

# Organizing Schools for the Future

**What significant movements are beginning to influence curriculum changes in today's schools?**

"**M**Y INTEREST is in the future, because I am going to spend the rest of my life there," says Charles F. Kettering, General Motors executive, scientist and inventor.

As educators, our greatest concern is our students and they are the future. Where do we look, and to whom do we listen as we organize our schools for tomorrow?

Ralph Tyler, writing in *The Elementary School Journal*, says that "an examination of the developments in America indicates several trends which have great significance for the work of the school.... With increasing concentration of population, with rapidly changing conditions industrially, socially, economically and politically, the ability to learn new skills, to acquire new knowledge, and to deal with new problems will become even more essential."<sup>1</sup>

J. Hartt Walsh writes, "It may very well be that by 2000 A.D., the three R's will be replaced by the three C's of comprehension, creation and communication."<sup>2</sup>

Let us consider the forces which have influenced and are continuing to influence the curriculum of today's schools: the scientific movement, child development and the group dynamics movement.

<sup>1</sup> Ralph W. Tyler, *The Elementary School Journal*, LVII (November 1956), 76, 77.

<sup>2</sup> J. Hartt Walsh, *The Nation's Schools*, Vol. 57 (April 1956), 50.

In addition let us look at the movements which are beginning to affect changes and should exert more influence in the future:

Intergroup education with its contribution to the development and change in attitudes

Research in basic skill development; the concept of continuity and sequence in their development

Need for rich, stimulating, permissive school environment

Influence of social change

Studies relating to the theory of learning.

Principles developed from studies relating to the above are determining practices which are becoming prevalent in our schools. Rather than enumerate long lists of these principles, which are to be found in many of our educational books, let us illustrate the practical application of some of the principles which are operating for a school of today.

## \* A School Tells Its Story

The staff of this school of today has organized its curriculum study to facilitate the transfer of research findings into learning activities for boys and girls. This school has 850 pupils, 40 teachers and 1200 parents, and is situated in a middle class suburb adjoining an industrial metropolis. The practices to be described have been evolved during the past seven

years. The first three years were consumed in working in a system-wide curriculum project. Seven objectives for the school system, a philosophy of education and a theory of learning grew out of this study.

At the end of three years, the staff members were eager to put their findings into practice. How could these objectives, philosophy and theory of learning become part of the everyday classroom learning activities? The process used to develop and refine the three parts of their study was a growing experience for children, teachers and parents. They had tasks to do and responsibilities to be shared. The staff elected a steering committee of five teachers, who worked as a small committee in defining problems, deciding what tasks were to be done, suggesting approaches and presenting all ideas for discussion. As leadership emerged, ideas were born and nurtured. Parents and children were involved in teacher-planned workshops, panels and studies.

Problems have been identified by the staff and the solutions found through study of relevant research and active group participation. Practical application of the three parts of the study was the writing of resource units in the field of social studies. These were prepared by groups of teachers hoping to stimulate and develop growth in understandings, skills and appreciations. By incorporating music, art, physical education, library and other resource areas, they believed they were also justified in saying that they were planning for integration through these units. As they worked in developing resource units and studying the pertinent research, they became aware of a problem they had as a staff. They must have some common values and understandings.

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As a group, they became interested in the growth and development of children, and grade levels lost their rigidity and meaning. Continuity and sequence in the learning experiences of children became a fascinating subject. What are children like in the kindergarten? What do you do? Where are concepts and skills first introduced? What and where is the initial stage? What follows? They decided to do something about these problems.

The quality of learning in the social studies and other content areas is related to the student's ability to use wisely the many skills of reading. Ability to read independently, to locate, to organize and to evaluate a variety of reading materials helps children to retain ideas. To achieve the above abilities, they must plan learning activities in which children have an opportunity to know, develop and refine these skills in a functional program which is both continuous and sequential in nature. They worked an entire year studying and compiling learning activities which would be fertile ground for the development of the word-attack skills. These activities considered the interests and developmental stages of child growth. From the retelling of a story, following directions in a game, and taking turns in the kindergarten, to the functional application of the rules of syllabification in the sixth grade they fashioned a chain of learning activities, link by link.

Because the staff members enjoyed success and satisfaction from this enterprise, they decided to go into the study of the continuity and sequence of work-study skills. A few months were spent in study and discussion before they went into the forming of the links or even con-

sidering the chain. The staff members decided that they had begun the previous job without sufficient study.

As they have worked, parents and children have been a part of the plan. Children, teachers and parents have formed panels to keep large groups abreast of their progress. As leadership has become flexible, ideas flow freely and procedures are easily changed. Teachers are suggesting changes in areas which affect their feelings about their jobs. They are eradicating many of their minor irritations simply because it is easier to solve a problem than to gripe about it. This group has become professional in its reading and eagerness for sharing and trying new ideas.

The staff found, through study and appraisal, that the student population of their school was suffering from overprotection. The student council was established to help the youngsters in setting up their own "rules of the game" and in becoming responsible for solving their own problems with guidance available. The staff has observed noticeable growth in the youngsters' selection of student council representatives. The student council has established an excellent record in authority and responsibility. True, there are young children who wear authority noisily, but generally this improves with wearing. Growth has been observed in the children's ability to see themselves as others see them. Children and teachers cooperate in writing individual evaluations. Children are sharpening their evaluative skills as they determine their goals and understand how to reach these objectives.

The sharing of ideas, the eagerness to help each other, the development of friendships and the social functions are indicative of the good feelings engendered through solving common problems.

The growth that develops through respect for a group of which you are a member, as well as self respect for jobs well done, has a healthy and positive reaction.

The staff has been troubled by the apparent double standard of goals developed by home and school which frustrates many children. Through parent-teacher planning, the former large meeting with a general approach type of PTA program has been discontinued. Parents and the teacher of a particular group of children discuss child development principles and developmental levels of children, as well as the specific curriculum which is based on the interests and needs of their children. The relaxing of impossible standards and some evidence of growth in understanding and enjoying children at the developmental level have been observed.

The Parent-Teacher Association has a large membership, and in turn has an active executive board. The staff and student council are represented on its board. In this way they are all aware of objectives and are ever ready to evaluate each other's ideas.

### A School Plans for Tomorrow

What does this staff look forward to in the school of tomorrow? What kind of plans are they working on now? What plans are they dreaming about?

One of the most important changes which is in progress this year is that of "continuous progression." There will be no grade levels from kindergarten through grade three. Though many schools have adopted the ungraded primary block, the staff has studied for three years a plan which is unique in that it is tailored to meet local needs. The great number of parents involved and their understanding of the concept has helped in obtaining

the approval of the Board of Education.

"Continuous progression" will allow children to progress at their own rate of ability. A handbook relating some common agreements reached about continuity and sequence of learning activities for the young child has been compiled. It is believed that this will help in meeting the needs of the gifted, the average and the slow.

Look ahead ten years and what do we see? We will only be able to notice a few of the dreams that have materialized. There will be no grade levels, but groups of children and a teacher, or teachers, planning and working together. Materials will be developed and tailored according to the interests and the abilities of the individuals within the group. Audio-visual materials will be in the majority of the resource materials used. Group planning, a wealth of materials, increased knowledge regarding continuity and sequence of growth, a better understanding of how children learn, and a growing respect for and use of pertinent research will sharpen the staff's approach toward its goals. Opportunities for learning will be broad and varied. The school will draw in many resource people to help meet children's interests and the children will travel broadly to satisfy needs and interests. "Learning by seeing"<sup>3</sup> will be as important, or perhaps more important, than "learning by doing."

Evaluating and improving the curriculum will be a major task of all teachers. They will have a twelve-month job. The student vacation period will be used by the staff in serious study and discussion, and in improving both the content and process in learning activities. Some teachers may leave for special study at a university with the purpose of helping the

entire staff. This extra time will provide for workshops planned by parents, children and teachers with time to take more than a general look at specific ideas and problems. Secretaries and clerks will be in greater number to assist teachers in preparation of materials and in relieving them of purely clerical details.

Familiar sights will strike your eye. The staff will be helping children in creating an atmosphere based on democratic principles. Understanding of our responsibilities, as well as our rights in a democracy, will motivate us (children, parents and teachers) to seek truth and to grow in understanding and appreciation of our way of life. The communication skills will be continuously used, evaluated and improved.

A few guides in shaping our schools of tomorrow may well be:

1. Leadership is a group function.
2. The purpose of research is to improve the quality of education.
3. Problems must be solved by all those concerned in the solution.
4. Channels of communication must be broadened and the quality of communication skills improved.

In addition, leadership must accept the responsibility for continuously improving the atmosphere of the school so that ideas evolve which are shared and implemented in classroom activities. In-service education must be theoretical as well as practical. Teachers must create as well as practice. Development of sharper techniques in interpreting needs of students in society will increase the involvement of students in activities.

All must undertake the task of improving the quality of education as a personal responsibility. Each must study, share, evaluate and implement to the optimum of his ability the joint results of our tasks.

Educators must build for a future in

<sup>3</sup> J. Hartt Walsh, *The Nation's Schools*, Vol. 57 (April 1956), 50.

which technology will demand creative geniuses and skillful interpreters of the dreams. New and specific understandings and appreciations of an individual's responsibilities toward the democratic way of life must be developed by our schools.

As teachers, the most important responsibility is to improve the quality of learning of boys and girls. The needs of

all children, and particularly our own group's needs, will be interpreted into learning activities in the classroom. Children of all levels of ability must function effectively and creatively. The world will survive on ideas and their skillful interpretation and application. As Winston Churchill says, "The empires of the future will be the empires of the mind."

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## Evaluation— for Today and for the Future

**Realization of educational objectives is an intimate process of social change that involves reorientation of teacher perspectives based upon new knowledge that is carefully worked into the culture of the school and community.**

**H**OW EFFECTIVE are our means of achieving our objectives in education? In recent years much thoughtful effort has gone into the reformulation and clarification of educational objectives in the light of an ever-growing body of knowledge about society and human development. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, has taken a leadership role in this task and has made some distinguished contributions through its publications.

Are we implementing these objectives? In looking for evidences of school practices that implement these objectives we find some exciting and provocative experiments, such as the work of Hilda Taba and her associates in the Committee on Intergroup Education, and the

work of The Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation and the schools associated with it. There are also emerging some action research studies of real promise. But these efforts are rare enterprises in the general school programs.

There is, by and large, a great hiatus between our stated objectives and actual school practices. A visit to schools and classrooms across the country reveals little fundamental change in classroom practices from those of 30 years ago. It is true that today there is less arbitrary restriction on child behavior, better understanding of children's growth needs, and more attractive and interesting instructional materials. But a very large majority of classroom teachers still are

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