A unique program combines theory and practice.

Ovid F. Parody

Theory and Practice in Battle Hill Junior High School

THE Battle Hill Junior High School is one of three schools housed within a large school building located on Battle and McKinley Avenues in White Plains, Westchester County, New York. The name grows out of our Nation's history, since the school is on the hill where the Battle of White Plains was fought. The Battle Hill Elementary School consists of about 500 pupils and 20 teachers, while the junior high school has 375 pupils and 22 teachers. Both of these schools are part of the White Plains Public School System, while the third school, which is temporarily housed in one wing of the building, is the Westchester Community College.

In this article an attempt is made to: (a) provide a glimpse of a junior high school in action; (b) outline the school's program; (c) describe the school's basic organization; and (d) suggest educational principles which guided its action.

A Junior High School in Action

If we were to visit the Battle Hill Junior High School, these are some things we would probably see:

—Pupils working out algebra lessons at the blackboard
—A class listening to Spanish records
—The student council meeting with its faculty sponsors
—Pupils reading aloud from an English anthology
—The school orchestra rehearsing in the auditorium
—A teacher explaining how to read a bar graph
—Pupils getting on a bus to go on a field trip
—Pupils working in small groups preparing committee reports in connection with social studies

—Boys constructing bird houses and ash trays in industrial arts
—A class taking a written examination in math
—Boys and girls enjoying social dancing in the gym during the noon hours
—A pupil discussing a problem with a guidance counselor
—Pupils listening to tapes in a French class
—Parents being served tea as guests of a homemaking class
—The assistant principal discussing a discipline problem with a teacher and pupil
—A group of pupils working on a research problem in the library
—A parent and teacher carrying on a conference in the teacher’s room
—The art teacher working with a group of students painting a mural for the hall.

These are some of the typical activities engaged in by pupils, teachers, parents and administrators as the school program is translated into action.

The School’s Program

Typical schedules for 7th, 8th, and 9th grade pupils are listed here. In the 7th and 8th grades pupils have a single choice of an elective—a foreign language. In the 9th grade they may choose one from among a number of electives. Besides the regular offerings, a program of extraclass activities is provided for pupils in all grades. These are scheduled in an activity period during the school day.

Courses of Study

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<th>7th Grade</th>
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**Electives:**
- French
- Spanish

**9th Grade**

**Required**
- English
- Social Studies
- Science
- Mathematics
- Physical Education

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Block scheduling is used in the seventh grade. English-Social Studies are scheduled together in a double period as are Math-Science. This means that all seventh graders are scheduled with only two teachers for their four major subjects. This organizational pattern eases the transition from elementary to junior high school by reducing the number of pupil-teacher contacts and increasing the amount of time pupils and teachers spend together.

In addition to the potential improvement in pupil-teacher relations, teachers are provided an opportunity for the cooperative planning of units of work.

We have now had a glimpse of this school in action and have seen an outline of its program with some description of its characteristics. Next we shall turn to a
description of how it is organized to achieve its purposes.

**Battle Hill's Organization**

Underlying all of these subjects and activities is a purposeful design. The school is thought of as performing three major functions. The general *administrative function* provides for the over-all organization, administration and supervision at the building level as part of the city-wide system. The planning of educational experiences through subjects and activities to facilitate pupil growth toward educational objectives is carried on through *curriculum function*. The counseling of students with special regard for the uniqueness of individuals and the needs of exceptional children is a responsibility of the *pupil-personnel function*.

These functions are not allocated to departments because they cut across all such divisions. Classroom teachers, for example, work in all three areas. Therefore it is difficult and undesirable to make a neat division of activities and a specific allocation of responsibilities. All three functions work better when they are in close interaction with each other. However, it is possible to allocate responsibility for general coordination and leadership in these areas.

At Battle Hill, the school principal, as the general administrator, is responsible for all three functions. He carries out this responsibility by working closely with three coordinators. The administrative function is coordinated by the assistant principal, curriculum activities are coordinated by the helping teacher and the coordination of pupil-personnel service is the responsibility of the director of guidance.

The school principal, the assistant principal, the helping teacher, and the director of guidance serve as the executive committee for the school. The executive committee is augmented by representatives elected by the faculty to form a planning or steering committee to assist the executive committee.

The focal point of all these activities is the guidance of pupil progress toward the objectives of the school.

**Battle Hill's Objectives**

Several years ago the staff members were asked to write down their purposes. Just what were they trying to accomplish in each of their areas? The individual statements of teachers were then integrated through a series of faculty discussions into a statement which could be accepted as our common school-wide objectives. These were formulated as follows:

We seek to help each pupil:

1. Become more self-reliant in the situations of everyday living
2. Communicate more effectively through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and developing skill in arithmetic
3. Cherish and help perpetuate our great democratic heritage through the study and practice of good citizenship
4. Develop an understanding of the problems of our local, national, and world communities
5. Establish and maintain good human relationships in home, school and community
6. Maintain and improve physical and mental health
7. Use the scientific method with increasing competence and feel at home in the world of nature
8. Find joy in creative expression or intelligent appreciation through a variety of recreational activities
9. Discover vocational aptitudes and opportunities
10. Choose wisely among the educational opportunities of the Senior High School
11. Express truthfulness, goodness and beauty in daily living.

Some of these objectives are more pertinent to the work of specific departments than are others; yet all departments can make some contribution to each objective. Thus these objectives tend to unify and coordinate the efforts of all teachers.

Guidelines to Action

During the past decade at Battle Hill, certain guiding principles developed which provided special emphases for the school. Sometimes these principles were operative as unexpressed basic assumptions, at other times they were consciously expressed when dealing with problem situations. Of course, all faculty members did not subscribe fully to all of these ideas; there were varying degrees of acceptance and commitment. Yet there was sufficient consensus to provide a “rationale” for the school.

Curriculum

Curriculum is a composite term which becomes manageable when broken into its basic elements:

Offerings, learnings, process

—A person says curriculum, meaning offerings
—A listener hears curriculum but thinks of learnings
—Confusion results.

We need to think of the process through which offerings and learnings are woven into behavior.

The learner should become responsible for directing his own learning.

—As the learner matures, responsibility should shift from the teacher to the learner
—Pupils should be actively planning, choosing, evaluating in keeping with their maturity levels.

Learning should be carried on in a spirit of discovery.

—Junior high pupils should adventure in the broad areas of human experience
—Through the exploration of their world, they should discover their interests, needs and abilities and clarify their self-concepts.

Learning is not complete unless it produces a change in behavior.

—Memorizing the Constitution doesn’t automatically make a good citizen
—Behavior grows out of our perceptions
—If we are to change behavior, we have to change the learner’s perceptions.

The school should be deliberately planned as a learning environment.

—Classrooms should provide stimulating centers of interest
—Teachers should have a variety of materials and resources at their command
—Flexibility should be built into the use of time, space, materials and personnel.

Guidance

Guidance is not a separate department, it is an essential part of the teaching-learning process.

—Specialized guidance personnel are necessary—but—
—One of their major responsibilities should be the re-education of teachers
—A new professional role should emerge: teacher-counselors.

The essence of discipline is the development of internal goals and controls as the individual matures.

—The positive constructive aspects of discipline should be stressed as much as the discipline of restraint
—Discipline which frees a person to achieve is as necessary and desirable as the discipline of restraint.

Respect for personality and for individuality.

—The unique individual is the irreducible element in education
Grouping, marking, promotion, setting standards, and other school practices must accept and provide for this basic fact.

A school should have an emotional tone that is both warm and friendly, firm and supporting.

An emotional climate can facilitate or inhibit human growth

Fear is contractive, love is expansive

The way a person feels about what he learns is just as important as what he learns.

Administration

Administration is a service function which provides leadership.

The democratic leader integrates his ambitions with the welfare of the group.

He helps the group identify its goals, clarify its problems, adopt effective ways of working together and of evaluating results.

The junior high school is a part of a system-wide organization extending from K-12 and must be planned and operated within this context.

Human growth is a continuous process

We do injustice to it when we break it into arbitrary fragments

Our concern should not be for the preservation of the junior high school organization but rather for making the best provisions for the continuous growth of the early adolescent.

Cooperative planning not only gets the job done but helps build democratic personalities.

Pupils need to work together

Teachers need to work together

Parents need to work together

Pupils, teachers, and parents need to work together.

Parental and community cooperation grows out of understanding and participation.

A community will not support a program it does not understand

A community cannot understand a program without being informed

A community cannot be informed by just being told; participation is necessary.

Theory should guide practice and practice in turn should remake theory.

Theory without practice is sterile

Practice without theory is blind

We need to keep theory and practice closely joined through a continuous process of in-service education.

It was this rationale that gave the school its characteristic atmosphere as a learning environment for early adolescent boys and girls.

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