

The Curriculum Commentator

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Increasing Enrollments and the Race with Space

Each month this column, written by a member of the Association, will be concerned with curriculum development: recent trends, issues, conferences, publications, experimental studies, and learning materials. This month's contributor is Don S. Patterson, chief, Organization and Supervision, Division of Elementary Education, U. S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C.

WITH THE OPENING of school this fall came the largest enrollments ever recorded for thousands of school systems over the nation. While current publicity is apt to leave the impression that this is an actuality in every school, it is certainly true that a crisis exists in many communities. The stork has started a race with space which at present finds the bird far out in front and increasing his lead.

Ways and Means

The most significant thing in the study of incomplete data is evidence of the adaptations employed in the race of school systems to house increasing school enrollments. Some of the practices indicate ingenious ways of meeting local needs; others represent *practices that are only stop-gap measures and will result in lost educational opportunities for thousands of children.*

Many schools are transporting the overflow from one area of the school system to another where space is available. In some instances it is in a building built for elementary children; in a number of instances it means placing small children in junior and senior high school units far from their own neighborhoods.

Shifting or staggering class sessions is not at all uncommon in over-crowded areas. This means that classrooms are shared during the day by two, and sometimes even three, groups of children. In a few instances one teacher handles one group in the morning and a different group in the afternoon.

At least one school system reports a unique modification of the total school program. The entrance of children to the school has been staggered so there are four entrance periods each year. This means that facilities will be in full use the year around by regular class groups. Children will be in school the typical nine months, but will have their traditional vacation staggered so about one-fourth of the children will be on vacation at any one time. By this method the school system hopes to make more adequate use of all school facilities and care for about a fourth more children with their present buildings. In other places kindergartens have been curtailed or even discontinued so the space can be used by other grades.

Entrance ages have been raised in a number of cases in order to reduce the numbers for this fall term. Not all changes in entrance ages, requiring children to be nearer five for kindergarten or six for the first grade, represent an attempt to control enrollments. Others have made similar changes because greater maturity is a factor of school success.

Adding more teachers to the staff is another adaptation. In some instances two teachers are assigned to unusually large classes. Sometimes three teachers are given responsibility for two classrooms where enrollments are heavy.

Pushing Out Classroom Walls

In many schools all available non-classroom space is being used. Libraries in some school systems have been taken over

in part or entirely for classroom space. Auditoriums have been partitioned to make two or three classes. Parents' rooms, book rooms, playrooms, the stage, hallways, foyers, the principals' offices, and even supply rooms have been converted to classroom space.

School administrators have turned to the community for space. Church basements, Sunday school rooms, a fire hall, community halls, lodges, clubs, and public libraries have been pressed into use for classes. In some places abandoned school buildings have been renovated and pressed back into service. Some schools even use space in neighboring communities!

Is This the Solution?

The increase in class size seems to be the most general method of meeting the crisis. In some instances classes of almost unbelievable numbers are reported. Here is an example in a small suburban school district with only one large elementary school building. In the fall of 1947 the school's average class load was thirty-seven, the largest class had forty-two and the smallest was thirty-four. This fall the average class size has risen to fifty-six. The largest class is sixty-five, and the smallest class is fifty-one. This illustration may seem to be an extreme example, but limited data for current enrollments leads one to conclude that a serious crisis does exist in too many classrooms over the nation.

New school construction, additions to present structures, and temporary facilities are other ways of caring for increases. Most conspicuous are those buildings of a permanent nature. A limited number of semi-permanent and temporary buildings are being constructed. In some areas quonset huts are being used. Even in cases where schools have the finances to build, the needed facilities are lagging behind the increasing numbers of young children.

The adaptations pointed out illustrate local efforts to house school children. We must continually keep in mind that children pass this way only once and every

attempt should be made to see that every adaptation makes for the greatest educational opportunities for each individual. If the race for space is won, it will come only from cooperative effort at the local, state, and national levels.

Be Sure to Read . . .

FOR THE TEACHER. *Helping Handicapped Children in School*, Edward William Dolch, professor of education, University of Illinois. (The Garrard Press, Champaign, Illinois, 1948), discusses the education of all children, with emphasis upon adequate attention to all handicapped children, as an ideal toward which the schools should progress. The barriers of the handicapped need to be overcome. The book is developed for the regular classroom teacher, helping her identify the handicapped child, how to understand his difficulties, and how to plan educational experiences in terms of his individual needs. It deals with those types of handicaps which every teacher finds in her classroom. If the suggestions given are followed, the teacher can go far in securing for each child improved educational opportunities.

CHILDREN WITH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HANDICAPS, J. E. Wallace Wallin, (Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York, 1949), is developed for the professional worker in the fields of special education. The emphasis is upon the descriptive, explanatory enumeration of cases and research in regard to all types of mental and physically handicapped. The approach places emphasis upon educational, psychological, social, and medical problems and their practical implications.

THE ILLINOIS PROGRAM. A publication from the Commission for Handicapped Children, *The Educable Mentally Handicapped Child in Illinois*, 1949, defines the problem of mentally handicapped in that state and describes the Illinois program for exceptional children. It reveals the trend toward more special classes in the public schools for the education of

the mentally handicapped. The state program is described, the present facilities are enumerated, and the job ahead is presented.

A SELF-SURVEY. *An Evaluation of Indiana Public Schools*, (A Report of the Indiana School Study Commission, Indianapolis, 1949), is an example of a cooperative self-survey carried on by professional and lay people of the state. The study deals with all phases of public education. Factual evidence in regard to the schools is used to project specific conclusions and recommendations for education throughout the state. The treatment of how the study was initiated, organized, and conducted should be of particular interest to others interested in the techniques of self-evaluation.

FROM VIRGINIA. *The Characteristics of a Good Elementary School, A Guide to Better Schools*, (Division of Elementary Education, State Department of Education, Richmond, Virginia, 1949), is designed as a direct means of improving elementary education throughout the state. It directs attention of school divisions toward division-wide programs of school improvement. The bulletin focuses upon better understanding of children, improved quality of community living, continuous personal and professional growth of personnel, improved plant and materials, and cooperative planning. Illustrations are used to show improved practices in the phases of the total program for children.

FOR PARENTS. *Information for Parents of Cerebral Palsied Children*, (The California State Department of Education, 1948), gives suggestions that will help parents of cerebral palsied children understand the problems of their children, and help them meet these problems more effectively. The booklet is of value in planning educational programs.

CRIPPLED CHILDREN IN SCHOOL, Romaine P. Mackie, (Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office, 1948), deals with the definition of crippled children, types, and facilities for serving them. There is a rather extended discussion of educational programs for these children, and also qualifications of teachers of the crippled.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL, Hazel F. Gabbard, (Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office, 1949), is a guide to help parents better understand the responsibilities of the home in guiding the child's early learning experiences. The many questions which parents frequently ask were used in preparing this report.

AN ACTIVITIES STUDY. *Adult Education Activities of the Public Schools*, Report of a survey, Homer Kempfer, (Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office, 1949), reveals what is now going on in adult education under public school auspices. The study indicated diversity of organization activities for adults and out-of-school youth, and points the way to extending development of adult education programs.

THE FORTY - EIGHT STATE SCHOOL SYSTEMS, (Council of State Governments, Chicago, 1949), is a factual report of pertinent information on the major aspects of the organization, administration, and financing of public elementary and secondary schools in the forty-eight states. The study should provide a basis for educational improvement, picturing clearly the significant facts affecting the operation of school systems and focusing attention upon economy and effectiveness of school operation by states. The data revealed are for the school year 1947-48. Many comparisons are drawn from data for the years 1937-38, 1941-42, and 1946-47.

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