

Methods of Individualization . . .

In Junior High School

The school's task is to develop an environment in which each child can find identity, purpose and achievement.

The greatness of a nation may be manifested in many ways—in its purposes, its courage, its moral responsibility, its cultural and scientific eminence, the tenor of its daily life. But ultimately the source of its greatness is in the individuals who constitute the living substance of the nation. . . . Our concern for human excellence is a reflection of our ideal of the overriding importance of human dignity. It is not a means but an end. It expresses our notion of what constitutes a good life and our ultimate values.¹

THIS task of contributing to the greatness of a nation and developing each individual in terms of his unique nature and potential is one of the responsibilities of the junior high school. While all segments of the school are dedicated to this task, the junior high school has a strategic role to play as it seeks to serve the young people beginning the transition from childhood to adulthood,

¹ Special Studies Project Report V. Rockefeller Brothers Fund. *The Pursuit of Excellence: Education and the Future of America*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., p. 1-2.

from dependence to independence, from immaturity to maturity. The particular role of the junior high school has been to effect a transition from the self-contained classroom of the elementary school to the departmentalized offerings of the senior high school, yet to maintain a function and an integrity all its own.

Individualizing classroom instruction in the junior high school is one aspect of the unfinished business of providing for the vast range of individual differences; it is part of the task of contributing to an even greater range of differences among unique individuals. In attempting to facilitate the individualization of instruction, various administrative and curriculum plans have been employed.

These arrangements include nonpromotion, acceleration, ability grouping,

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departmentalization, block assigning, core curriculum, or partial grouping through specialized or elective offerings. Within the classroom, teachers have tried enrichment, subgrouping, individual projects, contract plans, multiple texts, and various techniques such as role playing or sociodrama, individual or group research and reporting, or have organized the class as a democratic unit with student leadership, and with individual and committee responsibilities. Individualization may be facilitated by any one of a number of plans, but it is achieved only in a given classroom situation.

Role of the Teacher

Methods of individualizing instruction may be enhanced by certain organizational arrangements, but need not wait upon such devices. For years good teachers have recognized the importance of many factors available to all for individualizing the school experience and instruction; such intangibles as room atmosphere, teacher attitude and class morale are representative. The teacher's acceptance of a comment, poor or excellent, which represents the best a particular pupil might make, the development of room spirit wherein each pupil feels he can express his ideas and still be accepted, and the momentary recognition of an idea or a new interpretation all contribute toward individualized instruction.

A ninth grade English class had been reading George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Two pupils illustrating a wide range of ability and comprehension remarked upon it.

Said one, "*Animal Farm* by George Orwell is often considered a political satire. In it Orwell depicts the Russian revolution in terms of an animal revolt which fails when

the ideology of the revolution is replaced by the totalitarian methods of the group that seizes power."

The other pupil responded with, "*Animal Farm* is just a book about animals. I didn't like it."

Appropriately, the teacher followed the first remark with the question, "You say it's political satire, but Orwell calls it a fairy story. How do both terms apply to this book?" Since the second remark was an honest expression, the teacher used it to launch an evaluation of the book with, "What was there about the book that made you like or dislike it?"

Subgroups Within a Class

Establishing subgroups within a class is a possibility open to any teacher. The groups can be based upon the various purposes, skills or achievement levels of the class. Groups can be developed on the basis of different aspects of a unit to be developed—planning, bibliography, class activities, evaluation and the like. Groups can be cross sections of the class with leadership, high and low ability rather evenly distributed.

An eighth grade history class developed a series of dioramas based on "Roots of the American Revolution." Each committee produced one scene. The more able pupils contributed to the research, the design, the idea; others shared in the building of the figures and the background.

Flexible Class Assignments

Assignment can be individualized, although each pupil, regardless of background, ability or interest, will do the "same" assignment. Likewise, all pupils can share in the same objective.

Students in a ninth grade class studying vocations were assigned to write a long theme on their own vocational choice. Each

student selected an occupation appropriate to his own ability and aspirations and wrote of its relationship to his school record, achievement to date, and out-of-school activities. The nature, the scope, the selected vocational area, the development of the paper, and the facility in writing were all based on the ability and background of each individual student.

A seventh grade English class spent some time analyzing the reading that each pupil had done to date, in terms of different levels of difficulty, the kinds of books usually read by certain students, and the skills involved in various types of recreational or study reading. Each pupil then selected an objective for the next marking period such as reading books by different authors to give variety, concentration on a single author for two or more books, developing a skill such as skimming or reviewing, finding a new subject about which to read, or adding more challenge to his individual reading program. With the help of the librarian, each pupil then developed a list of suggested readings appropriate to the objective he had selected. At the end of the marking period an evaluation was made of the progress of each pupil in terms of his own established objective.

As part of the guidance program of one junior high school, pupils were given a battery of tests including academic, aptitude, general achievement, reading and a vocational interest inventory. The results of these tests were recorded on profile sheets for each pupil, and were interpreted for them in terms of a check on a continuum from "Low" to "Very High." In a group session, each pupil was given his own profile sheet which he studied as the counselor explained what could be learned from each test result and how different ratings could be related to each other. Each pupil then wrote a summary of his profile based on the test data, either agreeing with the results or describing why he thought the results were in error. These papers were the basis for individual interviews and follow-up counseling.

Varied Materials

In many schools resource units or curriculum guides provide a flexible framework within which can be developed units of instruction that are appropriate to a given class and the individuals that comprise it. Such guides make possible many approaches to a given content area that can be developed through teacher-pupil planning, or at least modified by class discussion and the evident interests and needs of a given group.

A seventh grade class studying the local community developed an outline of study that incorporated the ideas of different class members and their levels of interest and understanding. Used were materials that ranged from simple textbook explanations to reports issued by the local newspapers, government and social agencies. Operating from the common unit outline, each pupil selected for an oral and written report a topic or area of special interest to him. As part of the study, each pupil gave special attention to his own neighborhood, and its relationship to the city as a whole in terms of the many factors that had been identified. Textbook assignments were made in books with a wide range of difficulty.

Classroom Methods

Teacher-pupil planning, role playing, individual and group reports and projects can contribute to the material to be studied and to the progress of the class. As a pupil identifies himself with the class and develops a proprietary interest in it, he is likely to be better motivated to learn and act upon the desired outcomes of the unit.

Each student in an eighth grade history class selected a personality in the Continental Congress and prepared to take his role in a presentation of the work of the Congress. In this connection, each did a biog-

raphy of "himself" as individual research in biography and history. A chronology of the events was developed as a class activity. The drama teacher explained role playing as a method, and then, without a script, each pupil enacted in a class presentation the role of the individual he had selected.

A ninth grade history class wanted to study the "Isms." In the teacher-pupil planning sessions that followed, a class outline was developed with provision for individual research and reporting. Analysis of the process revealed that the brighter pupils had suggested and reported upon the theoretical backgrounds of the various ideologies; the pupils of average ability had contributed and sought out applications of theory such as Fascism in Spain, Socialism in Scandinavia, and Russia under Communism; while the pupils of lesser ability sought out biographical information on Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin.

A ninth grade core class used Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki* as the focal point for a series of reports and discussions dealing with the literature and history of early peoples in the Americas and the Pacific, map study, geography, anthropology, and study of personalities. The original planning of the unit, the range of content and method of presentation gave each student an opportunity to develop an interest or a skill.

Team Teaching

Flexibility in teacher assignments can also contribute to individualized methods of instruction. In the teacher team situation, each teacher represents a content area or a skill that can extend the range and depth of subject matter, or contribute to appropriate methodology.

For certain periods during the week an art and a shop teacher worked with the science classes. As pupils developed projects and experiments, the art and shop teacher helped with methods of presentation, illustrations, materials, or with construction equipment.

An experienced English teacher and a beginning teacher with her strongest work in the field of social studies were each assigned to a "block" class of language arts and history. The two classes were handled by either teacher in large groups for films, certain discussions, or group reports. Sometimes one teacher would observe the work of the other teacher and the class, take an individual aside for a conference, work with a small group in an adjoining room, take a group to the library, or share with the other teacher in the group discussion. At other times the classes were organized as two separate units, or regrouped according to the content or skill emphasis of a given unit. Small discussion sessions were developed on the basis of pupil interest, abilities or skill needs. Pupils profited from the experience of one teacher, the fresh viewpoint of the other.

Extracurriculum and Extension Activities

Participation in the student council, the literary, science or library club, the choral or instrumental group, and the athletic teams is an established means of providing for the development of individual interest and talents. Whether they are part of a noon-hour program, an after-school or elective period, these and like activities make an important contribution and must be considered an integral part of the total school curriculum contributing to the individualization of instruction.

In the junior high school the individualization of instruction is inevitable to the extent that each learner selects from the curriculum those elements that have meaning or purpose for him in terms of his own striving and his own perceptions. Such instruction may be enhanced by administrative organization, but need not wait upon such devices. The methods

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provement. There is recognition that there have been curriculum improvement efforts and instructional improvement programs being carried forward by the State Education Department, professional organization efforts, college and university influences, and local school system planning and work. As we see it, the cooperative action program described in this brief report is a needed and a natural extension of these programs and efforts which have been taking place. The NYSASCD action program is aimed at ways of helping these

established and still developing curriculum improvement efforts to bring about a greater impact on instructional improvement within local school systems."

Members who served as chairmen for the local action committee are: Stanley Applegate, Manhasset; Perry Brown, Niagara Falls; Paul Halverson, Syracuse; Edna Hedger, Mt. Kisco; Bernard Kinsella, Rochester; Joseph Leese, Albany; and O. Ward Satterlee, Potsdam.

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suggested are a recognition of the unique nature and worth of each student, the fulfilling of the heritage of the American Dream for each child. Whether or not individualization can be achieved in a classroom situation may depend in part

upon whether or not the teacher attempts to provide for all the individuals represented, or whether he is willing to recognize the importance of developing an environment of method, materials and motivation in which each child can find identity, purpose and achievement.

School Library

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pings, used reference indexes for special problems and the periodical index for recent information. The classroom teacher and the librarians also helped the students, answering questions and helping them locate materials that were needed for their special assignments.

During this past school year, the library was open on five Saturday mornings. Students had an opportunity to utilize library materials from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Seventy-two students took advantage of this opportunity and ex-

pressed appreciation to the library staff for this new service.

At the end of the school year the library staff was pleased to discover, when tabulating statistics for the yearly report to the administration, that 1084 class groups had been brought to the library by teachers. The school library becomes a vital agency of the educational program when administrators, teachers and librarians work together creating plans for individualized instruction. They provide opportunities for real library experience and meaningful library instruction at the time when students are ready for the experience.

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