

A New Program in Junior High School

*A school staff
attempts to develop
an integrated program.*

THESE days it is either refreshing or distressing—depending upon one's convictions—to note that there continues to be significant curriculum research and experimentation toward integration and continuity in secondary schools.

For example, secondary schools of 100-250 pupils and with staffs that desire to make greater provision for "knowledge of more facts and entertaining of more ideas, and to a better, more orderly arrangement of them"¹ might consider the current reorganized curriculum of the Stewart Junior High School at the University of Utah.

In the summer of 1954 Stewart School staff hypothesized that a further integration of the curriculum would offer a better organization for learning. The school's curriculum at that time consisted of an English-social studies core and conventional subject offerings in mathematics, science, industrial arts, music,

art, physical education, home economics, and an activities or "club" program. The problem for the staff was the perennial one: how to make the curriculum more integrated, productive, sensible, and worthwhile.

Stewart staff recognized, of course, that a continual integration of the curriculum has characterized the secondary program for the past 50 years. Separate offerings in literature, spelling, reading, grammar, and penmanship have lost their identity and become a program of language arts, or English. Smatterings of science appear as biology, general science or practical science. Common learnings courses, the life adjustment program, and the core curriculum are working examples of the integration concept.

Research in adolescent growth and development preconceived an integrated curriculum as being of superior worth for the learner.² Research designed to evaluate integrated curricula supported the hypothesis.³ The NEA, among other organizations, reported a clear trend to-

² *Adolescence*. Forty-Third Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Part I. Chicago: Department of Education, University of Chicago, 1944.

³ J. Paul Leonard and Alvin C. Eurich, editors. *An Evaluation of Modern Education*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1942.

¹ John Dewey. *Experience and Education*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938.

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ward a more integrated curriculum in the nation's secondary schools.⁴

Proposed Program

Through a series of Stewart staff curriculum workshops, a more integrated curriculum was suggested which moved beyond the "core plus conventional subjects" organization. Specifically it was suggested for grades seven, eight, and nine that:

1. The core program remain as it had been organized; i.e., the various grade levels would remain intact. There would be a large block of time available for work. The core would consist of a fusion of English and social studies. The general method would continue to be unit teaching.

2. All of the special interest areas of the curriculum—music, art, home economics, industrial arts, clubs—would consist of six and twelve week predetermined units of work. Students would have a variety of choices and be able to cross over into other grades; e.g., a unit of work in art, "Landscapes," might draw students from the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

3. The science and mathematics programs would consist of predetermined units and students would not observe grade lines. Algebra was to remain a full year sequence, primarily for ninth graders; and some science units, e.g., "Reproduction" would be restricted to ninth graders.

4. Units in physical education and health would be required of all students. Once again students could cross grade

lines, but units of work would not be as definitely predetermined.

Stewart School had utilized the "core" design for several years prior to the curriculum reorganization under discussion. The values of the core (development of common understandings, skills, values for democratic citizenship; provision for individual differences, guidance opportunities, etc.) were long recognized by Stewart School personnel. There was no reason or desire to change this part of the program. Improvement possibilities seemed to lie with the special-interest areas.

This reorganized junior high school program, essentially a modification of the project curriculum, began in the autumn of 1954 and is now completing its fifth year of operation. There have been certain changes of the original program, but the curriculum organization at Stewart School as of this year is essentially the same. Units have been extended from six to nine and twelve weeks (six weeks we found to be an insufficient length of time to do quality work) and the core time for the seventh graders was extended.

While the purpose of this article is to present, as simply and concisely as possible, the reorganized design of the junior high school curriculum, it should be emphasized that persons concerned with the school considered the curriculum to be more than a device or an organization.⁵ They (essentially the school staff) indicated clearly their stand on such fundamental questions as the social context in which education is to take place, the meaning of democracy for the school, and the nature of learners

⁴Grace Wright. *The Core Program Grows; An Inquiry Into Practice*. U. S. Office of Education. Bulletin No. 6, 1957. Washington, D. C.: Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, 1957.

⁵Earl W. Harmer, Jr. "A Study of the Curriculum and the Curriculum Development Program of the Stewart Junior High School at the University of Utah." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1958.

and the learning process. Stewart staff members believed that they knew what they were trying to do, how they were trying to do it, and that the results would be worthwhile.

An Evaluation

The administration of the apparently complex program was easier than the Stewart staff had anticipated. Careful preplanning by teachers was necessary, of course, and the preliminary preschool scheduling conferences took time. Once the pattern became established, however, the problems of scheduling became fairly routine. The "unit-plan with no grade lines" organization allowed the teacher-parent-pupil (and often the principal) combination to plan a program geared to the needs, problems and interests of each student. Furthermore it was possible to make adjustments in the program for individual students as the year progressed.

One might reasonably assume that a consequence of such a diversified program would be confusion. Stewart staff members were worried, too; however, the functioning program proved quite the opposite. The staff, 16 in number, worked carefully, thoroughly and compatibly. The total student body numbered approximately 160 each year for three grades—this is, incidentally, the average size of the secondary school in the United States. In short each teacher knew the program of most of the students and, of course, the core teachers were primarily responsible for pupils in their particular grade. The on-going school program was no more confusing or disruptive than the conventional program had been.

The values of the program had been hypothesized to be:

1. To offer a wide variety of study areas; to increase the exploratory opportunities for students
2. To improve learnings in fundamental knowledge and skills
3. To offer greater opportunities for problem solving; to develop critical thinking
4. To make better provision for individual differences
5. To improve the guidance services of the school
6. To offer increased opportunities for personal and social development through broad contact with all junior high school pupils and teachers
7. To offer greater opportunity for democratic living
8. To promote greater sensitivity and understanding of social conditions and problems
9. To promote greater understanding of personal competencies, characteristics and potential.

It remained, of course, for the staff—and particularly the writer, who was for two years a member of the Stewart staff—to attempt to evaluate the curriculum. The comprehensive evaluation program cannot be detailed here, but extensive standardized and staff-built tests were administered; criteria were established for the program from which questionnaires were administered to pupils and parents; informal evaluation sessions were held by staff and parent groups.

The verdict of the evaluation over a three-year period was that the reorganized program was a better instructional program for Stewart School pupils than the former program had been. Pupils made outstanding gains in science and social studies learnings. The varied study areas and the elimination of grade lines offered opportunities for individualizing

(Continued on page 521)

service to teachers in procuring and organizing instructional materials, diagnosing and advising on learning and teaching problems, and generally helping administrators and teachers on curriculum development, child study, or in-service education.

Portland, Oregon, Cedar Rapids and Des Moines, Iowa, Great Neck, New York, and University City, Missouri, have master-teacher consultants giving a broad service to their schools, while other systems reported the use of consultants in more specialized ways. In University City the five Resource Teachers, together with elementary principals and others who give leadership in the subject areas, wrote a comprehensive resource guide for elementary teachers. The guide includes curriculum descriptions, an index of basic and supplementary materials, a community trip guide, and a collection of enrichment ideas contributed by teachers.

The Sand Hill School of Carrollton, Georgia, reports a cooperative effort in the Atlanta, Athens, and Carrollton areas. A publication entitled "Some Promising Practices in Improving School-Community Relations" suggests making wider use of school buildings, having parents evaluate school practices, and having parents appear as resource people in classes or serve as substitute teachers.

Grand Island, Nebraska, reports a program for public information which enables the community to evaluate its schools constantly. Daily radio broadcasts are made from tape recordings which have been made in classrooms; one page of the local newspaper is devoted to a weekly account of school news; a bulletin which periodically publicizes the best practices of the best teachers is available to the public as well as to the staff.

Many school systems make it possible for every parent to have periodic private conferences with the child's teacher at the elementary level. Two examples are the Upper Arlington Schools at Columbus, Ohio, and the Cedar Falls, Iowa, schools. These districts have placed the conference at the heart of the reporting process in the elementary schools. Cedar Falls has three parent-teacher conferences each year. In Upper Arlington a fall conference is followed by a "progress letter" in January, a "check-list" in April, a progress report from the parents, and additional conferences where needed.

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Junior High School

(Continued from page 511)

instruction and for extending personal and social contacts. Parents, students and teachers overwhelmingly endorsed the program. Its continued existence is one testimony of its worth.

Incidentally school staffs with a view (necessarily a brave one these days) towards the improvement of their instructional programs need not look for new curriculum development principles or processes. Long-established steps might include: (a) Studying the literature, the students, the community; (b) Formulating a statement of purposes; (c) Determining and implementing the design of the curriculum; and (d) Developing a program of evaluation.

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