidance function is centered in the homerooms. The core teachers act as homeroom teachers for the seventh grade groups and share responsibility for guidance with the eighth grade homeroom teachers. Time is set aside in the schedule of the core classes for homeroom meetings, and each group is organized with its own officers. Considerable time has been spent during the past few weeks in helping the eighth grade students select their ninth grade courses for next fall.

Several teachers have used the *Problem Check List*<sup>2</sup> with their groups and have found it very valuable in identifying student needs and interests. The long period of time which the core teachers spend with their classes during the day gives them an excellent opportunity to become well acquainted with their students and to help them with individual problems.

### Enter the Parent

Early in the school year the teachers saw the need for keeping parents informed of the purposes and progress of the new program. Only if they knew and understood the program in which their children were participating could it truly move forward. Therefore, varied contacts were made with the parents and the community.

After the first marking period in October, letters were sent to parents inviting them to conferences with the core teachers. A large number of parents responded, and teachers held individual conferences almost every day after school for several weeks. The conferences proved rewarding and did much to clarify the purposes of the course in the minds of the parents.

Parents were also invited to attend two general meetings during the first semester. At these meetings the principal and the coordinators of instruction and guidance described the workings of the program and its advantages over the previous curriculum. Teachers were also present and answered specific questions regarding their work. Several par-

ents were concerned about the neglect of "grammar" and of spelling. Teachers explained the new methods and cited examples of students' progress in writing and speaking. Many favorable comments regarding the worth of these meetings have reached the school.

A special committee of the High School Community Council was formed for the purpose of studying the seventh and eighth grade programs. Core teachers have been invited to attend the committee meetings to describe class activities and discuss problems. The committee, working with two of the teachers, is now at work preparing a report with recommendations for next year's program.

### Planning Has Only Just Begun

At the present time the teachers are preparing a bulletin which will describe the program and will include source units and inventories of materials available in the school and community. Attention is also being given to an appraisal of the techniques now being used in the development of the communication skills; teachers are sharing experiences concerning methods which have proved successful and are making suggestions for new materials. During the remainder of this term, part of each staff meeting is to be set aside for a study of some of the newer methods for helping teachers understand children. The director of guidance will explain the uses of sociograms and sociodrama.

On the basis of our experience this year we would offer the following suggestions to teachers who plan to initiate a similar program:

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<sup>2</sup>Published by the Bureau of Educational Research, Ohio State University.

All teachers or the students in the core groups (both the core teachers and the special teachers) should help in planning the program.

The entire faculty should be regularly informed of the progress and development of the course.

Time should be provided during the regular school day for staff meetings.

Children should be helped to understand the reasons for change. If students are accustomed to day-by-day assignments by the teacher, it takes

time for them to see the values that come from long time planning, group work, and self-appraisal.

Parents should be in on the program from the start and should be helped to understand the purposes of the program. Study groups, individual conferences, visits to classes, participation in selection of materials, assisting in planning trips—these are techniques which might be used to acquaint parents with the core program and its purposes.

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## Workshopping for Growth

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DONALD P. SUMRILL

"Why not try a workshop yourself this summer"? is the question asked by Donald P. Sumrill, principal, Southeastern Junior High School, Battle Creek, Mich., who goes on to provide some answers in his account of a successful workshop. He describes how this project provided new ways and means of learning, but equally important, he stresses the importance of what has actually been done in providing experiences for teacher growth in education.

THE WORKSHOP is not a unique instrument nor an innovation in the in-service training of teachers, but it does present a most interesting method of actually trying to live some of the practices one preaches. To the teacher who has had a wide experience with workshops, this account<sup>1</sup> of the workshop held at St. Mary's Lake, Battle Creek, Michigan, may be an old story, but to the uninitiated it may open avenues for teacher growth possible in almost all school systems. From the formal and informal evaluations of this

workshop, the participants showed clearly that it was one of the most interesting and significant of their educational experiences. With no thought of belittling the formal courses one may pursue in the regular university summer session, they were all agreed that the opportunity to study together informally whatever problem most interested them, to live together with their fellow workers, with no worry of marks, term papers, or set standards was a most worthwhile experience.

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Mrs. Nellie MacDonald and Vivian Beers for their help in editing this account.

### We Find a Spot and Make Our Plans

The idea for the St. Mary's work-

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