

Organization for Improved Learning

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In this article Paul W. Pinckney, principal of Oakland High School, Oakland, California, discusses some basic implications for the organization of a comprehensive high school. The proposals are not new, Mr. Pinckney suggests. Neither are they within the realm of impossibility for any high school genuinely interested in action to improve its present organization.

REORGANIZATION, administratively, will not bring about the needed changes in the program of the public high school in America. Many reorganization plans have been advocated and adopted without carrying with them an iota of change as far as the program of instruction is concerned.

The whole junior high school movement is a case in point. So is the development of elaborate systems of guidance and counseling. Organizational changes almost never bring about the desired changes in the nature of the learning process. Fundamental to such changes are changed points of view on the part of teachers and administrators that follow careful study and consideration of the contributions of psychologists, physiologists, biologists, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and professional educators as they relate to the problems of a particular school.

However, many teachers and administrators have made or are making such investigations with the result that they wish to make changes in their teaching that are next to impossible in high schools as presently organized. Certain changes in organization are essential if

such teachers and administrators are to have any real opportunity to use the knowledges and techniques they are gaining in furthering the education of young people in our secondary schools.¹

PROVISION FOR COMMON LEARNINGS

The program must be so organized that part of the school day, week, or year of each pupil is spent in areas of experience in which all may participate and the remainder of the time in furthering individual and special group interests, both vocational and avocational. In the first years of the secondary school the amount of time devoted to the areas in which all will have learning experiences will be large. It will decrease from year to year as individual and special group interests receive more emphasis.²

In using the phrases "areas in which all may have learning experiences" and

¹ Willard B. Spalding, Paul W. Pinckney, and high school principals. *A Point of View in Secondary Education*. Portland, Oregon Public Schools, July, 1946. (A mimeographed bulletin.) Many of the points developed in the above article were suggested by this bulletin.

² Educational Policies Commission. *Education for All American Youth*. National Education Association and American Association of School Administrators. Washington, D. C.: The Commission, 1944. p. 234-240.

“common learnings,” no attempt is made in this article either to advocate or oppose a core course in common learnings. A proposed plan, however, is outlined which makes it possible to organize a school so that larger areas of experience than those allowed for in traditional subject fields may be developed, both within the “areas in which all may have learning experiences” and in the areas to be developed for individual and special group interests.

New Plans for Familiar Subjects

In our opinion, there is a large area of organized school work in which all young people should have experiences. This statement must not be interpreted to carry with it the implication of minimum standards of accomplishment nor that any two young people working in these areas will have the same experiences, or even, necessarily, similar experiences. What experiences each has will be determined by a variety of conditions, including previous experiences, maturity, interest, ability, emotional stability, and others which the reader will add. The statement does not carry the implication that pupils with a wide range of previous experience, maturity, interest, ability, or emotional stability will be working together as a group to solve problems in which all, or nearly all, are interested and to which all make contributions. This means that provision must be made within the school organization for a flexible program and grouping of subjects so that any or all the subject fields may be called upon to aid in solving the problem at hand.

Probably the subject matter needed for the development of the “areas in

which all should have experience” in the secondary school are and can be included in the presently organized language arts (English), mathematics, science, physical education, health, industrial arts, homemaking, music, and art courses. The modern high school will be so organized as to:

- ▶ Make it possible for the same group of young people to work together for longer than one period and for longer than one semester
- ▶ Make it possible for one teacher to lead and advise a group of pupils in solving problems that extend beyond the traditional boundaries of one subject
- ▶ Make it possible for two or more teachers to work together in helping a group of young people solve their problems
- ▶ Make it possible for the principal to organize groups of teachers during school time to study the learning process, to develop better techniques of teaching, and to discuss, work upon, and solve any problems important to the group.

“Common” and “Special” Fields

Almost all of the school time of pupils in the first four years of the secondary school (grades 7-10) should be spent in the “areas in which all will have learning experiences.” Specialized interests at the seventh and eighth grade levels should be provided for through club activities, with a time for such activities scheduled as a part of the school program. In addition, until a thoroughgoing study can be made of the secondary school mathematics program, we will probably need to make provision in the ninth grade for a three-way differentiation with regard to mathematics: one group should prob-

ably work in a general mathematics program; one group should eliminate formal mathematics from their program until the twelfth grade; and one group should be programmed for algebra. (When teachers are better prepared to make use of quantitative analysis in their teaching, such differentiation should not be necessary at this level.)

At the tenth grade level, in addition to the club program, specialized education should, under present conditions, include, in addition to club activities, opportunities for geometry and foreign language for certain pupils. This should take approximately one-third of the time of pupils electing those subjects. The remainder of their time and all of the time of other pupils should be spent in "the areas where all will have learning experiences." (It is probable that typing should be added to the "common learnings" at this grade level.)

In the eleventh and twelfth grade the areas where all will have learning experiences should take about one-half of the school time of the students and should probably be built around the subject matter now included in the fields of language arts (English), social studies, work experience, and health and physical education. The other half of the school time would then be devoted to specialized education. If additional years are added to the secondary school, the areas of "common learnings" should never entirely disappear but should take not more than from a sixth to a fourth of the pupil's time.

A New Kind of Study

It will be noted that no time for study is provided. It is the opinion of the author, backed by research, that for-

malized, required, outside study has little or no place in the modern secondary school. Burton³ says,

The few statistical studies show that home study is not a significant factor in affecting the achievement of pupils. Results are about the same with or without home study. There is, however, one aspect of this item which must not be overlooked. Home study of the traditional formal sort may be dispensed with as far as the evidence now shows; however, as we move over toward modern teaching which identifies study with learning and which utilizes not one or two but a large number of varied study activities, a different situation emerges. If we are to develop independence in attacking and studying problems, and if learning is to approximate life situations, then there must be continuous interaction between the pupil and his total environment. In carrying on modern teaching-learning situations there will be many things to be done outside school. These will not even resemble the home study of the formal school.

Neither will they resemble or call for the school study period of the formal school. The modern high school will be so organized as to:

- ▶ Make it possible to block program students so that they may work together as a group for whatever part of the day they spend in the areas of "common learnings"
- ▶ Make possible the programming of club activities during the school day.

LEARNING TO KNOW STUDENTS

Pupils must be known intimately and understood by their teachers. For this reason the program should be so organized that the students will come in contact with a relatively small number

³ William H. Burton, *The Guidance of Learning Activities*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1944. p. 344-345.

of teachers and remain with those teachers a relatively long period of time.

At present, in most secondary schools, pupils are programmed for six periods of work with six different teachers for one semester. During the twelve semesters (grades 7-12) it is possible for a student to meet seventy-two different teachers in class and study. Most students actually meet from fifty to sixty teachers. In many cases, these fifty to sixty are in addition to contacts with two or three counselors (whom the student may never meet in a teacher-pupil relationship), two vice-principals, a principal, a librarian, and sundry other school employees.

Under the present set-up it is totally impossible for any teachers or any counselors to become well enough acquainted with the students soon enough to do a very effective job of personal counseling early in the child's experience in the secondary school. The modern high school will be so organized as to:

- ▶ Make it possible to provide for homeroom teachers who stay with their groups a minimum of three years
- ▶ Make it possible to hold frequent homeroom meetings during the school day for the purpose of group guidance and organizing for school social and student body activities
- ▶ Make it possible for the homeroom teacher to teach his homeroom for at least one period a day for the first year the group is assigned to him
- ▶ Provide time for counselors to aid homeroom teachers in planning and developing homeroom programs and to aid them in counseling difficult cases
- ▶ Provide for counselors to remain with their groups throughout the period that the students remain in the school

- ▶ Provide a program of studies so organized that students usually remain with the same teacher for a year rather than a semester
- ▶ Provide a program of studies so organized as to make it possible for one teacher to work with the same group of pupils in two or more subject areas or for two or more teachers to work and plan together the educational program for the same group of pupils.

Such organization has implications for serious study by faculty groups of such common practices as mid-year promotion and failure, so-called homogeneous grouping, and subject failures in the areas of the "common learnings."

ELIMINATION OF RIGIDITY

Flexibility must characterize every phase of the program. In spite of the necessity for time schedules, courses of study, and the assignment of pupils to classes, the larger needs of pupils must always take precedence. The modern high school will be so organized as to:

- ▶ Make it possible to carry on an extensive activity-club program as an integral part of the school program, with provision for frequent meetings on school time
- ▶ Make it possible for the homeroom to meet frequently on school time, to be the center of guidance, student government, and social activity of the school
- ▶ Make it possible to develop a club program that will provide for social clubs, school-service clubs, special-interest clubs, or any combinations of the above
- ▶ Provide for regular meetings of the student body, the representative assembly, and the student council on school time
- ▶ Provide for regular meetings of organized classes upon school time.

The program of the comprehensive high school must be so organized as to allow for the breaking down of subject fields so as to make possible the organization of units and courses which cut across subject boundaries. The program of the modern high school will be so organized as to:

- ▶ Make possible the development of units and courses that encompass larger areas of experience than is possible under present subject organization. Such units and courses can and should be built to encompass areas now included in language arts and social studies; mathematics and science; music, art, and literature; foreign languages and social studies; language arts, shorthand, and typing; mathematics and industrial arts; and art and home economics
- ▶ Make it possible for groups of teachers, working during the school day, to make plans, collect and organize materials, and perfect techniques that will provide for the development of such teaching units as are outlined above.

CHANGES IN ORGANIZATION

Provisions such as these recommended in the three areas discussed can be taken care of by a comparatively few changes in organization and administration of the school. Most of them can be completed within the school, without waiting for city-wide, state-wide, or national acceptance. None of them are dependent upon changes in such "bugaboos" as Carnegie units or college entrance requirements.

Elimination of Mid-Year Programming

Many secondary school teachers and administrators advocate the elimination of mid-year programming but insist that it cannot be carried out until mid-year

entrances are eliminated. Only two simple changes would be necessary for its elimination in any school regardless of whether the school system has mid-year entrance or not:

- ▶ Programming of the student for a year at the beginning of the fall term
- ▶ Elimination of semester failures. This, of course, opens up the whole question of failure or non-failure. It is sufficient to state that schools that have eliminated promotion and failure on a semester basis have noted no increase in retardation, in number of failures, nor decrease in achievements.⁴

Heterogeneous Grouping for Common Learnings

Block programming of pupils in the areas included in the "common learnings" should be carried through without regard to race, color, religion, height, weight, mental ability, or achievement (except that those pupils defined as special cases by a state or city might be segregated). This would make possible:

- ▶ Programming of the same group of pupils to one teacher for two or more periods so that he might develop a program of unit work extending beyond the boundaries of traditional subjects
- ▶ Programming of the same group of pupils to two or more teachers in different subject areas so that they might plan together a program of coordinated work with those pupils.

Time for Teachers to Plan

The provision of a daily conference period for all teachers is essential to the development of a program of im-

⁴ Walter S. Monroe (editor). "Secondary Education: III Organization." *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1941. p. 1083-1084.

proved instruction. Most schools have provided such a period but have failed to make the best use of it. When such a period is provided, teachers who are engaged in the study of the same or similar problems can be programmed for the same conference period. The principal or curriculum assistant is then provided with a period in which he can have regular meetings with teachers for the purpose of working out the solution to educational problems of the school.

Time for "Extras"

A program, based upon the present very common six-period, six-hour day, which provides for from three to six periods a week in which no classes are scheduled, should be set up. During these periods homerooms, assemblies, clubs, and class organizations will meet. If six such periods were provided, classes would meet four times a week instead of five. If three such weekly periods were provided, classes would meet nine times each two weeks instead of ten.

It should be pointed out that no great amount of class time would be lost even if six periods a week were devoted to such activities. Shortening and eliminating periods in order to carry on all school activities would be done away with. A school adopting such a program might begin by setting aside three periods a week for activities, unless it already has very comprehensive club and homeroom programs, and increase the time as these programs grow. If three periods a week were provided, one might be for assemblies, one for homeroom, and one for clubs—with one period a month taken from the clubs for class organizations. One

period a week would, of course, not make proper provision for all the clubs in a comprehensive activity program, nor would one period a week provide enough time to carry on a well-developed homeroom program. Under proper guidance a secondary school faculty would soon see the necessity for expanding the time given to these programs.

Provision for Leadership Training

Classes in leadership, to which officers of clubs and classes, members of the school representative assembly, and the student council would be programmed, *with credit*, should be established. Such classes would plan, organize, and carry out the school business under the leadership of teachers who were provided with the same time to carry on this work they had for classes.

Provision for Knowing Youth

Counselors, when relieved of many of the routine duties of guidance by the homeroom teachers, would have the time to help develop well-organized homeroom programs and study and plan to become more effective counselors. The recommendation that all homeroom teachers be assigned to teach their homeroom groups during the first year of such assignment means, of course, that each secondary teacher would need to be competent to teach one subject at either the seventh or eighth grade level, or the ninth or tenth grade level. A cursory survey of the preparation and teaching experience of about seven hundred secondary school teachers indicates that all have the necessary qualifications, if not the inclinations.

FOUR COGENT POINTS

It cannot be emphasized too often that:

- no plan of administrative reorganization will make any difference in the educational program of the school unless accompanied by a well-organized, aggressive program of growth and development on the part of the school faculty
- some such program of administration

is absolutely essential if teachers and administrators who wish to make progress are to be allowed to do so

- the above proposals embody the elements necessary to reorganize a school in such a way that administration need not hamper educational advancement
- none of the proposals are new. Most of them have been made over and over again, but, as far as the author knows, they have never been brought together as an integrated plan.

Continuity of Learning through Cooperative Planning

MARIAN C. BUTLER and ROBERT C. HAMMOCK

Youth in the modern high school is hardly set on a desert island apart from all that goes on educationally, both prior to and following the four years usually spent in that institution. Yet actual practice too often seems to indicate this is at least the operational point of view if not the theoretical one. Robert C. Hammock, associate professor of education, University of Alabama, and Mrs. Marian C. Butler, assistant superintendent of the Waco, Texas, public schools, indicate some of the problems involved in providing a continuous program of education and suggest ways of solving those problems.

WHAT CAN A SCHOOL SYSTEM do to assure twelve uninterrupted, coherent years of developmental education for all its children?

Every teacher recognizes the problem of creating and holding vertical articulation. Unsolved, the problem stands squarely in the way of every plan to produce the intelligently, capably functioning individual that irrevocable duty binds our schools to produce. Solved, the problem moves aside as every worker in the school is freed of extraneous considerations to concentrate

on the part he is to play in the child's whole education. It is likely that no school system has completely solved the problem; it is true that some schools have made intelligent efforts toward its solution; it is disappointing that many schools either make little effort toward achieving satisfactory vertical articulation or have not recognized in its absence a cause of some of the frustration that practically every teacher feels.

The continuous nature of all learning demands that the years of the child in school be sequential and develop-

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