

Double Sessions Are Pressure Points

While "double sessions" may be unavoidable in many areas at the present time, we must observe very carefully the effect of this makeshift arrangement upon children and upon teachers. Certain program changes suggested in this article may help bring a bit more creativeness and flexibility even into the "double sessions."

"OH, IF I only had the time," "I feel continually rushed," "I never seem to get through my daily program," or "If I just dared take the time, I would like to try some special activities." These were expressions heard while talking with teachers experiencing double sessions.

The teacher who feels such frustrating tensions often unintentionally transmits these tensions to those with whom he works. Self-imposed pressure such as this is not a wholesome atmosphere in which learning should take place. There is a possibility that two undesirable situations may develop from this type of frustration. There is a good chance that the teacher, anxious to help pupils overcome the handicap of the shortened day, may tend to focus attention almost entirely upon academic achievement. On the other hand, there may be the teacher who comes in, rolls up his sleeves and says, "Well, what shall we do today? You know there isn't much time, but let's get busy," and then takes off in some direction he considers important. In either case, sight of the objectives may very likely become lost.

If a teacher has a tendency to place too much stress on the academic areas alone, it is reasonable to assume that he will also place too much dependence upon the results of the standardized objective tests. If the results of the tests indicate the pupil is making normal progress in the academic areas, the teacher may feel that he has been able to combat the ill effects of double sessions. Evaluation based on a diagnostic survey of the academic skills, however, is not enough. Since the total development of the child is of primary importance, the teacher must not permit himself to become regimented into such a narrow traditional pattern. He must assume the full responsibility to which he has dedicated his services.

The fact that Jim, who is in second grade, tested fourth grade on a reading achievement test does not indicate that he has been able to make

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the hurdle in achieving social acceptance. Has Donald gained the place in the group for which he has been struggling? Is the group more tolerant of Marita because of her conscious efforts to overcome her temper tantrums?

The teacher must not lose sight of the total objectives, if he is to help the pupil to develop all of his capabilities to the fullest degree possible. He must keep in mind the manner in which children achieve their developmental tasks as they mature. In order not to lose sight of the objectives in this period of stress and pressure resulting from the shortened day, the teacher must keep them constantly before him, and evaluate continuously in the light of all the objectives of a good education.

Review the Objectives

Changes in conditions require changes in methods and procedures, if the objectives are to remain the same. Similarly, if the teacher does not change his methods and procedures when conditions change, it seems safe to assume that his objectives have changed. The shortened school day presents a real challenge to the teacher and his methods. No longer can the school day be thought of as a divided day in which a certain amount of time is devoted to reading, to arithmetic, to spelling, to writing, to social studies, etc. The day has now become so short that double session teachers cannot afford to divide it into segments and still hope to maintain even a minimum level of education.

Present day objectives aim at personal and social development as well as development in the academic areas.

The concern of the teacher is the selection and organization of those experiences that may be expected to contribute most toward the education of the well-rounded individual.

Revamp the Curriculum

It seems quite universally accepted that it requires a five hour school day to achieve these total objectives under present curricular plans. Assuming that this is true, it becomes evident that the same results cannot be expected with the shorter day. If double sessions are not to deny the pupil equal educational opportunities, it is necessary to evaluate the present methods of achieving the objectives. Even though double sessions are not to be regarded as a satisfactory substitute for the regular school day, it is necessary to make the best of the situation until the emergency can be met in a more satisfactory way.

Double sessions, in the minds of many, have been thought of as a temporary problem. This kind of thinking has led to a feeling of complacency upon the part of many people who should be taking the lead in facing this problem realistically. This complacency seems likely to prove disastrous to a large number of our youth. The birth rate indicates that the largest number of first graders, thus far, will be enrolling in September, 1954, and that the heaviest load is yet to come when the 1952 population enters the first grade in September, 1958. Thus, double sessions at some or all of the levels may be seen as continuing well into the 1970's, unless physical facilities are made available to accommodate the increasing enrollments.

Temporary problems? Yes, but permanent enough to justify the best efforts of the profession in developing a curriculum which will utilize the limited time available to the best possible advantage. There appears to be a limited choice of alternatives in this matter. One alternative is to reduce each activity engaged in by a proportionate amount of the total reduction in time. A second choice is that of allowing the usual amount of time for some of the activities and of curtailing to a reduced share of time certain other activities considered less important. A third alternative is that of integrating all the activities in such a way that multiple outcomes may be expected. The "Problems of Social Living" approach offers such an opportunity around which to integrate all activities. In this manner one would be able to utilize many of the children's out-of-school, community experiences.

The first two of these alternatives may, ideally, be discarded without further consideration. Obviously, either of these choices results in an inequality of educational opportunity. The third alternative is the only one of the three that seems to offer some possibility of obtaining somewhere near the same results in the shorter period of time.

The "Problems of Social Living" approach is not new, but it is one which is often discussed and less often tried. It would require much careful planning on the part of the teacher. The role of the teacher would be that of selecting and coordinating the valuable social and educational experiences, and of guiding the group to successful realization of these experiences.

Points of departure for an integrated approach are numerous if the teacher will only be alert to them.

The daily sharing period presents many opportunities from which to begin. A complete unit on "Community Helpers" for second graders was developed from the following opening which presented itself at a sharing period. Bobby began, "My daddy got a promotion last night. He now has a real police car to drive." "What does he do, Bobby?" asked the group. "He chases people that run red lights and he catches 'em for speeding," replied Bobby. "Mrs. Jones, maybe Bobby's father could come to talk to us about getting our bicycles checked and talk to us about safety. Do you think he could, Bobby?" asked John. "My daddy's going to get a raise this month and we're going on a real vacation when school is out," piped up Ernie. "I know Ernie's daddy, Mrs. Jones. He's our mailman," spoke up Timmy. "I hardly ever see my dad," said Jimmy. "Why don't you?" Bobby wanted to know. "Cause he works nights. My mom works until I get home from school and then my dad goes to work and works until late at night. He works in a bakery so we can have fresh bread each day," replied Jimmy.

There is no end to the opportunities offered in such an opening as this. Each of the children wants to talk about his dad. It is very important to Bobby that his dad has been promoted, and it is important to the group to know how each contributes his part to the community. A problem centered around such an immediate interest can lead into a more thorough un-

derstanding and appreciation of the community. It is rich in possibilities of utilizing the "Community Helpers" as resources. Parents are proud to be asked to help. They know what it means to their children. How proud Bobby will be to bring his dad in and ask him to show the other boys and girls his gun and badge. Skills? Can reading not be learned in the story about the "Postman"? Spelling and writing, too, can be learned in this way. And cannot arithmetic be taught by posing a problem about the two blocks north and the three blocks east that the postman walks?

Reorganization of the curriculum around such problem centers would combine or integrate related subjects, thereby allowing more time for the broad area of social living. It would allow more freedom of choice in selection among needs, interests and community resources available. It would tend to reduce subject matter load since subject matter would be used as a means instead of an end. This approach would save time and be more productive, since understandings, attitudes, knowledge, skills, etc., would be developed in context.

In changing or developing a curriculum, the teacher must not lose sight

of the need for reappraising his methods and techniques of evaluation. The devices that served in one situation may not be equally valid and reliable in another situation.

Reappraise the Measuring Devices

As has been pointed out, each curriculum requires its own particular evaluating devices. Evaluation should be a continuous part of the planning and should be done in light of all the objectives sought. This means that there is a need for many types of evaluative devices and means of interpreting and recording the results in a meaningful and understandable manner. The use of standardized achievement tests will serve the purpose of giving the teacher assurance that his new approach will successfully bring about the desired results in the academic areas. But these tests can tell only a part of the story. The teacher must find the means to evaluate and record the more subjective behaviors sought.

In this period of pressures, with the possibility of losing sight of the objectives greater than ever before, it becomes now more necessary than ever to reconsider our methods of teaching and evaluation.



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