

# An Experimental Program for Young Adolescents

**In the William McKinley Upper Grade Center, each child is working at his own level, is not being held back by those with less ability, and the slow learner is not being rushed or discouraged by those with greater ability.**

**F**ROM coast to coast and border to border, boards of education are being hard pressed to stretch the revenue dollar. Each is reviewing its sources of income, investments in fixed assets, expenditures for new buildings, and the increased cost of educating today's children to meet the problems of tomorrow. Great emphasis is being placed on the proper and efficient utilization of buildings, personnel, equipment and instructional materials, not only with the idea of keeping costs down, but also with the intent of improving the over-all educational program.

As elsewhere, the war years brought about a tremendous increase in the birth rate in Chicago. This population increase was supplemented by a large number of in-migrants to meet industry's demands for more and more workers. Changes in the social order in other sections of the country increased the city's population to the point where double sessions became a familiar part of a school's organization in many sections of the city. The Board of Education found it difficult to keep pace with the growing school population. Classrooms became a precious and costly commodity.

No other area in the city of Chicago

was as hard pressed for classrooms as was the midwest section—the gateway to the city—designated as District 8. Convenient to public transportation and the railroads, it has been the port of entry for thousands. It has become the first stop in a series of moves from one home to another, from one job to another, and, for the children, the first of many transfers from one school to another within a relatively short period of time. It was not uncommon to find the pupil transiency rate exceeding one hundred per cent. The Board of Education was faced with the problem of providing classrooms and an educational program which would help the children adjust to a new physical, social and economic environment.

Two high schools, Crane Technical High School, serving boys only, and the McKinley High School, offering a general coeducational program, were located in the heart of this area and relatively close to each other. The combined enrollment of the two schools was less than the capacity of Crane Technical High School. Neighboring elementary schools were filled to capacity and all were operating on a double session basis. In an effort to alleviate this condition, the Board of

Education, on the recommendation of Dr. Benjamin C. Willis, General Superintendent of Schools, approved the following plan in June 1954: (a) to modify Crane facilities so that provision could be made for a coeducational program, consolidating Crane and McKinley High Schools by transferring McKinley students to Crane; (b) to convert the McKinley High School building for elementary school use. This additional elementary school facility would eliminate the double shift sessions of four elementary schools.

### A Plan Develops

How best to utilize the former high school building became the next question. After careful studies, a decision was made that in view of the physical facilities within the school plant, the building could, with a minimum outlay of time and money, best serve the needs of students in grades seven and eight. Removing these grades from neighboring schools would ease the existing crowded conditions and eliminate the double sessions. Thus the William McKinley Upper Grade Center came into being.

The writer of this article was appointed to the principalship of the school effective as of August 1954, a month prior to the opening of the new semester. An assistant principal and a clerk were also assigned to assist in the organization and preparation. With the cooperation of all departments, requisitions covering rehabilitation, instructional materials, furniture, equipment and supplies were prepared and processed within a relatively brief period of time. On September 7, 1954, McKinley opened its doors to approximately 650 seventh and eighth graders.

Early in the planning stage it became evident that a physical plant, although it

could influence, could not make the educational program. The available facilities and the large number of seventh and eighth grade pupils suggested the possibility of developing a program designed to meet the needs of a specific group of children — young adolescents. Conferences were held with General Superintendent Willis, members of his cabinet, and Miss Bernice Boye, District Superintendent of District 8. The following tentative and broad educational program was suggested: (a) the seventh and eighth grade program would be departmental in nature; (b) the specific needs of the local group of pupils were to determine the curriculum; (c) the details of the program, though subject to review by Dr. Willis and Miss Boye, were to be developed by the school staff.

An analysis of the available records of the incoming seventh and eighth grade student body revealed that approximately 36.5 per cent were one or more years over-age for their grade. Ages ranged from 11 through 18; their IQ's ranged from 53 to 135 with the median being 89. The median reading levels based on standardized tests were 4.2, 5.0, 5.6 and 5.9 for grades 7B, 7A, 8B and 8A respectively, and ranged from 2.4 to 11.5. The median arithmetic scores were 5.1, 5.3, 5.5 and 5.8, and ranged from 2.9 to 10.0. Many of the pupils had no intention of continuing their education once they were graduated. The majority of the students were not born in the city or state; of those who were, many had attended three or four other Chicago Public Schools prior to being transferred to McKinley.

A community study revealed that al-

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*A story in human relations. These students, working congenially together, are typical of those attending the William McKinley Upper Grade Center.*

though rents were high, housing was substandard. High rents forced families to double up, limiting the amount of room available for desirable family living. Family income was below the city average, even though usually both parents were employed. The number of families receiving assistance from public agencies was far above the city average, as was the juvenile delinquency rate. Poor housing resulted in a high transiency rate. Little community interest and desire for self-improvement were evident. At present, the large public housing projects, 7 and 14 stories high, and the concentrated action of community councils, are helping to stabilize the community and improve conditions in general.

To staff the school, some permanently certified teachers were assigned, with the others drawn from the substitute pool. For several this was a first teaching assignment. The recency of their training made it possible to initiate and de-

velop a program which was free of the inhibitions of the past and provided a core of teachers who were responsible for our present program—a program designed to meet the physical, emotional, social and educational needs of each individual child. The program, from its inception to the present, was developed in three stages.

### Grouping

Originally, children within each grade, 7B, 7A, 8B and 8A, were grouped in homerooms on the basis of their reading achievement scores, and followed a "block" program. While this was justifiable in some respects, many problems soon developed. Homerooms made up of those with the lowest reading achievement presented the largest number of social, disciplinary and truancy problems. No apparent correlation existed between the pupils' reading and arithmetic achievement levels. Homerooms with the

poorest readers were not developing leaders with qualities desirable and necessary for participation in the various school activities. The group was not contributing to the development of school spirit. Few, if any, were eligible for listing on the honor roll. The recognition of these problems suggested the second stage.

With the next incoming group, the students from the various contributing schools were assigned to homerooms without regard to academic achievement. Students were then grouped for language arts, social studies and arithmetic on the basis of their achievement in reading. The programming was more complicated and time-consuming, but the improvement in general attitude and school spirit was most gratifying. Three limitations became apparent: (a) the range within the language arts and arithmetic classes was still too broad, (b) insufficient opportunities were being presented to children at the extremes of the achievement scales, and (c) the desired flexibility in student programming was not being attained.

The third phase of the program developed as the result of careful study mixed with strong hopes and is a complete departure from standard grouping practices. It involves using the entire upper grade student body, 7B's, 7A's, 8B's and 8A's, as a single unit in determining groups in the areas of language arts and arithmetic. Based on test results in language arts and arithmetic, plus teachers' observations, students are grouped according to achievement within the two areas. No longer would the semester grade classification of a child influence his placement in either language arts or arithmetic. If a student's achievement indicates that his level is 4.8 in an area, he is programmed to a group which

ranges in ability between 4.6 and 5.5, without regard to his semester grade. For administrative purposes, levels are used in lieu of grades. In all, nine levels were set up, with the ninth level designed for those students whose achievement levels are beyond the eighth grade. Under this form of organization, each child is working at his own level, is not being held back by those with less ability, nor is the slow learner being rushed or discouraged by those with greater ability. If, in the teacher's opinion, a child is improperly placed, it is a minor matter to adjust his program so that he is constantly working to the best of his ability. Tests are administered annually to measure progress and to determine whether regrouping would be advisable. Any language arts or arithmetic class may consist of 7B, 7A, 8B and 8A students. The common denominator is their achievement within the narrow limits of the specific class.

In the areas of music, art, physical education and science, the grade year, that is, seventh or eighth, is the basis for programming students to these areas. The semester of a particular grade—7B, 7A, 8B or 8A, is used to program students in the areas of social studies, home arts and industrial arts. In the course of the week, a child comes in contact with students from his own and other rooms and grades.

The standard period is 40 minutes long. During the week a pupil will spend five periods in each of the following areas: language arts, social studies and arithmetic. For the very slow learners, social studies and language arts have been unified, allowing for a longer block of time. Students are also programmed for two or three periods of physical education, science, art and music. Girls are programmed for either three or four periods in home arts. In view of the exist-

ing socioeconomic conditions, great emphasis is placed on family living, consumer education, child care and nutrition. Boys are programmed to the industrial arts shops for either four or six periods weekly. Basic tool processes are taught and utilized, instruction in safety, consumer education and related materials in the areas of plastics, woodworking, electricity and metals are presented. Vocational opportunities in various areas are also discussed. A minimum of one library period, two periods devoted to club activities, and three periods with the homeroom teacher for health, safety, guidance, counseling and civic activities completes the student's weekly program. For those interested, instruction in the playing of band instruments is offered. Individual needs necessitate modifications of the preceding program, with the result that we seldom have two identical programs.

### Club Program

The club program was developed to meet specific interests and to develop new ones. Included in the program are such activities as the junior and senior girls' choruses, boys' glee club, band, newspaper, service club, charm club, art clubs, a Junior Red Cross, three craft groups, modern dancing, stage crew, audio-visual club, junior librarians, science club, and two groups which concern themselves with improving their reading and arithmetic skills. For the approximately 10 per cent who do not wish to participate in the club program, rooms are set aside for supervised study purposes. In only one group, the senior girls' chorus, is ability a requisite. As other interests are shown, additional clubs will be programmed.

The last period of every Wednesday is set aside for assembly programs, with the seventh and eighth grades alternating in

***Research for the gifted. In the William McKinley Upper Grade Center an attempt has been made to arrange for each child to work at his own level.***

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*Coaching non-English speaking children. Each passing semester sees improvement in school spirit and in the relationship among the various groups.*

participation. During the school year, all departments sponsor programs. Included in the schedule are activities designed to recognize national holidays, special events, orient new students to McKinley, acquaint students with various local, state and national agencies, and programs which are the outgrowth or culminating activities of various classes or clubs. The final assembly program of each semester is the graduation—the goal of all of our students, and for some, the only graduation in which they ever will participate. This January, 132 students were graduated, and this June, the class will number 198.

As a supplement to the regular educational program, we participate in the "Lighted Schoolhouse Program" which makes the building and its facilities available to the community for recreational purposes three late afternoons and one evening a week. As the program develops

and the need arises, we may see the building open every day and evening the year round.

The success of a program can be measured by the progress made. If we use the test results of those graduated this February in comparison to our first graduating class of February 1955, the median achievement levels in reading and arithmetic have improved from 5.9 to 6.6, and from 5.8 to 6.8 respectively, with the IQ median remaining fairly constant at 89. Individual growth showed gains from a low of a few months to a high of over four years during the students' two-year stay at McKinley.

From the social viewpoint, success can be measured in the change which has taken place in general attitudes toward one another and toward the school and community. Each passing semester one notes the improvement in school spirit, thoughts on beautifying school grounds,

improvement in the relationship among the various racial groups, a decline in truancy and in the number of girls who must be excused from school attendance for social reasons.

From the personnel viewpoint, although many of the staff are still classified as substitute teachers, more are requesting that they be permanently assigned to McKinley. The results of each teachers' examination suggest that for those who have served at McKinley, their experiences have been in keeping with modern theory and practice.

What of the future? Individualization of programs will be continuously refined. We realize that it will be necessary for some children to spend a longer period of time in the elementary school. Our present thoughts are in the direction of establishing a 7C or 8C group which would extend the time spent at McKinley one semester for the slow learning child, so that he can master fundamentals at his own rate without failure or repetition.

Our future plans include:

1. Developing special science classes for those who demonstrate outstanding ability or interest in this area;

2. Initiating and developing a follow-up study of our graduates so that we may be better guided in meeting the needs of the student body of the present and of tomorrow;

3. Continuing the cooperative experimental guidance program so that our students will not only know where they have been, but also what lies ahead;

4. Improving our promotional policy so that each child can recognize his own worth and be aware of his own limitations and potentialities;

5. Evaluating and re-evaluating what we are doing so that we will always be prepared for the tomorrow and the students it will bring.

No, we do not have all the answers—perhaps very few indeed. But we intend to keep on trying to do our best for the young adolescents of today who will be our tax-paying and voting citizens of tomorrow.

## The Visitor

Happiness,  
Why are you a stranger at my door?  
You never take my hand and lead me down  
the paths of laughter and joy.  
Now when I go to the door to eagerly await  
you,  
Darkness meets me with its arms outstretched  
To take me down the paths of silence and  
sorrow.  
How can I tempt you to call again?  
Would a table set for tea bring you?  
Or fresh flowers awaiting you on the door-  
step?  
Every day I leave the door ajar.  
I am at home to you, Happiness.

—AILEEN AVERY—*Grade 8A, South Pasadena, California, Junior High School.*

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