

# Curriculum Developments

Column Editor: Arthur Hoppe

## Junior High School Years

Many persons have had opportunities to learn the impressions, judgments and suggestions of James Bryant Conant concerning the American junior high school. Two important meetings served as settings for his reporting on this topic. These were the AASA meeting in Atlantic City and the NASSP convention in Portland, both in the current year. A final report has now been released.<sup>1</sup> The new study is a natural sequel to his investigation of the American high school.

Dr. Conant and his research team visited about 125 schools in 60 communities in 17 states. They also received 300 questionnaires from 200 communities in 30 states. Great variations in conditions and practices were evident: with respect to curricular offerings, time schedules, classification of students, reading abilities, guidance practices, and the relations of homes to the junior high school. Many will recall that Dr. Conant, at the NASSP convention, made tentative statements endorsing such matters as: departmentalization of the eighth grade, with specific subject requirements for all in grades 7 and 8, and with pupils grouped according to ability; special attention

to the development of reading, science, and such extraclass activities as are educationally valuable; libraries and guidance services sufficient to their great tasks, and homework appropriate to the field and to the pupil.

A comparison of Dr. Conant's final conclusions and recommendations with those he delivered tentatively in Portland should intrigue, particularly those students of curriculum most concerned with the junior high school. Here is an area of great concern to public and professional persons alike, an area of enormous opportunity and challenge.

## Block-Time Programs in New Jersey

The Division of Curriculum and Instruction of the New Jersey State Department of Education investigated block-time and core-type programs in the New Jersey secondary schools.<sup>2</sup> Questionnaires were sent to all junior and six-year high schools in the state. Block-time or core-type classes were reported by 51 junior high schools (56 percent) and 15 six-year high schools (42 percent): a combination of 66 schools or 51 percent of the total. These data lend much encouragement to those persons who value highly the general education of second-

<sup>1</sup> James Bryant Conant. *Recommendations for Education in the Junior High School Years: A Memorandum to School Boards*. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, October 1960. 48 p. 50 cents.

<sup>2</sup> See: *The Secondary School Bulletin*. Trenton, New Jersey: State Department of Education, March 1960.

ary school students. These facts are noteworthy as school people face widespread pressures for more specialized work in such areas as science, mathematics and language.

In relation to core-type or block-time classes, the New Jersey situation reflects in various ways the national picture. A large majority of such classes appeared in the seventh and eighth grades and a few in the ninth. The most popular subject combinations were language arts and social studies, usually for a block of two periods. The most troublesome obstacles related to the securing of adequately prepared teachers or to the necessary manipulation of the class schedule. School principals cited many advantages of this type of curriculum organization, such as:

Teachers get to know pupils better.

Guidance work is much facilitated.

Individual differences are better served.

Pupils are more secure.

Cooperative and flexible planning are more easily achieved.

Usage of teacher and pupil time is more efficient.

Wider applications of knowledge and skills are possible.

Better opportunities are available for cooperative evaluation.

### One-Teacher Schools

Widespread concern has been expressed for reasonable size in school corporations. Some readers, therefore, may be surprised to learn that the United States had nearly 24,000 one-teacher schools as recently as last year.<sup>3</sup> The total enrollment for these schools was nearly 400,000 pupils: this involved 1.1 percent of all school children, and 1.8 percent of

all teachers. This is an extreme contrast from the situation of 40 years ago. Then there were 196,000 one-teacher schools, staffed by 31 percent of all teachers and enrolling 25 percent (five million) of all school pupils.

This report of a recent survey by the NEA Research Division attempts to clarify many popular misconceptions about the one-teacher school. The report presents many data describing the nature and conditions of the teachers in such schools. These schools are not staffed with young unmarried women who have no college background; rather, the teachers are typically 45 years old, married, have two children of their own, two years of college or more, and at least ten years of teaching experience. Admitting that the one-teacher school may have serious limitations, the statistics of this survey support the needed concern for practical improvements in the personnel and educational programs they present.

### The Golden Conference

The nature and the concerns of children and youth are generally recognized to be of profound importance to curriculum workers. A new wealth of information in this area is being issued as a result of the Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth.<sup>4</sup> An album of LP records includes major addresses by President Eisenhower, Secretary Arthur Flemming, and ten authorities in such areas as family, delinquency, values, education and adolescence. Several publications offer the complete conference proceedings as well as separate digests, summaries of reports, and special papers.

<sup>4</sup> White House Conference on Children and Youth, Publication Division, 330 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington 25, D. C.

<sup>3</sup> See *NEA Research Bulletin* 38: 3-14, February 1960.

Several states have planned action to implement the recommendations of the White House Conference. In November Hawaii and Oregon held State Conferences on Children and Youth; Maryland, Massachusetts, Illinois, New Jersey and South Dakota have organized appropriate committees or commissions to carry on needed activities in this vital area.

#### Bulletins

*Your Science Fair, An Opportunity for Youth.* Arden F. Welte, James Dimond and Alfred Friedl. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1959. 103 p. (Price not indicated.)

This is a very readable, well organized, profusely illustrated "Guidebook to Successful Science Fairs." It has four parts: the first two dealing with the "why" and the "what" of science fairs, the third with an elaborate description of the "how," and the fourth with many samples of projects and reports considered to be outstanding. Science fairs are held at the local, regional, state and national levels. With the current high interest in science and the increasing number of science fair participants, this guide should prove to be particularly valuable to persons who have responsibilities in this area.

Michigan Department of Public Instruction. *The Status of Block-Time Programs in Michigan Secondary Schools.* Bulletin No. 426. Lansing: the Department, 1960. 36 p.

Three years ago, State Superintendent Lynn M. Bartlett appointed a Committee on Core and General Education, numbering 24 persons and chosen from public school and college personnel. This committee conducted a study that is reported in this bulletin. It surveyed 2,600

### Individualized reading?

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school districts, contacting superintendents, and found that 536 had secondary schools and 229 (46 percent) had block-time programs. Within these districts, 298 schools had block-time classes, and 46 percent (140) of the schools were strictly junior high, while 54 percent encompassed four other patterns of school organization. Nearly 1,600 teachers were involved in these classes, more than 1,000 of them in junior high schools. The report indicates that these data suggest a doubling in the number of schools offering such classes from 1953 to 1957.

The report includes separate data collected from principals and from teachers involved in block-time programs. Rather wide efforts were made to orient faculty members to core, but very few to orient students or public. Nearly half the schools had staff planning one year or more *before* initiating the program. Opposition to block-time programs ap-



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peared in only one-third of the schools; the great majority of faculty and administrators reported favorably. The major obstacles were inadequately prepared teachers, scheduling problems, materials and time.

Michigan followed the national pattern in other facets of core programs also. Most such programs occurred in the seventh and eighth grades; few in the ninth or higher. The great majority (70 percent) of programs combined English and social studies. Fifty percent of the teachers had from three to ten or more years' experience in block-time classes.

New York City Board of Education.

*Operation New York*, Report of the Bureau of Curriculum Research, Curriculum Center. New York: the Board, 1960. 117 p. (\$1.00.)

A group of educators set out to do something that would help teachers

utilize better the many resources in the natural environment of the City of New York. What they have produced is a research report well worthy of note. William H. Bristow, Director of the Bureau of Curriculum Research, indicates that the report suggests ways in which rocks, water, soil, plants and animals may be used to provide meaningful and enjoyable experiences for boys and girls; that such a report can be a guide to many interesting earth forms. Attention is drawn to the immediate locale of the school, including excavations and even sidewalks and curbs. The forces of nature at work are also emphasized: for example, erosion in a vacant lot, or "flood areas" following a storm, or the decay of leaves into soil. Pupils are encouraged to study the interrelationships of all living things with their physical environments.

This research dispels completely the notion that "the City" has little to offer for environmental study save concrete and steel. Since there are literally thousands of "little environments" to be found within the City, the publication of this report is meant to stimulate many schools to carry out similar research to enrich the curriculum for their pupils. The New York group recognizes the potential of such studies as this for promoting important learnings in the field of conservation. The group developed this model with unique concern for scholarship, for participation in and grasp of procedures of production, for usefulness of the product, and for a high quality of learning experiences.

This report will be particularly suggestive to science teachers in intermediate or junior high grades in large city schools.

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