

# Front Lines in Education

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## Core Programs in American Secondary Schools

Numerous educational authorities and commissions, such as the Educational Policies Commission and the committee of the John Dewey Society, have urged secondary schools to develop core programs which would comprise at least part of the work in general education or common learnings. A limited number of schools have experimented with the development of such programs in recent years. Several patterns seem to be emerging out of this experimentation.

Perhaps educators will not agree on what constitutes a genuine core program, and a number of things school systems are designating as core programs would not conform to even minimum characteristics for such programs as advocated by leaders in the movement. But common to all definitions of a core program is a statement that such programs should be organized around problems of concern to the youth participating in the program, and that traditional subject matter distinctions should be completely disregarded. This means that in planning learning activities for a core group a problem approach is used. The essential requirement is that pupils' learning experiences be organized around problems which are of concern to them personally in their own growth and development in an environmental situation or around problems arising in the cultural environment that are of significance to the pupils.

The three trends that appear to be emerging in this field are: (a) a group of experimental campus laboratory schools are organizing core programs that extend for two or three hours during the day and which replace separate classes in at least the areas of social studies and Eng-

lish; (b) a number of public junior high schools are also developing core programs which extend for one-third to one-half of the school day during which time a single teacher, with all the members of the staff serving as resource people, assumes responsibility for the entire common learning program of the pupils, except for physical education and possibly certain creative experiences in the arts and for out-of-class learning experiences; (c) a few senior high schools have developed a single-period, personal-social problems course, which is required of all pupils. This course does not constitute a full program of common learnings but, rather, serves to provide the students essential experiences not provided in the formal subjects also required as a part of the program of common learnings. This course does not substitute for English or the traditional social studies courses.

Examples of such core programs will be cited here. This report does not presume to be exhaustive, and the editor will welcome descriptions from other school systems.

**The University School, Ohio State University.** This campus experimental school has developed a core program that extends through the entire secondary school, grades seven to twelve. Three hours are devoted to the core program in the junior high school grades and two hours in the senior high school program. The faculty of the school has done an extensive amount of planning for the core program over the past five years or more, and on the basis of this discussion has blocked out three major areas of living within which it is felt that the more important problems of youth of junior high school age will fall: (a) personal living problems; (b) personal social problems; (c) social, civic, and economic problems. Furthermore, the

faculty, on the basis of other extensive studies of developmental and growth characteristics of children, has defined certain broad areas within which it recommended that core units be developed. For example, in the area of personal living it is recommended that core groups develop a unit on, "Understanding My Body" in the seventh grade.

For the senior high school five major areas have been defined for each grade. An area centering around "School Living" is common to all three grades. This area comprises the individual counseling and guidance work which is carried on by the core teacher. Other areas of work recommended, for example, for the twelfth grade include: "Problems of Producer Consumer Economics," "Implications of Scientific Advancement," "Major Conflicting Ideologies," and "The Bases for Determining Values by Which We Live." Basic plans for the entire core program have been set forth in two very helpful teacher guides which a faculty committee has prepared on the basis of faculty discussion.

**University High School, University of Kansas.** This experimental school has also developed an extended core program which occupies two hours each day in grades nine to twelve. In addition to the core program a pupil may carry two, or with permission, three electives. Provisions for electives are made in the field of home economics, foreign languages, science, mathematics, music, specialized English, commercial work, and arts and crafts. Thus it will be observed that the core is a substitute for all work formerly offered in formal social studies and in basic communication. The core program at the Kansas school is organized around four major areas: "Self Realization," "Human Relationships," "Economic Efficiency," and "Civic Responsibility." The faculty of the school has suggested approximately twenty units which might be developed in each grade in these four areas. Of course, the core teacher and the pupils determine the particular units to be considered and plan the development of

each unit, with the restriction that each class develop two units—"Living and Learning in U. H. S." and "Checking and Improving Fundamentals"—and that at least one unit from each of the four areas be used. The core teacher may utilize the services of other teachers of the staff in the development of various phases of a unit. In addition, an English teacher is a full-time member of the staff and she spends two hours weekly in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade core groups and one hour weekly in the twelfth grade core group. In addition, she works with the core teachers at other times in checking written work, discussing needs of pupils, and in any other way aiding pupils with their English needs.

**Battle Creek, Michigan, Senior High School.** An excellent example of the public school approach to at least one aspect of the core program, namely, providing pupils help on their personal problems, is the course in Battle Creek senior high school, "Basic Living." This program was first offered during the school year of 1947-48, and was the outgrowth of extensive faculty planning based on the recommendations of a workshop group and previous experimentation with problems courses. This course is required of all tenth grade students and is designed primarily to help students with personal problems which confront them as entering students in senior high school. The faculty has recommended five areas within which personal problems are to be considered. These areas are: "Orientation," "Understanding Ourselves and Getting Along With Others," "How Our Body Works," "Nutrition," "Personal and Community Health." Within each unit suggestions are offered in the teacher guide for the development of various problems, but again the teacher and the pupils are urged to work out their problems in their own unique way. This course does not replace any other work in the social studies or English fields, but is intended primarily to provide opportunities for counseling, guiding, and helping students with their personal problems.

**Denver Secondary Schools.** The Denver secondary schools have long experimented with some type of core program or work in problem areas. Their experience in developing core programs during the period of participation in the Eight Year Study is well known. In more recent years the Denver senior high schools have utilized a course in general education as a means of providing pupils opportunities to study personal and social problems and of guiding and counseling the students. The schools vary in the development of this course, but a minimum of two semesters is required in all the schools. Additional work is available in General Education and in one or two of the high schools additional semesters are also required. Considerable emphasis is given in the tenth grade to orientation and guidance of the student, but throughout all semesters of the course students have ample opportunity to work on units which they determine and develop cooperatively with the teacher. The junior high schools have developed a core program which extends for two or more periods of the day and replaces the traditional subjects in the common learning areas.

**Oak Ridge, Tennessee, High School.** The Oak Ridge, Tennessee, high school used a two and one-half period core plan in grades nine and eleven during the school year 1947-48. This year the school is working on plans to extend the core to all grades. In grade nine the core includes the areas of social living, personal living, health, and social responsibility. One teacher handles the entire core group. In grade eleven the core is called unified study. It deals with contemporary problems, and is designed especially to integrate American History and English. Pupils are given one unit of credit in each of these two subjects. Two teachers work cooperatively with the core group in grade eleven.

**Drum Hill Junior High School, Peekskill, New York.** This school has been experimenting with a core class in each of the three grades. The core comprises only

one school period and involves only part of the students in any one grade, since participation is on an elective basis. The core groups pursue varied activities, planned by the teacher and pupils. This program is not a substitute for the more formal course work of the school.

**Required Problems Courses in Secondary Schools.** A number of high schools are adding personal-social problems courses to their curriculum and requiring all students to take such a course. The Lincoln, Nebraska, senior high schools have developed a one-semester problems course which is required of all twelfth grade students. This course covers four areas: "You," "You and Your Family," "You and Your Community," "You and Your World." The broad areas of the course have been determined by the teaching staff, but pupils cooperatively plan the development of individual units. Coffeyville, Kansas, senior high school has added a course in family living to the curriculum which is required of all students. This course deals with the family as an institution, family relationships, family economics and consumer education, conserving family resource, child care and guidance, and home management.

**Minneapolis Studies the Common Learnings Program.** A most helpful guide for teachers in understanding the development of a core program is a bulletin entitled, *A Primer for Common Learnings*, published by the Division of Secondary Education of the Minneapolis public schools. While Minneapolis has not adopted a full fledged core program, this bulletin provides teachers and administrators help in studying and planning for such a program.

#### New Curriculum Publications

Maine State Department of Education—*School Days*. Suggestions for Daily Programs in Maine Elementary Schools. Curriculum Bulletin No. 6. Augusta, Maine: The Department, 1948.

Superior, Wisconsin, Public Schools—*Physical Education*. Kindergarten Level.

Superior, Wisconsin: The Schools, 1948.  
Kentucky State Department of Education  
—*Planning Air-Age Education*. Educational  
Bulletin, Vol. 16, No. 6. Frank-  
fort, Kentucky: The Department, Au-  
gust, 1948.

*Building a Program for the One-Teacher  
School*. Educational Bulletin, Vol. 15,  
No. 6. Frankfort, Kentucky: The De-  
partment, August, 1947.

Oregon State Department of Public In-  
struction—*Science For Oregon Schools,  
Part 1 Elementary and Junior High  
School Grades*. 1948.

*A Guide to the Program of Studies in*

*the High Schools of Oregon*. 1947.  
Salem, Oregon: The Department.

Mississippi State Department of Educa-  
tion—*Handbook for Elementary Teach-  
ers*. Bulletin 124. Jackson, Mississippi:  
The Department, 1947.

Board of Education of the City of New  
York—*Safety in General Science*. A  
Resource Unit for Use in Ninth Grade  
General Science. 1948.

*Extended School Services Through the  
All-Day Neighborhood Schools*. Cur-  
riculum Bulletin, 1947-48 Series, No. 3.  
*School Shop Safety Manual*. 1948. New  
York: The Board.



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