

No audible opposition to the Child Research Bill has been expressed by members of Congress, except on grounds of economy. When one considers that the cost of the National Military Establishment is about \$300,000,000 *per week*, the "economy" argument is not impressive in opposition to an appropriation of \$7,500,000 for the purpose of providing scientific information regarding American children, information which can be expected to lead directly to the development of "better citizens" and of adults

more adaptively adjusted to the American type of culture.

At the time of this writing the Child Research Bill has not been passed, and its passage during the First Session of the Eighty-first Congress seems doubtful. If, by the time this article appears in print, no action has been taken, it would doubtless be of interest to many readers of this journal to write their representatives in Congress urging its passage. When it does become law, our readers will wish to follow the scientific work as it progresses.

Curriculum Issues in Elementary Education

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In this article Henry J. Otto, professor of elementary administration and curriculum at the University of Texas, discusses seven vitally important issues which require consideration as curriculum revision proceeds in the elementary schools. To the extent that curriculum workers come to grips with fundamental issues like these discussed by Professor Otto will they be successful in developing more adequate programs for boys and girls.

SINCE EVERYONE KNOWS that the school curriculum should be kept up to date, we can dispense with the preliminaries dealing with the need for curriculum revision and launch directly into a consideration of some of the issues which require consideration as curriculum revision proceeds. The issues discussed in this article are not intended to be all-inclusive in number or scope. They are merely *some* of the issues which the writer believes are worthy of consideration at this time.

Fundamental Reorganization and Synthesis of the Entire Instructional Program. Most efforts at bolstering segments of the elementary school curriculum will meet with discouraging results until there is a basic attack upon a fundamental reorganization and synthesis of the entire instructional program. A brief look at the facts will suggest the importance of this issue. Prior to 1800 only two subjects, reading and writing, were commonly taught in elementary schools in the United States,

although a few schools had added arithmetic and language. By 1945 the total number of subjects and areas of special emphasis had reached twenty-four.

In addition, most elementary schools engage in several co-curricular activities such as assembly programs, safety patrols, student councils, and clubs. (A recent survey showed forty-two different activities which were classified by one or more schools as co-curricular.) Also, the schools are called on to engage in an increasing number of adult interest activities, such as helping celebrate National Drama Week, Army Day, or assisting in the Community Chest drive. Recently a superintendent of schools informed me that during the 1948-49 school year he had received eighty-one requests from various adult groups for his permission (which meant that he was to take the initiative in promoting the idea or activity in the schools) to have the schools engage in an activity sponsored by a non-school adult group.

One must remember that all of the activities mentioned in the preceding paragraph become a part of the school curriculum if teachers and pupils engage in them. Such an overwhelming array of activities, especially if they are not well integrated and carried on as separate entities, result in a curriculum that is so overcrowded and so cut up that effective teaching and learning are impossible. Teachers and pupils spend the day dashing from pillar to post in a mad scramble to keep up with an impossible list of things which have been squeezed into the program.

Nothing short of a major operation resulting in a thoroughgoing reorgani-

zation and synthesis of the curriculum will bring order out of the chaos and again return us to a curriculum which permits good teaching and effective learning. Obviously such a reorganization should consider educational needs in society today rather than merely revert to a narrow curriculum of a century ago.

A New Interpretation of the Purposes of Education. In general, educational leaders throughout our country's history have produced very acceptable statements of the objectives or purposes of education. Practice may have lagged behind the theoretical conceptions of appropriate goals, but the goals were very acceptable nevertheless. One of the difficulties has been the interpretation or application of the statements of purpose; so frequently we have taken the position that a statement of objectives represented a statement of minimum essentials for all.

For example, if a statement of objectives included an item such as "The educated person solves his problems of counting and calculating," we have done our best to ascertain how much knowledge and proficiency in arithmetic was necessary to meet this objective for at least the average or slightly-above-average citizen. Then we proceeded to apply our findings as minimum essentials for all when we have known for decades that all children are not capable of achieving that which is desirable for the average or slightly-above-average citizen.

Statements of educational purposes should be considered as directional goals but not as minimum essentials. A directional goal would mean that we

endeavor to help all children acquire some knowledge and skill in arithmetic, but how much each child is to achieve must depend upon the ability, background, amount of schooling, and many other factors pertaining to the individual.

The new interpretation that is needed must differentiate clearly between minimum essentials and purposes of education. Perhaps the idea of minimum essentials should be abandoned altogether. At any rate, purposes of education should be viewed only as directional goals and should not be distorted into prescriptions regarding minimum essentials.

A Realistic Approach to Meeting Individual Differences. In spite of more than five decades of talk and research about individual differences in children, school practices are still geared largely to class-as-a-whole methods and procedures. All members of the class are given the same texts through which they progress as a group. Standards for promotion from grade to grade are conceived as group standards and applied to *individuals as mem-*

bers of a group. These are but a few of the many examples that could be given to show that present practices are still geared largely to group procedures involving the class-as-a-whole concept.

If we are going to go beyond the "talk" stage in meeting individual differences, we will have to:

- abandon the competitive and comparative marking system as a means of appraising children's educational development
- change many of our conventional notions and practices about promotion standards, grouping of pupils, and pupil progress through the school
- look upon purposes of education as directional goals rather than as minimum essentials
- provide each teacher with basal texts and supplementary books at from three to five grade levels
- allow individuals and small groups within a class to progress in a given instructional area as slowly or as rapidly as their preparation and abilities permit
- modify our teaching procedures to permit more sub-groups within classes

These are but a few of the problems which must be met realistically if we desire to implement our convictions



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about the importance of adapting education to the abilities, maturation levels, and educational potential of the children in our schools.

The Role of Basal Texts. If the three curriculum issues previously named are met realistically, teachers will be faced with new problems regarding the use of basal texts. It is common knowledge that in most schools in which basal texts are adopted (singly for a given grade or in series for several grades) teachers either feel that they should use them systematically day by day or they are instructed to do so. This problem is most acute in states in which there is a system of state-wide adoption of basal and supplementary texts.

It should be apparent that systematic day-by-day assignments from basal texts, especially if given for the class as a whole, cannot prevail in a school which meets realistically the three curriculum issues already identified in the preceding paragraphs. Basal texts, whenever used systematically for day-by-day assignments, become the course of study and leave the teacher little freedom to develop with the children an instructional program that meets modern criteria for good teaching.

Perhaps few would deny the splendid improvements which have been made in the past thirty or more years in all types of books for elementary children. The argument here is not intended to be a criticism of basal texts; my concern is merely with their use. Furthermore, I believe that an adequate supply of good basal texts is a "must" for any good school. Schools, however, need to modify the ways in which basal texts

are used. Instead of allowing basal texts to determine the curriculum and to circumscribe teaching procedures, basal texts should be used as reference and resource materials to implement a teaching program developed by teachers and pupils.

We should assist teachers through all the methods at our command to develop educational programs with children which are far superior to teaching programs geared to basal texts. As this comes about, basal texts will serve as references and resource materials which contain vital information, practice exercises, and instructional suggestions on many specifics which children need to learn.

Departmentalization of Instruction. It is becoming increasingly apparent that commonly accepted goals of education cannot be realized satisfactorily in highly departmentalized programs. We might as well face the issue frankly that departmentalization is inimical to good curriculum design and good teaching. If some departmentalization is inescapable, it should be kept to a minimum so that all children spend three-fourths or more of the school day with the same teacher.

In most schools that are highly departmentalized, efforts at curriculum revision are stymied. Instead of giving teachers freedom to think through several approaches to a fundamental reorganization and synthesis of the curriculum, the thinking of teachers is grooved and regrooved into the old pattern of departmentalized subject areas and a school day chopped into so many equal segments, each separated from the other by the ringing of a

bell and the mass migration of pupils to other rooms and teachers. In schools in which a high degree of departmentalization exists, a fundamental re-thinking of the organization for instruction should precede or accompany curriculum revision efforts.

The Need for Functionalizing Education. For decades various leaders in education have called our attention to the advisability of making schooling more directly useful by orienting instruction to realistic problems of everyday living in order to help children see value in what they are studying, to apply their learnings more effectively in solving their problems, and to contribute more actively toward the improvement of living. Efforts to make education more functional are being carried out in a number of places, and several dozen published accounts of such efforts are now available.

The chief problem lies in the fact that the number of places in which concerted efforts in this direction are being made is too few to make much of a dent on the total picture of education in this country. The opportunities to expand the functional aspects of schooling have probably never been better than at the present. The various trends and emphases in curriculum revision today make it much easier to functionalize schooling than at any previous time in our history. Professional literature peculiarly helpful in functionalizing schooling is now much more plentiful than it used to be. Schools engaged in curriculum revision work should not overlook the added opportunities for curriculum improvement which lie in this direction.

More Vital Social, Citizenship, and Character Education Needed.

A new horizon seems to be evolving with reference to the area which we used to call citizenship education. Formerly our restricted concept of citizenship education meant courses in the social studies and in civics. Valuable as this was, it is entirely too limited to serve present-day needs.

The new horizon which seems to be developing envisions a broadly conceived program for promoting the wholesome social, emotional, character, personality, and citizenship development of every child. It is recognized that desirable development in all of these areas is essential for helping our children to become the kind of human beings who can live and work happily, satisfyingly, and cooperatively in a democratic society.

In order to achieve this broader goal, all of the resources of the school must be utilized properly. Living together at school is viewed as a laboratory for social education. The character and quality of pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil relations, policies and practices in grouping and promotion of pupils, cooperative teacher-pupil planning, pupil participation in school and classroom management, auditorium activities, the lunchroom, and physical education are some of the major categories of school activities which are utilized in new ways so that the broader goal may be realized. Classroom instruction in the social studies and in civics continues to have its place, but it must be recognized that instruction in these areas is but a small segment of the school's total program in social, in citizenship, and in character education.

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