

One of the important functions of public education is to get each student acquainted with himself to the end that he can make the most of his life and thus contribute to the public weal. To get acquainted with his own being is highly important. This cannot be accomplished without also gaining knowledge of the individuality of others; this knowledge figures intimately in every facet of his life, because he is a social creature.

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FLORENCE E. BEARDSLEY

# Educational Dilemmas

**Though facing today's unusual pressures, the school still must attempt to provide its burgeoning population with a program that exemplifies the best that is now known about how children and young people grow and learn.**

Higgledy, piggledy<sup>1</sup>  
My black hen  
Are we to build schools  
For gentlemen?

**R**ECENT articles and proposals would make us think so. Are the schools to adopt the European system? Why this mounting pressure? Schools are always under pressure to change or not to change. Unusual uneasiness existing everywhere, however, tends to produce greater sensitiveness to pressure groups. Schools responding, sometimes enthusiastically embrace procedures that should be examined more critically. The educational dilemma at present is that the schools are short, yes, very short—short

<sup>1</sup>This nursery rhyme sometimes uses the phrase, "hickety-pickety." The author, here, however, wishes to convey the meaning, "in confusion or a jumble."

of money, short of teachers, short of buildings, but long on children!

Higgledy, piggledy  
My black hen  
They come in groups  
Sometimes nine, sometimes ten.

The hordes of children for which America is grateful and proud create a severe problem and a challenge. Is it possible for our land to offer to all, free educational choice? Of what shall that choice consist? Are most children early to be channeled into groups according to some artificial screening? These questions deserve most serious consideration.

The American dream would provide all children opportunity to complete a high school education. This, however, is becoming increasingly difficult. Along with the burgeoning hordes has come a

refinement in knowledge of how students learn and how the human organism grows. We are in a dilemma because we no longer can disregard the fact that each child is unique, each child has a number of different maturity rates, and each child has a different learning pattern. Consequently, each child develops a different background of meaning.

In the tradition of the American dream, if the factors in which we are short and what we know about learning are mixed together higgledy, piggedly, the schools find themselves inadequate, and a chain reaction of very strange phenomena begins. Any solution which presents a new angle is quickly embraced.

There is a law in physics stating that for every forward action there is a backward thrust of equal intensity. Perhaps it should not surprise us then, when many feel that instead of going forward to meet the challenge the time has come to revert to the practices of other times. In those days we were more certain of the answer. Those were easy days, when education for *all* was only a dream, not a reality.

One of the areas in which a dilemma is encountered is the matter of school organization. Pressure to change organization extends into the classrooms as well as throughout the school. Once again there is serious debate concerning the merits of heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping.

Agreement among those who follow the implications of research affirms that learning a skill is largely an individual matter. It then follows that enough instructional help must be available to give the child necessary instruction at the time he needs it. To some, the solution of the problem is flexible grouping—the forming and reforming of groups in the skill areas in order that a child may always be with a group which is stimulating to him and in which he stimulates others, but never

remaining in the same group throughout the day or day after day for long periods of time.

Others, starting from the same premise, indicate that the simplest way to care for children's needs is to get all the children together who need a particular skill. This will make it easier for a teacher to instruct, and, because the preparation is all the same, the teacher can handle many more children.

There are various ways of accomplishing this end. Some schools would teach the same subjects in all the grades at the same time, reassigning the children during that time according to the place where they fit best. Others would have three levels of ability within a room. Objections are aroused by any one of these methods. What shall be used as a criterion for forming groups? Many schools use reading ability; others, intelligence quotient; still others, convenience, because some children take music or play on the football team. Does a skill taught in isolation become functional? What happens during the rest of the day to each of these children?

There are still others who have looked seriously at the fact that every child has a rhythm of development according to his own pattern. Basing their action on these facts, they have said that it is necessary that a child not be placed in a group but progress at his own individual rate, especially when a skill is being acquired. In these instances no grouping occurs, at least for the major part of the day. This is a very limiting kind of situation requiring a master teacher who can work with many children individually *at the same time*.

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Much of the reduction in class load throughout the country has been partially based on the fact that parents have wished and administrators have felt it necessary to give the individual child more time with the teacher. This relationship was the key to adequate opportunity for educational development.

It is not only the well-to-do community that wishes to restrict its class load to a reasonable number. Cricketville was a boom town—one of those towns that spring up around a government project. The scene was dotted by the coral, blue, and silver of trailer homes. The children were many and the original three-room school now had 22 rooms. Still it could not be designated as a school because children were to be found in the city hall, in the town library, in the Quonset huts, and in the new building that had required every cent of bonding capacity that Cricketville could muster.

The town was under pressure to supply school buildings, water, lights, sewer facilities, and other necessary utilities. Towns in such situations are apt to slight the schools, but not so the people of Cricketville. They cherished good educational opportunities for the children. When it was rumored that, starting with the fall, the teachers of Cricketville would have 30 children in their classes, the commercial club and the service club requested the district board to keep the class load to 25. "We may have to take up private subscriptions. We haven't much else to give our children in this town, but we do want them to have the opportunity to learn," they said.

This illustration gives evidence of the thrust that is occurring to reduce class load and to make instruction an individual matter.

Everywhere the problem is the same—too many children enrolled for the teaching staff—but not all communities ar-

rived at the same solution. Mariontown boasted that its teachers were on the highest salary scale in the state. Classrooms were filled and about to overflow. The superintendent, pressed by financial limitations, received well-illustrated literature indicating that employment of teacher aides was a new way to care for heavy class loads. This, he felt, gave promise of a solution. Teachers' salaries were raised and class loads were artificially increased from 32 to 42. A high school girl was employed to help each teacher.

It is not known whether the teachers of these experimental classrooms had always used very formal procedures, but it was interesting to those who visited the rooms to watch the experiment. The instructional procedure was largely "study and recite," and was unusually formal for this system. It was apparent, however, that the children were under unusual tension. Much more homework than could possibly be desirable was given the children. The parents complained. Much attention was being given to straight drill, and little effort was being directed to caring for individual instructional differences except for those children who were falling markedly behind the large majority of the class. The teachers felt under compulsion to have *all* children reach a certain standard by the end of the year; yet this pressure was not apparent in those teachers of the system not having teacher aides.

The second year the project was in process, the plan was changed to furnish a secretary for each teacher for half a day. These secretaries were to go through all the papers, do all the correcting, and all the recording. When interviewed concerning their reactions, the teachers felt that they did not know the individual children as well as formerly and that it took much of the teachers' time to direct

the secretaries. Instead of lightening the teaching load, it had been increased. The teachers expressed a desire to have less salary, lighter class loads, and no teacher aides.

Higgledy, piggedly  
My black hen  
We're pushed and pulled  
Beyond our ken.

If the pressures to take care of all the children of all the people cannot be met, perhaps we should see to it that the gifted, of whom we have spoken so often and for whom we have done so little, receive attention. The need of the nation for scientists, for intellectuals who will do pure research, for men who will be creative, and yet have all the components of mental alertness in a world the aspects of which are just now dimly seen on the horizon, is pushing many of us to look to the gifted to make sure that they have a scholarly education.

But alas and alack, who are the gifted? Once you seek a description, it is hard to define. Even those who are gifted show an uneven development and there are many more of them than we had thought. How shall we give special help to each of them? Here, again, when the idea is pushed too far, we may develop a class education for certain types of people—an education for the elite and an education for all others who fall into a lower class. This we may face if we cannot support the full financial burden of public education—truly an educational dilemma of great magnitude.

The appearance of a new medium such as television or radio always creates new problems. In attempting to make effective use of the element we often find ourselves overenthusiastic. The estimates of achievement tend to be enlarged as compared with the evidence.

Instructional television is in that phase of development at the present time. Its

foremost promoters believe that its use might permit a reorganization of the whole school system. They envision its use with extremely large classes to help overcome the teacher shortage. It is believed by some that better instruction would be brought to the classroom through the use of master teachers in the telecasts. All of these statements are true to a degree, but how shall these truths be integrated with other facts? Surely we cannot utterly disregard the different learning rates of children or that they bring different backgrounds and varying needs to the learning situation. Only the classroom teacher could resolve these differences and he must have time for individual instruction.

Television is little different from motion pictures, which have been available to the schools for several decades. Experience with motion pictures has shown that they are best used in presenting a growth process which takes a long period of time to accomplish and which, in the motion pictures, can be encompassed in a short period of time. When a developmental process is too large for the classroom, or children cannot have access to the real situation, then television or motion pictures as media are good and serve better than any other media might serve. If it is desired to show action as it occurs in life or as it occurs in narration, television or motion pictures can greatly benefit and richly supplement classroom instruction. Television is vivid and full of action when used to bring current happenings into the classroom. It is not likely that television is the present cure-all for our problems, but if wisely employed it surely will augment our instructional processes and learning will be much richer for its use.

Higgledy, piggedly  
My black hen  
The college refuses  
To let us in.

The bulge in secondary schools will soon reach college doors. The colleges surveying the oncoming hordes reach for new methods of screening. What shall they use? Grades and objective tests? This threat has already affected the secondary school. There is a renewed emphasis upon grades and grading—just when there was some hope that schools might shake themselves free from the bounds of the Carnegie unit—just when there was an exhilarating push to learn more because there is so much to know and because the opportunities of making use of knowledge are legion.

Are teachers to think more about the smaller segment of students who are now to go on to college and less about preparing the larger majority who may be having their last chance at formal education? There is a push in this direction.

There are others, however, who have taken a different turn in the road. Knowing that most children in elementary and secondary schools cannot and will not go to college, the curricular offerings have been broadened to include almost everything that a community has indicated as examples.

Spreading offerings so thin has also produced a trend in the opposite direction. There are those who believe that the school can only accomplish so much and no more. That being the case, our job as educators is to return to the "good old" fundamentals.

One such district on the east coast offers as an elementary program reading, arithmetic, writing, spelling, history, and geography. No science is taught because that is the task of the high school; no health because that is the task of the home. No library books may be brought

in from outside libraries unless first approved by the board. All extraneous material used by the teacher must be approved by the board. School is to be simplified and directed to the rigorous "essentials." Children pass or fail as they meet their tests. Teachers in the school like it. They are not bothered by anything except the few facts they teach. This makes teaching so easy. Teachers really have few choices to make, no judgments to pronounce, no individual differences to consider. "Theirs not to wonder why—theirs but to do or die." Higgledy, piggedly, you wonder why, why, why in the light of all the present research there should be such a throwback to the times of yesteryears.

Still another solution to care for the great numbers of children has been proposed. Why not lessen the expense, push the children through school, and hustle them into the labor market? There are certain children who seem to be very apt in their abilities to absorb the intellectual offerings of the schools. By arranging a shortened curricular offering, it is possible for some youngsters to move into college at 14 or 15 years of age, thus reducing the cost to the school systems and adding to the productive force of the labor market. Other places have shortened the number of years to be spent in elementary school, either by condensing the program or by starting the children at age five. All these methods bear careful inspection.

More research of a valid nature is needed to uncover the real facts. Just what has happened to the individuals who have participated in this type of school experience? What will this do to the labor market? To how much play life is an American child entitled? Should we take away two of these years? Questions and pressures make educators uncertain

and have caused schools to react in many different ways.

The tempo of change has been rapid. The schools, always slow to react, have been caught by a surge of demand—demand for people trained and prepared for the world of electronics and automation; men to man the machines that out-compute man; men to man machines that can remember and correct their own mistakes.

Man is being freed to be creative, to be inventive. An equal number of people will be needed to service machines and keep them in working condition, but by far the greatest challenge that comes to us in this new age is a need for people to be trained to render personal service to mankind, service in social welfare, in the aesthetic world, in cultural fields, and in the field of human relations. The move is rapid. All of us have not yet sensed the immensity of it, but little portions of the change have already disrupted the serenity of old patterns enough to make us feel that demands are urgent.

Knowing that change is rapid and the need is imminent, we are tempted to try anything that brings solution to the growing pains we are experiencing. All growth is apt to cause irritation. The pressures that are evident in the world are evident in the schools. They are causing changes in instructional techniques, in curricular offerings, in financing, in organization, in programming, and in screening.

We need the long-time view. We need also not to be afraid of change, but to seek for valid evidence that the change we accept will square with what is known about human beings and their learning processes. If we do not have the needed research, we must ask for it or set about to find the answers ourselves.

Yes, there are educational dilemmas. Let us not be stampeded nor yet forget to move with the times.

Higgledy, piggedly  
My black hen  
Let's be calm  
And check again.

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