

Curriculum Change in the Small High School



DONALD W. BRUNER

In effecting curriculum change, does the small high school have certain advantages over a larger institution? This article shows, for example, that ample opportunity exists in such a setting for interchange of values and concepts held by various age groups in the community.

THE SMALL high school need not take a back seat in the drive to promote curriculum change. Even excluding gains due to consolidation across the country, the small high schools have made—and are making—significant contributions to secondary curriculum reorganization.

The physical limitations of the small high school with its few teachers have often compelled reorganization of the school's program. In the small compact community where everyone knows everyone else, needs can be more easily recognized, whether they be needs of

youth, adults or of the community as a whole. This can result in a better program at school for boys and girls, as need for changes in the conventional program becomes generally recognized. In this process, there is usually more understanding throughout the community as to the central role of the individual teacher in the development of the school's program. This is important, for any program of curriculum development is only effective to the extent that it results in improved learning experiences for youth, and the great majority of those experiences are undertaken

with the guidance of the teacher. In the small community, the direct effect of one outstanding teacher in bringing about a fundamental change in the curriculum can hardly fail to attract the attention of the entire community.

In the 1951 ASCD Yearbook, *Action For Curriculum Improvement*, there is a section devoted to the conditions which compel change in the curricula of our schools. One of these conditions is the tendency for our society to become stratified according to age levels. The yearbook states:

"Schools themselves tend to increase and perpetuate stratification. It is unusual for children of all school ages to be found within the same school building. Granted that there may be other good reasons for age groupings, school people must face the fact that the grouping of children into elementary, junior high and senior high schools contributes to stratification. Likewise the tight system of grade levels which prevents children of one grade from associating freely with children of other grades tends to rob them of opportunities for learning the values held by those younger or older than themselves."¹

To alleviate this condition, there are many opportunities in the smaller school to integrate work of different grade levels. Often a common problem will require a spread of skills and abilities in learners much better provided through cooperative work of two different grade levels. On occasion these levels may be rather widely separated, such as in the cooperative work of the eighth and eleventh grades to be de-

¹ *Action For Curriculum Improvement*, 1951 Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Education Association of the United States, 1201 Sixteenth Street, Northwest, Washington 6, D. C., p. 31.

Donald W. Bruner is acting vice principal, Washington High School, Portland, Oregon.

scribed. This type of program requires teachers who are resourceful, enthusiastic, and who plan with students. One such teacher is James Morse of Ashland, New Hampshire. Ashland High School is a six year school with grades seven through twelve. Recently his eighth grade class in English organized "Sunville, New Hampshire"—but let Mr. Morse tell the beginning of the story:

"Many jobs and businesses were suggested. Then we turned to the government (this was still the same fifty minute period). Before the bell sounded, we had set up a rather complete system of government patterned after Ashland's Town Manager Plan.

"They left the room buzzing with high excitement. They were not concerned as I was with educational possibilities but with a feeling of pride and anticipation. . . .

"I became director of economy with rather sweeping powers which I have not had occasion to use very much. My powers have since been restricted by a vote of the Board of Selectmen.

"We organized five wards in the town with a selectman to be elected from each ward. There was so much interest and excitement among the students about what we were doing that they began holding meetings after school (without me) in order to accomplish more. It was at one of these meetings that the town was named Sunville, New Hampshire. . . .

"Sunville—I liked it and I do today. It is bright. It is alive!"²

As Mr. Morse and his students developed Sunville, they found many opportunities for integration of class work.

² James Morse, "The Story of Sunville," *Curriculum Bulletin No. 1*, Plymouth Teachers College, Plymouth, New Hampshire, April 1951, pp. 2-3.

The eighth graders discovered, for example, that they needed much help from the mathematics teacher. In order to help them satisfy their needs for living in Sunville, this teacher taught them principles of budgeting, helped the town architect to learn to use some principles of geometry, helped the town tax collector with tax problems, reviewed with the group per cent as it related to the bank, and helped certain students set up a system of stocks and bonds for their businesses. However, Mr. Morse demonstrated special ingenuity in his integration of work with his junior class in English and with the high school economics class.

Operation Futura

For any student to establish a business in Sunville, he must, according to the decision of the group, meet certain conditions or requirements just as he would have to do later in real life. Among other things, the student must interview business men in the community, and he must also contact members of the junior class for occupational information through "Operation Futura."

Operation Futura was an agency for vocational information developed by Mr. Morse's junior class in English. They rented a regular box, #556, at the town post office, and negotiated all their business by United States Mail. Students in this class wrote everywhere for free and inexpensive materials supplying vocational information. They used these materials in their own personal work. They also classified all information, and made it available to the rest of the school.

As the agency operated only by mail, requests for information and materials had to be sent in writing through the

town post office. The class had developed an efficient organization for carrying on this business. A designated student picked up the mail each day, and it was processed regularly through the channels of the organization. Thus, as every student in Sunville became employed or went into business, it was necessary for him to seek advice and information from the juniors in English through Operation Futura. Much work of the two different classes was integrated in this way.

Integration of different grade levels was accomplished in other ways, too. The Citizens' Committee of Sunville found it necessary to investigate banking practices because of wide dissatisfaction among the citizens of the town. For this purpose, some counselors had to be called in from the economics class. This procedure proved to be so successful in this instance that it was decided to request the economics class to make a study of the Sunville economy. Overall changes could then be accomplished as a result of recommendations made by the economics class for increasing efficiency in the running of the town. In addition to the newspaper that came out once a week in Sunville, there was a weekly radio show. This provided integration in that the show was given before a live audience in a different room (the seventh grade) and was broadcast to Sunville.

It would be difficult to describe adequately the enthusiasm of students for living (and learning) in Sunville. The writer has visited Sunville, and was thrilled to observe the interest, purpose and meaningfulness with which the citizens carry on their everyday learning activities, and the degree to which basic skills in English were being developed.

Our college students in the "Secondary Principles" course considered the visit by Sunville's Town Manager and Mr. Morse one of the high spots of their semester's work. There is much that is contagious about the kind of learning that goes on in Sunville.

One should note in this description of the situation at Ashland, that here is a process of curriculum change coming about mainly through the initiative of a single teacher. This program is meeting with success because of the willing cooperation of students, other staff members, and people in the com-

munity. It represents a program which clearly demonstrates how ample opportunity for interchange of values and concepts held by various age groups in the community is possible. In this learning experience, not only have the young people been working with students of various other grade levels, but with adults representing various age levels of the community as well. It is this kind of work in education which is developing a program in our schools which will meet more effectively the imperative needs of our youth. Let's have more of such educational planning.

What Are the Issues In Secondary Education?

THEODORE D. RICE

Reporting for the ASCD Committee on Improvement of the Secondary School Curriculum, this author comments on current issues in secondary education. He also outlines the committee's plans for further action.

AT THE 1953 ASCD meeting in Cleveland, about one hundred and fifteen people from all parts of the country gathered in an open meeting of the Committee on Improvement of the Secondary School Curriculum. Two thirds of these persons were from secondary schools. The remainder were from community groups, colleges, state departments and the U. S. Office of Education. They were asked to advise the committee regarding what they thought such a group could do, through the ASCD, to help improve the curriculum. During the hour of the

meeting they identified the following as areas of need and also suggested some possible procedures for meeting these needs. These are not listed in order of frequency of mention, but rather in order of relatedness. They give, in part, some clues as to issues in secondary education.

- *Impact of the child-centered emphasis on the secondary curriculum:*

How can we deal more effectively with the wide range of differences between pupils in present secondary schools? What should we do about pupils whose needs are not met by the

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