

# A Movement Emerges

**The junior high school movement is once again becoming a "cutting edge" of educational thought and practice. Its assets are renewed interest, a corps of able, experienced and dedicated leaders, and the necessity of creating an adequate school for today's adolescents.**

**D**IVISION of American public schools into three levels, each of which consisted of a number of grades, was neither an accident nor a decision suddenly arrived at and quickly implemented. In colonial schools, periodic reclassification of pupils on the basis of achievement did not exist. The scheme of promotions from one grade to the next was a development probably resulting from increase in the numbers of pupils and consequent increasing complexity, during the early and middle nineteenth century. Before the twentieth century began, the practice had become set into the familiar and still popular pattern of eight elementary and four secondary grades.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, the eight-four plan had been accepted and implemented all over the country. However, criticisms of it, of its curriculum and its products, which have never been absent from American life, began to increase among administrators and professors in colleges and universities. Consequently investigations, studies, surveys and conferences were organized by school people to search for the weaknesses in the public schools. The "Reorganization Movement" got under way.

Specific complaints and suggestions for changes that were made, dealt with duplication in content in the elementary

grades; poor preparation evidenced by college freshmen; large drop-out in grades 7, 8 and 9; inadequate training of teachers for grades 7 and 8; recognition of the early adolescent's need for extracurricular activities (something other than academic textbook learnings); growing pressures to add practical and fine arts; and the increasing need for new buildings resulting from the rapid increase in enrollments. A potent force dictating change was the new knowledge of and insight into the nature of adolescence which pointed to the desirability of beginning secondary schooling at an age earlier than 14.

In 1892 a group later to be known as The Committee of Ten, was appointed by the National Council of Education for the specific purpose of studying the several subject matter areas included in the public school curriculum. Its report, one of the most significant in American education, recommended introduction of science, algebra, geometry and foreign language in grades below 9, or, the reallotment of grades into six-year elementary and six-year secondary schools.

In 1893 the Department of School Superintendence of the NEA, appointed the Committee of Fifteen to inquire specifically into the problems of reorganization of the school system. Their survey

of opinion did not yield conclusive answers, so they recommended continuation of the 8-4 plan.

In 1899 a committee representing the NEA Department of Secondary and Higher Education, after four years of study, recommended a "unified six-year high school . . . beginning with the seventh grade."

Still another group took action in 1899, namely, the Committee on College Entrance Requirements. It was the first one to point out that developmental changes occurring in children, dictate the initiation of secondary education in the seventh year. They also said that reduction of the elementary school to six years would secure easier transition for children going into secondary schools and decrease the drop-outs.

In the very early years of the twentieth century, the University of Chicago played a leading role in educational reorganization. Conferences for study and recommendation held there, brought together representatives of the private academies and the public high schools. In general the outcome of their research was support for the 6-6 plan.

By 1905, the NEA Department of Secondary Education had established a standing committee on equalizing the time for elementary and secondary education. Among their recommendations was introduction of departmentalization into grades 7 and 8. They also emphasized the need for science laboratories and shops for the younger pupils. Committees on six-year courses were also set up for the specific purpose of reforming the 8-4 plan.

A Committee on Economy of Time in Education was appointed in 1907, to study that factor which had received constant attention for the previous twenty years. Its 1913 report was the first one in

which organization of an intermediate school was recommended. One of the suggestions was a 6-4-2 plan, to include 2 years of Junior College. Another suggestion was the 6-3-3 plan which had already been inaugurated in some school systems.

The many reports, surveys and conferences which had taken place between 1900 and 1910 had already produced enough support for courageous administrators to begin to experiment. Break-down of the 8-4 plan was under way; 6-3-3, 9-4, and 7-4 were being tried. Probably the first complete separation of the intermediate grades occurred as early as 1896, when in Richmond, Indiana, grades 7 and 8 were housed in a separate building. In many other places, internal changes already had departmentalized grades 7 and 8, instituted subject promotion, used the "Home Room" for guidance and copied other features of the high school.

### The Junior High School Emerges

The year 1909-10 is generally accepted as the time when the junior high school movement, per se, began with the use of the 6-3-3 plan in Columbus, Ohio and in Berkeley, California. The name Junior High School was first used in Columbus. In both cities there were attempts to embody the best recommendations that had been made by educational leaders during the previous twenty year period. As the result of the favorable attention given to those schools, the movement rapidly gained momentum.

In his report for the school year 1913-14, the Commissioner of Education defined the new development as follows:

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A Junior High School is defined as an organization of grades 7 and 8 or 7 to 9, whether housed with the senior high school or independently, to provide by various means for individual differences, especially by an earlier introduction of prevocational work or of subjects usually taught in the high school.<sup>1</sup>

The number of junior high schools increased rapidly. By 1926 there were more than 1100. Nearly a thousand more were added in the next eight years. In 1952 there were 3,227 separate schools and 10,351 combined junior-senior high schools.<sup>2</sup> All over the country new ones are now being built as rapidly as possible in an effort to keep up with the swelling tide of pupils. In rural areas and consolidated districts, the junior high school is usually part of a six-year organization. Even there, however, efforts are made to keep the younger students in separate wings and to select for them teachers who are sensitive to their needs. Even in the six year school, there is evidence that a somewhat different philosophy underlies the kinds of educational procedures employed and the kinds of materials provided.

In urban centers where numbers permit separate buildings, there is no unanimity with respect to the grades included in the junior high school. When the elementary schools are not overcrowded (now a rare occurrence) they want to retain the seventh grades. As soon as the senior high schools are filled they are forced, though reluctant, to let the ninth grades go into the junior high schools.

<sup>1</sup> For the preceding sections, the author has depended upon William T. Gruhn and Harl R. Douglass, *The Modern Junior High School*, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1947, Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>2</sup> Circular 379. Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, D. C.: Superintendent of Documents, 1952.

These factors have seriously retarded the development of a unified functioning program in many cities.

### Changes Are Occurring

The junior high school movement continues to be fraught with controversy. Some educational leaders believe that a common philosophy needs to be established for all grades K through 12, the implementation of which would solve some of the most serious problems confronting education today. They are apt not to be in accord with the commonly held belief that "Junior Highs are different." To other leaders, the nature of early adolescence makes it imperative to set up for these pupils, learning experiences and teaching methods that differ somewhat from those which are used in the elementary schools and those deemed satisfactory in the senior high schools.

Change in the basic structure of the school day, is probably the most significant development in the junior high school movement. It has come about in response to the need to reduce the pupil-teacher load which results from departmentalization and to provide a more simplified day in which a degree of stability in relationships can be achieved. Consequently very many junior high schools are incorporating a block of time into the daily schedule, thus breaking down the rigidly departmentalized day. The time block is called by various names—basic studies, unified studies, general education, common learnings, core class, and in some places it retains the subject matter names: English-social studies or math-science. Almost invariably the last named designations also mean that the teacher adheres to subject matter courses. The most forward development permits the teacher to cross subject matter barriers as he and the pupils, together, plan

those learning experiences which are of importance to them.

Another development in the junior high school movement is the integration into the regular program of the so-called club activities. In some places this means organization of special interest groups which meet at various times throughout the day and week. Unfortunately this tends to increase the number of teacher contacts and the excitement and noise attendant upon many changes of classroom.

Some kinds of learning experiences in the club concept are provided for best when they become part of the unit developed in the "core" class. Other kinds, formerly offered mostly as clubs, are best taken care of by providing diverse and rich fine-arts and practical-arts opportunities for both boys and girls. There are schools in which the clubs have become "electives" which are seen as extensions of the regular subject offerings. In other places an entirely voluntary after school program is all that is offered. The development of teams for interscholastic competitions plagues many principals while others have developed fine programs of intramural games for all students.

The guidance program is another area in which significant development is taking place. Some schools retain the superimposed non-functioning home room plan, hampered by lack of time and the defects of direct character education lessons. In other localities, the guidance function is removed from the teacher and placed in the hands of counselors. The counselors may teach human relations and vocational information part of the day and test and confer with individuals the rest of the time. Where integrated teaching goes on in the block of time, those teachers usually accept responsibility for the guidance of the children in

those classes, believing that only a teacher who really knows and likes a child can guide him.

Although exploration has always been accepted as one of the needs in the junior high school, only recently has the movement developed new ways of meeting it. Whereas formerly the club program and an elective or two were designed as the exploratory program, the entire curriculum is now being envisioned as the means whereby the pupils can find out about themselves, the physical and social world, and the world at work. Implementation of this new approach means the change from a narrowly conceived shop program for boys and home economics minors for girls, to rich and varied creative experiences for both sexes together in both sides of the house. Human relations become the focus of attention as the objectives become understanding and practice of the arts and skills of making a life rather than of making a living.

### **Confusion and Threats Remain**

The most serious threat to the junior high school movement, lies in the attacks of the "back-to-the-fundamentalists." Some of them see in every young teenager a potential delinquent. They may believe that the school is responsible when it "reduces its standards" and fails to "make them learn" to read and write and spell and count more perfectly. Some of the attackers are senior high school teachers who, not being informed about the nature of the early adolescent, still clinging to the mind-storage theory of learning, and loath to change their own programs to meet the needs of all the children of all the people, believe that the junior high school movement is responsible for all the ills that beset them.

Possibly the most serious confusion in

the junior high school movement has to do with pupil behavior, with "discipline." In the attempt to cope with the instability and unaccountability of the young teenager, some schools have retained or returned to many rules and regulations authoritatively derived and administered, to regimentation and rigidity, to silent classrooms and even to the use of corporal punishment. Although the junior high school movement was initially characterized by the desire to develop democracy in administration and in the classroom, progress has been hampered in many places. On the other hand, there are schools in which pupils participate through their student associations, in administration and control and in the development of their learning activities in the classrooms.

### **An Autumn Goodnight**

The maple is home from the party.  
The dance of the summer is done.  
Her glittering play-gown of  
Crimson,  
Topaz,  
Gold,  
She drops at her lovely feet  
Fold  
Upon fold.  
She bows down her graceful young  
head  
In a prayer,  
And raises white moonlit arms up  
to heaven.  
With a sigh that rustles  
The leaves at her feet  
She sleeps.

—ALICE JOHNSON—*Grade 7A, South Pasadena, California, Junior High School.*

The junior high school movement which was on the "cutting edge" of educational thought and practice from the early 1930's to the mid-1940's, lost ground as it became crystallized. Now again, renewed interest, a corps of able, experienced and dedicated leaders, and the necessity of creating an adequate school for today's adolescents are ministering to the revitalization of the movement. Organization of the Junior High division of NASSP and of groups of Junior High principals (notably in the West Coast states) has also strengthened the movement. In the new and beautiful schools which are to be found throughout the nation, new programs are being tried. There is the chance that once more the junior high school movement will accept leadership in American education.

### **Night on the Desert**

Night steals over the desert;  
Dusk transforms cacti into shapes  
Not unlike those of living people.

A breeze springs up, calling  
And murmuring to itself in the hills  
And the canyons.

Stars appear out of the black,  
Twinkling and shining their messages  
To one another.

The moon rises from over the hills,  
Lighting the shadows and sending  
A weird glow over the sand.

A tiny lone human on these vast wastes  
Raises his head and wonders  
At the beauty of the night.

—BARBARA MCLEAN—*Grade 7A, South Pasadena, California, Junior High School.*

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