

## *A Problem of Many Facets*

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It is probably safe to assume that some type of organization, for the purposes of instructional improvement, is in force in most school systems. The type of organization is conditioned, among other things, by the type and size of school system, the groups it seeks to serve, the provisions for instructional service and leadership, the problems which teachers are trying to solve, and the facilities at hand for the solution of problems. Because organization for curriculum improvement takes on so many shapes and forms, because it is dependent upon so many different or so many combinations of sets of circumstances; the articles in this issue cover all phases—from broad and generalized problems of philosophy to practical details on specific problems.

In the first part of the magazine a variety of problems is discussed. The introductory article deals with basic issues which must be considered if any program of organization for instructional improvement is actually to result in improved learning experiences for boys and girls. A second author discusses some of the pitfalls attendant upon the organization of workshops—particularly those dealing with intercultural education. Another tells of an in-service program in a large city, and from it points to important generalizations applicable to organization of in-service programs in all situations—large or small. Those concerned with and responsible for state leadership in curriculum development will be interested in the account of how states are providing for needs in secondary education as well as the many aspects of a program of in-service education carried on in one western state.

## *Improving Our Instruction: Four Basic Issues*

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HILDA TABA

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IMPROVEMENT of instruction is like spring plowing. It is something that must be done over and over again, with a sense of newness and with a sense of repetition of a process that each new season brings.

Time was when instructional programs were changed earthquake fash-

ion; the current trend, or the current expert, plowed up what there was and set a new pattern. This pattern was allowed to encrust until the time came for another re-patterning, which eventually met the same fate.

Too often this was true because people other than those who worked in

classrooms set the patterns. A continuous and gradual exploration and improvement was, therefore, difficult. Partly this inflexibility was caused by the fact that the concepts of program patterning were not themselves so conceived as to call for a continuous change and improvement. They were fixed as to central ideas, areas to be covered, sometimes even as to details. But mainly it was because we addressed ourselves in a larger measure to schemes of curriculum organization and to isolated "methods" rather than to the ways of thinking about and planning instructional programs.

### Time for Moving Into Action

The time may be ripe for the development of methods of instructional planning which will allow the kind of fluidity in instructional programs which is needed in changing social realities and varying local conditions while still assuring their educational soundness. We have, for example, made scientific analyses of various types of content and their place in and contribution to general education. We should, therefore, be ready for a conscious sampling of content as well as for varying of organizational patterns without fear of excluding the essentials. We also have had experience with various organizational patterns such as chronology, themes, or current problems in history; authors, periods, outstanding books, and themes in English and literature, to name but a few. We have tested some combinations such as core curriculum and correlation. We should have learned from these how to combine important ideas and practices in various ways for enhancing needed relationships or for serv-

ing objectives other than those of content.

We are beginning to have a fairly adequately formulated body of facts and principles regarding the developmental levels of young people and the relationship of these to learning. The analysis of the needs of society and of the community is beginning to be substantial enough and sufficiently popularized to permit translation into educational needs.

Perhaps the hot currents of controversy over such "philosophical" issues as student interests vs. content as primary bases for curriculum planning, or experience vs. books as primary methods of learning have gone on long enough to discover that there are no "vs's"—only shadings of one into the other and the need for considering all in educational planning. We are beginning to discover that students, their interests and needs; society, or the community, and its needs and problems; and the unique features of any content are like the legs of a three legged stool—none more important than the other, all needed to support the stool.

We should then be ready for a coherent factoring of all these considerations in planning instructional programs and a conscious consideration of each in decisions about what to teach and how to go about it. If this be true, the major issue in improvement of instruction is the development of a framework of study and thinking which will permit sound planning by everyone concerned without dependence on "the" pattern or "the" scheme of selecting and organizing content and learning experiences.

What, then, are the crucial elements in this scheme of thinking? Only a

few basic ones can be described in this brief article.

### Objectives that Really Function

*Teachers need help in formulating realistic objectives and in conceiving them in relationship to each other.*

This sounds trite. Have we not covered pages with statements of objectives, carefully classified as to their immediacy and remoteness, carefully covering attitudes, skills, and knowledge? Yes, we have. But the uneasy truth is that these statements rarely serve their purposes, namely, aiding in selection of content and learning experiences, directing the emphasis for interpretation of ideas touched upon, and helping to focus details around basic concepts. Neither will an analyst of these statements appearing with courses of study or instructional plans find in them either a reflection of social realities or of the psychological realities of growing young people, their needs, and their ways of learning. Further, the attempts at being analytic in these statements, as one must be, have produced a curious overlooking of the organic nature of learning. Attitudes, knowledges, and skills swim around in separate classificatory pools with little or no recognizable relationship to each other or to the content outlines which follow.

To give objectives a functioning reality, it seems necessary for a teacher not only to accept the principle of needs but also to get some tangible evidence about what the needs of his students and his community are. Teachers need only ask such questions as: What are my students like? What experiences have they had? What kinds of growth do they most need? What is the com-

munity or the society like? What are the urgent problems and needs? How can my particular area of teaching contribute to these?

These questions cannot be answered in totality, gunshot fashion. They can be answered only with reference to a particular program or a particular decision about the program. Which problems of local history are most useful in a ninth grade? Which books will help to sensitize a given group of fourth graders in human relations? To be sure, these tangible studies do not answer all questions. They will, however, help teachers to get meaning from the generalized concepts found in literature and to set these concepts into relationship with their own work.

Both tangible studies and the exploration of literature are needed. Neither the society nor its children are there in a nutshell for the teacher to look at. All he can do is get a taste of what such analysis may yield. The general discussions and concepts about society or about children (found in literature) make little sense to classroom teachers who simply set about to teach human relations through literature in the sixth grade or community civics in the ninth. Only as they themselves find out about some tangible things in the community and about the students—the patterns of acceptance and rejection in community life in connection with human relations or the operating concepts of students on what makes for leadership in connection with civics—can they begin to use what is written about community needs and the development of young people.

With an insight gained from some direct studies, combined with the use

of general interpretations, the teacher can turn to the "content" of literature or of civics; select the most appropriate facts and ideas; and organize them into learning experiences designed to meet the "needs" and to achieve the objectives he has in mind.

#### Content in Terms of Ideas

*Another bothersome problem is that of organizing the content.* The major stumbling block seems to lie in the definition of content as a body of facts or an array of "areas" to be covered rather than a body of ideas to be learned through or illustrated by detailed facts. This former approach to content makes it difficult to relate content either to objectives or to needs, for the contribution of content lies not in its details nor special areas but in the underlying ideas and generalizations or the effect of details on molding of feeling or insight.

If, for example, a teacher is concerned with teaching about American people for purposes of enlarging sensitivity to diversity within America and enhancing insight into problems of living together, he must decide, to be sure, which group of people he will cover. Naturally he will have to sample, for covering all would be an impossibility. His decisions should depend on his knowledge of the people in the community and which understandings are, therefore, most helpful or needed, what his students are concerned with, where they need enlargement of insight.

But the main organizing ideas will come from answering the question of what needs to be taught about these people. These answers lie in such general ideas as the kinds of values they

brought with them, what they had to discard in the new environment, what happened to them in the process of adjustment, and what was added to America through them. From that point on the details may be settled: food customs in one case, skills in growing fruit trees in another, ideas about government in a third. In such an organizing scheme there is freedom for accommodation of detail to the local situation, to student interests, even to teacher capacity and availability of materials, without running the danger of sacrificing the sound main points and without getting lost in the tangential and irrelevant.

This approach to organization of content is in contrast to the usual method. Teachers and curriculum makers both are sure to outline the details, point out the topics and sub-topics of areas without mentioning the guiding ideas. These are left to the momentary impulse of the teacher or to the accidents of classroom development. This being the case, assurance of coverage is needed to avoid important gaps or treatment of irrelevant matters.

#### Needs Below the Surface

*A third important problem is that of translating what we know or learn either about the community or about the children into educational programs.* Our common mistake has been to make too direct a translation from surface facts about needs into curriculum, a sin rather frequently committed by the general education programs and core programs. An expression of interest in bicycles produces a unit on bicycles. Discovery of problems of social adjustment due to lack of social

skill tends to be followed by a unit on manners. A deficiency in the concept of democracy is translated into moralizing about democratic ideals, duties, and responsibilities. A neat package of illustrative biography of great people among minority groups is supposed to solve the problem of sensitizing to minority relationships or their contribution to American life.

In such instances direct surface steps have been substituted for interpretation and translation at several spots. Such discoveries as desire for bicycles, lack of social skill, difficulty in applying democratic ideals, or prejudice towards Negroes are but surface manifestations and need to be seen in their larger setting. Educational needs cannot be fulfilled directly the way one may satisfy hunger for milk or bread. A wish for bicycles may spring out of confinement, fad, a need for freedom from home, or lack of transportation. It may represent a false sense of values or of independence. Whatever the basis, surface needs must be interpreted until one arrives at a point where an educational and educative answer is possible. Learning how to buy and run a bicycle may not qualify as that in all cases.

Another abrupt translation occurs in connecting the idea of a need or an objective directly with a specific content. Thus, teachers who want to use fiction to help in awareness about the various kinds of work people do use fiction on carpenters, milkmen, and other workers selected for study. At this point the essential function of literature is lost and it is being used as a source of specific information. To make an adequate translation and connection, the specific problem, such as that of the

milkman, needs to be generalized into a general human problem—let us say the problem of loneliness while working alone, the contrast in our attitudes toward physical and mental work, or the many ways in which the lives of people are influenced by their work. One does not then need to limit the selection of literature to stories about milkmen. Any literature throwing light on these general problems will do and the insights gained can be applied to milkmen, carpenters, food workers, or any workers.

#### A Chance for All to Learn

*Throughout these proposals runs the issue of preparing teachers for this type of planning.* Teachers, like anyone else, learn by doing. They also are affected by the environment. Our first requirement then in improving instruction is to provide an experimental setting which stimulates teachers for thinking and planning.

This setting can be created by initiating tangible projects around which to work and learn. Teacher initiative cannot be aroused by someone working out plans and schemes and then asking teachers to adopt and to apply them. Participation in the very creation of plans themselves is needed. Experimental projects, limited in scope but generalized as to techniques of planning and ways of applying and using both tangible facts about students, community, content, and philosophical principles of good education, might do more for spreading competence in instructional planning than all the technical courses taught in isolation from anyone's classroom put together. This, of course, assumes supervisors who are

interested in curriculum planning and are not devoted to a particular scheme or a particular set of methodological devices.

Cooperative planning also becomes important—within departments, between departments, and school-wide. This cooperative planning is important at almost all steps: in getting data, with teachers who have worked at different types of information pooling facts and formulating interpretations together; in attempting to set the over-all direction or objectives suggested by the facts; and certainly in weighing the unique contributions of each area toward these objectives to assure well-rounded emphasis and to avoid overlapping. If properly planned, this type of cooperation need not be a nuisance or an excessive drain on time and energy. It does not take unusually brilliant teach-

ers. Recent experiences of the author have shown her that the average teacher does respond to this kind of counseling and can undertake instructional planning of a commendable soundness.

#### Harmony Between Essentials and Needs

Perhaps by combining this generalized technique of curriculum planning and a conscious identification and application of educational principles and psychological knowledge at each step, we can also solve the perennial dichotomy of the "essentials," which assumes universality and local adaptation, clearly necessary if we take the needs theory and individual variations seriously. We may find the essentials in general ideas and generalized skills and be free to serve the local needs of groups and individuals by a judicious variation in content and in ways of learning.

## Teachers Explore Basic Principles

SAMUEL EVERETT

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*"The contributions that might come from classroom teachers are . . . an almost unworked mine."*<sup>1</sup>

A group of teachers were meeting at the Philadelphia Board of Education building to discuss ways and means of promoting open-mindedness. They had responded to a request for volunteers made by the principals of eight elemen-

tary and secondary schools where they taught. But no one really knew just what it was all about.

The meeting began with a brief statement by the Associate Superintendent in charge of Curriculum. He talked about "the open and the closed mind," quoting from a challenging article by Samuel Fels, a distinguished citizen of the city. "Can open-mindedness be taught in the schools?" "To

<sup>1</sup> Dewey, John. *The Sources of a Science of Education*, New York: Horace Liveright, 1929.

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