

An Upward Extension of Core

PAUL R. KLOHR

This article describes development of a core program in grades ten-eleven-twelve at the University School, Columbus, Ohio. This experiment, now in its sixth year, represents an upward extension of the core program which has been in operation for several years in grades seven-eight-nine.

RECENT surveys of curricular practices such as those undertaken by Grace Wright¹ of the United States Office of Education indicate a slow but definite trend toward the development of core programs in secondary schools. However, such experimentation has been confined, reports show, almost exclusively to the junior high school level.

In the light of this situation, senior high schools struggling with the problem of providing a more functional curricular design may find some value in a description of how a core program has evolved in grades 10-11-12 of the University School at Columbus, Ohio.

This experiment with an upward extension of core, now in its sixth year, provides no final answers to the problem of curricular design. It does provide, however, an opportunity for continuous, cooperative staff thinking and planning with respect to the problem. Furthermore, preliminary evaluation indicates that core is a highly effective curricular organization at the senior high level in terms of learning experiences consistent with the democratic values of the school.

Since the total curriculum at the

University School is viewed as one continuous process, to understand the senior high core requires a brief examination of the core program at grades 7-8-9 out of which it evolved. Obviously within the limits of this writing, no complete account of all aspects of the program can be undertaken. Such accounts are available elsewhere.² Emphasis in this discussion, therefore, will be placed only on the general structure of the core and, more specifically, on the role of preplanned problem areas in an Adolescent Needs Core.

Beginnings in the Junior High

Since its founding in 1932, the curriculum of grades 7-8-9 at the University School has been experimental. During the school year 1945-46, a committee of the faculty, with Harold Alberty as consultant, undertook a re-examination of this program then described as a "Unified Studies Core." Basic to the thinking of this group were the several studies carried on by the faculty, such as *How Children Develop*.³

² For detailed description see: *A Description of Curricular Experiences—The Lower School*, 1952. (Mimeo.) 63 pp. and *A Description of Curricular Experiences—The Upper School*, 1952 (Mimeo.) 122 pp., prepared by the Faculty of the University School, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

³ University School, The Ohio State University. *How Children Develop*, 1946, 79 pp.

¹ Grace S. Wright, *Core Curriculum: An Inquiry Into Practices, 1949*, U.S. Office of Education, Bulletin 1950, No. 5 and *Core Curriculum Development*, Bulletin 1952, No. 5.

Paul R. Klohr is director of the University School, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

This re-examination resulted in the present half-day core in grades 7-8-9 which is best described as an "Adolescent Needs Core." Its over-all structure is shaped by three large areas of living: (1) Personal Living Problems (problems related to growing up), (2) Personal-Social Living (problems related to living with others), and (3) Social-Civic-Economic Living (problems of living in and understanding society).

Identified in each of these three large areas are the persistent problem areas adolescents face in growing up and living in the complex and changing present-day society. For example, "Understanding My Body" is a problem area in Personal Living, as is "Beliefs and Superstitions." In the Social-Civic-Economic Living area, are such problem areas as "Earning a Living" and "Community Agencies and Services."

Cooperative staff structuring of the core program in terms of large, pre-planned problem areas has helped to identify the persistent needs of junior high school boys and girls as they arise in daily living. In no instance has the structure limited the flexibility of learning units that various core teachers have developed with groups of students during the six-year period of its operation. For example, the kinds of learning units growing out of the broad problem area "Beliefs and Superstitions" have been as wide and varied as the needs of the various groups planning them have dictated. Yet, pre-planning in terms of general problem areas

has permitted, among other things, a realistic organization of teaching-learning resources, has encouraged wider use of special area teachers, and has helped to evaluate the over-all balance of learning experiences in the total curriculum. Even more significantly, perhaps, for teachers working in core for the first time, structuring in terms of broad problem areas tends to give some security to such individuals as they plan with students, security that formerly came largely from working within a subject field.

A Next Step Taken

At its 1946 Spring Planning Meeting, the staff took stock of its experimentation with the adolescent-needs core for half of the school day at the junior high school level. In studying the implications of this curricular design for grades 10-11-12, the staff recognized two major obligations: "In the first place, it is necessary to define and examine the characteristics of a democratic society and of the individual who plays his most effective role in this type of society. In the second place, it is necessary to define and analyze the kinds of experiences which are most likely to encourage growth in the desired direction."⁴

In the light of these obligations, the staff examined its senior high program, then organized as a Broad Fields curriculum with an "Orientation" period of two hours a week to provide for home-room and guidance activities. This examination led to the planning of a core for one third of the school day at grades 10-11-12. Democratic group

⁴University School, The Ohio State University. *Tentative Statement of the Core Program for Grades 10, 11, and 12, 1946*, (Mimeo.) p.1.

processes characterized this phase of staff planning.

Through the upward extension of core into the senior high school, the staff hypothesized that it was designing a curriculum which would, among other things, most effectively: (1) provide more adequate time for teachers to counsel with students, (2) permit a wider use of teacher-student planning, (3) create a teaching-learning situation in which logically organized subject matter fields function in the solution of significant problems, (4) develop further direct experiences in democratic living. Moving in this direction shifted the previous responsibility for teaching the common learnings

from the various subject fields to core. The remaining two-thirds of the school day was organized around courses which serve as electives with a special-interest education function or which serve to supplement further the general education function of core.

Faced with the problem of designing a structure for the newly-extended core, the staff, on the basis of its experience, examined the three large areas of living that comprised the over-all structure for core at grades 7-8-9. Again turning to basic research on adolescent needs and to staff study of growth and development of youth in a changing society, a number of broad problem areas were identified. During the first year,



Courtesy University School, Columbus, Ohio

WORK on a core problem encourages wide reading as well as "doing."

the following problem areas set the structure at the three grade levels:

Tenth Grade

School Living
Problems of Healthful Living
Problems of Living in An Urban Society
Problems of Producer-Consumer Economics
The Development of the American Scene

Eleventh Grade

School Living
Problems of Living in the Atomic Age
Problems of Establishing Beliefs
Problems of Making a Living (Exploring Vocations)
Current World Problems

Twelfth Grade

School Living
Problems of Producer-Consumer Economics
Implications of Scientific Advancement.
Major Conflicting Ideologies
The Bases for Determining Values.

The functions of problem areas such as these in the senior-high core are identical with their functions in the design of the junior-high core, some of which have already been described. They have been viewed by the staff as tentative and flexible guides. An analysis of the kinds of learning units developed by groups of teachers and students over the past five years at the University School in grades 10-11-12 reveals a balance of learning experiences distributed through the problem areas listed above. Yet, the many different kinds of units demonstrate the many

different directions learning has taken within these areas. Quite clearly, structuring the core in terms of broad problem areas has not been a restricting factor in the range and variety of learning units. Furthermore, staff experience indicates it has facilitated individual and group guidance at the senior high school level.

The Program in Action

Some of the real concerns of senior high school teachers and administrators are reflected in these kinds of questions, often raised about the University School's core: How is core staffed? Are you able to meet college entrance requirements? Are there opportunities for students to meet special needs and interests? Short of actual observations in the school, attention given to these three questions may help to give insight into the core program in action, for they indicate the kinds of questions the staff also faced in planning the program.

The core at University School is staffed by teachers trained in the various subject fields. They are individuals basically interested in the contributions of these fields to the general education of youth. Further, since each core teacher serves also as a counselor for his group, the core staff is made up of teachers interested in guidance. A typical teaching load at the senior high school level is one core class (meeting for one third of the school day) and two additional elective or special interest classes. For example, a core teacher with an English background may be scheduled with an eleventh-grade core and two English classes. A core teacher with a science background may have a tenth-grade core together



Courtesy University School, Columbus, Ohio

CORE provides many opportunities for individual counseling.

with a biology class and a physical science class. Teachers in fields such as music, related arts, and home arts, used as special resources in core, are scheduled at times when they may work cooperatively with core groups for which the core teacher has major responsibility. The remainder of their teaching load is made up of special interest or elective courses offered in their respective fields.

In general, this approach to staffing core implies that (1) each teacher's load is defined in terms of general education responsibilities and special-interest education responsibilities, and (2) a flexible scheduling of a part of each teacher's time is required.

College entrance requirements are interpreted at University School not in terms of time spent in various subject fields nor in terms of the number of Carnegie units completed. Rather, they are viewed as requirements that call for an analysis of the skills and understandings that a student has developed. The core teacher, who also functions as a guidance counselor, has major responsibility for making this analysis with the college-bound student. In this way, areas where the need for further growth is indicated are identified. Opportunities for meeting these needs exist in the special interest or elective courses outside of core. Core, by its very flexibility is also designed to help

meet such individual needs. Thus, "college preparation" in the school becomes a broad base of general education plus the appropriate special-interest education necessary to meet the special needs and interests of individual students. In this process, wide use is made of the judgment and evaluation of grade staffs—a group comprising all the teachers who come in contact with a student at a specific grade level.

To the college or university, the school sends a description of the various subject fields in which the student has had experience in grades 9 through 12. In addition, since letter or numerical grades are not a part of the evaluation program in University School, a careful analysis of the student's level of development with respect to basic skills and understandings is forwarded to the institution of higher education. Included in this appraisal are not only the common basic skills that contribute to academic success in college, but also evaluations of a student in terms of, for example, his study skills and habits, his ability to work with others, and his ability to plan and direct effectively his own life. What core has contributed to the all-around development of the student, it will be noted, is but one aspect of the total evaluation process.

Finally, there is the question of whether or not a senior-high program, a part of which is core, common for all students, adequately meets their special needs and interests. Just as core at the senior high school level may be viewed as helping the school to more adequately fulfill a college preparation function for some students, it provides also many opportunities in the Univer-

sity School for meeting other special needs and interests of students.

The fact that such a core organization introduces flexibility into the program at a time when students' needs and interests are becoming increasingly specialized contributes markedly to its effectiveness in this respect. This flexibility makes possible a wide range of individual and small group studies both within core and growing out of it, thus providing directly for individual differences among students.

Further Study Indicated

Using (1) the statement of philosophy and purposes of the school and (2) observations of the growth and development of students in the program, as criteria for judging the effectiveness of the core, a continuous evaluation of the program has characterized the undertaking from the outset. However, the staff recognizes a number of jobs to be done yet. Some of these, which represent "next steps" for the University School at its present stage of experimentation with a senior high core may be summarized as follows:

- (1) The need to develop a more adequate organization of resources, such as resource units or resource files.
- (2) The need to design evaluation procedures to appraise some of the "intangible" learnings of core.
- (3) The need to explore ways for a more effective use of special area teachers in core.
- (4) The need to experiment further with various organizations of time in an effort to find an answer to: how much of the day should be given to core at the senior high school level?

Copyright © 1953 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.