

Organization for Instruction Affects Pupil Values

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Two common approaches to instructional organization are examined in this article. The logical results of each of these types of program are also projected in this thoughtful analysis.

WHEN a school, or a school system, organizes its instructional resources and its curriculum content, it takes a major step in determining those values with which its students will leave the classroom. The limits within which the classroom teacher is allowed to operate may go a long way toward establishing the extent to which children will form the values a democratic society deems desirable.

Those of us who help set up instructional programs generally hold the teaching of values to be a most important aspect of classroom instruction. We generally feel, too, that those values we identify with democracy and democratic personality are chief among those we want to "get across" to children. And we say to teachers, "teach the values that will govern behavior, and behavior will take care of itself." Too often we then say other things through the way we organize our curriculums and determine content. Small wonder that our students leave their classrooms with far different values from those we had hoped to "get across"!

To illustrate, let us look at the ways in which two school systems with similar educational philosophies might organize instruction to attain the same stated goals. Then, let us note the

values left with the children in each of these systems. There will be a direct connection between the way in which instruction is organized and the values derived by students.¹

Two Approaches

School System A states as one of its main aims: "The education of children for democratic living." It probably subscribes to the notion that children learn best by *doing* things, by having vital experiences. It impresses upon its teachers that the teaching of democratic values is of paramount importance, since we live in a democracy. It will probably tell you that authoritarianism of any kind is incompatible with democracy. With these thoughts supposedly in mind, it develops its instructional program in the following manner.

There is a course of study for each

¹A word of caution may be in order here. The author does not intend to create the impression, through the use of the two hypothetical school systems, that one must choose one or the other of the two methods of organization illustrated. There are, and must be, myriad ways of organizing for instruction based upon peculiar problems of individual communities while at the same time remaining within the framework of democratic philosophy. The purpose here is to define sharply two methods of organization, one familiar and one not so familiar, so that the effect of organization upon pupil values may be more easily set forth.

grade level; it is binding upon the teachers; it states what, when, and perhaps how instruction is to take place; instruction is the teaching of stipulated subject matter. This course of study specifies textbooks and other materials which *must* be used. Supervisors are employed to interpret the course of study to teachers and to make sure they stick to it.

Now let us look at School System B and the way it organizes to achieve the same ends. This system also wants to educate children for democratic living, and it thinks they learn by doing things. It is likewise very concerned with teaching democratic values, and it voices strenuous objection to authoritarianism. So it develops its instructional program in the following way: This school, too, has a "curriculum guide," but this guide is organized in accordance with the thesis that the aims of a school are best met when the school first serves the purposes of its learners. The makers of this curriculum guide in School System B know that stipulated subject matter is not educative in itself, so they do not specify subject matter which *must* be taught. These curriculum makers know that experiences vital to the learners at the time of the experiencing constitute the medium through which true learning takes place. They also know that a vital experience for one class group is not necessarily a vital experience for some other class group, but is unique for each group, and that vitality of experience is dependent upon constantly varying factors affecting each group. So they know they cannot specify learning experiences in advance of an examination of the problems and purposes of each individual class group.

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Knowing these things, they have created a curriculum guide which does not concern itself primarily with what is to be taught, but rather with how to create an atmosphere in which students will want to learn. Such a guide will help teachers to discover real purposes of students, and to assist students as they attempt to realize these purposes. Such a curriculum guide might indicate recurring life situations which must be met by children in the process of growing up, but it would recognize the classroom group (students and teacher) as the ultimate determiner of curriculum content. This guide would endeavor to give the teacher an understanding of the problem census, group discussion and other possible methods of discovering needs and problems; it would suggest ways of attacking problems and democratic techniques which students might use to pursue their work; it might suggest evaluative techniques designed to furnish the students with indications of progress toward their goals. In summary, it would serve as a resource and an aid to teachers working through the purposes of their students toward a vital and meaningful education.

Results of Organization

Let us examine, now, the logical results of each of these types of curriculum organization.

In School System A, teachers are treated in a restrictive and authoritarian manner. They are expected, nevertheless, to turn out students who

love, understand and practice democracy. How can the teachers accomplish this? A person dealt with in an authoritarian way, with little respect shown for his own personality and integrity, is hardly apt to act any differently with his students. Even if a teacher were so disposed, it would be almost impossible for him to act so in School System A. He could not allow students their rightful democratic voice in determining and pursuing their own purposes because the course of study has already decided all the purposes, problems and answers. He could not take time out for a study of a real class problem because subject matter must be "covered." He could not convince his students that everybody's opinion has worth and that every individual is different and justly so when he has to strive to make all students reach a certain absolute standard—or fail. He could not use many methods that develop democratic attitudes because such methods cannot succeed with superimposed subject matter.

How can the children in System A develop those values associated with democracy in a setting that is not democratic? Might not the following be values that are more likely to develop?

(1) There's no use expressing your opinion—nobody ever listens to it. (2) It's OK to believe in democracy, but when you practice it, the people in power don't like it. (3) Don't be different—conform, and you won't get into trouble. (4) When you are a leader of people, you can do anything you want to because you are "supposed to know your business." (5) Democracy means merely voting and doing what the majority says. (6) Kids don't have any

rights. (7) Education is only for bright people—or maybe for the birds. (8) The book is always right. (9) The best people are those who get the best marks. (10) I'll be glad when I grow up so I can boss other people around.

These things happen—and School System A says it is turning out democratic citizens even though its organization may be fostering these very different learnings.

In System B, teachers are left free to explore the interests, needs and problems of the children in their classes. Teachers and students are encouraged to explore new areas of learning. Teachers are respected as being worthy and competent—they are treated in a democratic way. It therefore becomes easier for them to treat students democratically. And they are given help and encouragement in working with children and children's problems. Under these conditions, what values may students in School System B develop?

When they engage in projects that are completed only through the utilization of many people with varying abilities and attitudes, will they not learn to appreciate and value differences?

When they appraise the reasons for success or failure of a given undertaking, will they not find that people working together achieve more than do individuals striving against each other? And might not they find that group effort is stymied when individuals insist on rights for themselves but not for the rest of the group?

When a child is not compelled to strive against his classmates or the standards of an authoritarian teacher for recognition, will he not develop warmer feelings toward all people?

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When children are placed in the position of making decisions for themselves on a democratic basis—and living with the consequences—are they not likely to discover that there is more to democracy than voting and majority rule, and that freedom must be accompanied by judgment and a sense of duty to the rights of others?

When children are constantly allowed to select their leaders and representatives, is it not likely they will find that they must consider more than mere popularity? And they will probably discover that leaders have obligations to their followers.

When each child is allowed to pursue his individual purposes and develop his talents in school, does not education assume some role for him other than that of a necessary and boring evil?

We are now in a position to answer all these questions with "yes" because there is more than ample evidence to show us that these kinds of learnings take place when a school is successful in relating its curriculum organization directly to the values cherished in a democratic society.

Rigid conformity and great compulsion are not part of our democratic heritage. Any student subjected to such pressures as a result of short-sighted curriculum organization is not likely to develop a democratic outlook or the values we identify with a democratic personality. We school people say we want to develop democratic citizens and an appreciation for everything involved in the concept of democracy. If we are going to do this, all of us in education must make very sure we realize the implications of our efforts when we organize for instruction.

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