

WHEN STAFF MEMBERS RELATE TO THE PUPIL

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THE demands of a technically-oriented society coupled with mushrooming enrollments have placed increased burdens upon the senior high school. One of these burdens is the need to resist assembly-line instruction as the answer to mass education and the knowledge explosion.

Depersonalization usually accompanies bigness, and there is no doubt that today's schools are getting bigger. This is necessarily so, since small high schools with limited enrollments and inadequate staffs can only be considered as 20th century anachronisms. The efficient *transfer of knowledge* today requires highly diversified curricular offerings and well-trained staff members that only schools of adequate size can provide. The problem lies in finding ways for the staff in a large school to relate in meaningful fashion with individual students. Only so can each student enrolled profit from the curricular and instructional advantages such a school offers. At the same time each student will not be deprived of the advantages of the more intimate atmosphere of a smaller school.

Impersonal Schedule

Inflexibility has long been synonymous with schedule making. Only in recent years have attempts been made to render scheduling more susceptible to control by the instructional staff itself.

In the typical senior high school the bells ring seven or eight times per day, and the students shuttle from room to room on a rigidly controlled basis, with no attention paid to the *amount of learning time* a given student needs per subject. That is, 45 minutes per day may be allowed for each child to master the intricacies of 10th grade English, whether or not one student in the class could have digested the material in 15, while another might have required two hours to achieve equal mastery. When the bell rings, the teacher stops instructing, the students stop "learning," and the class scatters, not to see the teacher again until the next day.

Since there is by definition in most schools basic material to be covered, the teacher must gear his presentation to the pace of the average. This practice results

in about an equal division of bored (bright) and bewildered (slow) students in thousands of American classrooms daily.

Various "track" systems and plans of homogeneous grouping have enabled teachers more nearly to gear their presentations to the ability levels of their different classes. It is the writer's contention, however, that such wide ranges of abilities, aptitudes, interests and backgrounds still exist in every homogeneously-grouped classroom that it is impossible for the teachers of these classes to truly "individualize" their instruction and "relate personally" to their students in the time allowed.

Many secondary school teachers with heavy teaching schedules are quick to admit that, by the end of the year, there are some students in their classes whom they hardly know at all. Upon reflection, one wonders at the advantage such a system gives to the quick, the aggressive, and the personable student in these classes in terms of grades, class rank, and teacher and counselor recommendations for jobs and college entrance.

Some persons would say that the race has always gone to the quick. To these the author would reply that competition is not the name of the game we in education play. It is rather our responsibility to see that the shy boy in the back row, the girl with the speech defect, the slow-learner who also happens to be the nicest and most courteous lad in the class, also have their day in the sun. This demands individualized, personalized instruction, and ways must be found to provide it.

Three O'Clock Exodus

The enforced rigidity provided by the daily schedule ends at approximately three o'clock in the typical senior high school. Unfortunately, teachers who would like to meet individually or in small groups with the students they have taught during the day soon learn that many of the students who need help are unavailable. Extracurricular activities in the form of clubs and athletics claim a goodly number. Many hold afternoon and evening jobs. In the newer campus-type and regional high schools built on the outskirts of a community, the bussing of a majority of the students is a necessity.

The concept of the neighborhood school, wherein the children can remain after class and still get home in reasonable time does not apply to the usual senior high school.

In too many schools, assembly-line instruction seems to be the order of the day. Students see each of their subject matter teachers for a brief time only and personal teacher-student contact is kept to a minimum. Since much of the instruction is on an impersonal basis, it follows that many of the personal and academic needs of the students are not only unmet but are unknown.

Teacher Availability

The basic solution would seem to lie in increasing the *availability* of teachers to the students they teach *during the school day*. To the author, the daily

availability of teachers to students is more important than the *ratio* of teachers to students, usually used as one index of school quality.

Some schools increase the opportunity for teacher-student interaction by lengthening the standard period of 45 minutes to one of 60, with 15 minutes reserved for study and personal teacher help. This is an excellent method of increasing the availability of teachers to students, but it has one serious drawback. The long period cuts down the number of periods a school may schedule in one day, and thus limits the scope of the curricular program and the number of elective subjects a student may take. Other schools attempt to circumvent this limitation by utilizing a "rotating" period, with each subject matter class meeting but four times a week. Most schools have found that such a program still limits the extent of curricular offerings, and works best only in those strictly "college preparatory" high schools where all students follow almost identical academic programs.

"Common Study Hall"

The most effective way the writer has found to increase daily teacher-student interaction is to provide, within the daily framework of the schedule, "common study halls" wherein teams of teachers meet with students they have just taught the preceding three periods. A team might consist of a teacher of English, a teacher of history, and a teacher of mathematics, all of whom work with a group of 90 students assigned to them periods one, two, and three. The students are assigned to the teachers in sections of 30 each for the first 3 periods, and then report to a large group common study hall period 4.

Period	English	History	Mathematics
1	Sec. 1	Sec. 2	Sec. 3
2	2	3	1
3	3	1	2
4	Common Study Hall 90 Students (3 Teachers Present)		

The benefits here are obvious. A number of the students' own subject matter teachers are available to them for an extra period each day. Slow students can receive the extra help they need. Accelerated students can be given individual tutoring on an advanced level. Teachers can "reteach" a lesson to small groups, and work with others on a consultative basis.

Best of all, the daily interaction process allows teachers to get to know each of their students personally. Students have the feeling of "knowing where to go" if they need help. In addition, breaking a school of 1000-plus students down into "association groups" of 90 for at least part of the day helps to break down the impersonal academic atmosphere prevalent in many large schools. Students find themselves more readily accepted as individuals within the smaller group.

The foregoing is but a phase of the rather elaborate team teaching program in operation in the author's high school, and it is not his intent to describe this

program, since this has been done in other articles. He would suggest, however, that those associated with large, impersonal high schools examine the idea of breaking the student body into smaller academically-related groups, and provide, perhaps through a block-scheduling procedure similar to the one illustrated in the foregoing diagram, the opportunity for students' regular subject matter teachers to interact with them on a daily small-group and individualized basis.

School Within a School

The increasing depersonalization of the senior high school can also be effectively halted by utilization of the administrative "school within a school" principle. At Easton, each grade level occupies a separate area, and has its own administrative guidance and office staff. Thus, a 2,000 pupil high school in reality functions as 3 separate 650-pupil high schools, with a central administration coordinating the enterprise. Guidance counselors rotate, and spend three years with a single class as it moves upward through the school.

It is paradoxical that the increasing interdependence of individuals within our specialized culture has resulted in increased depersonalization of public institutions serving the individual. None of us wants our children to become mere numbers in academic factories that specialize in quantity production rather than quality control.

There appears to be a trend in this direction, and counter-efforts seem to be in order to enable administrators and teachers to establish relationships with students that go beyond the mere purveying of facts, opinions and orders to passive recipients.

In the central office of the 5-year-old, modern, 2,000-student Easton Area Senior High School hangs a famous painting by Winslow Homer of a one-room country schoolhouse. It hangs there for a purpose. It serves to remind us that the contemporary American secondary school, while priding itself on the beauty of its plant and the efficiency of its instructional facilities, can ill-afford to forget the basic human needs for warmth, security and understanding. These needs can only be met by providing daily opportunities for teachers, as human beings, to relate with students as individuals. The assembly-line technique, however successful in industry, was never meant for use by educators.

Reminder

FEBRUARY 1, 1966

**is the closing date for preregistration for the
Annual ASCD Conference, San Francisco, California
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