

A Curriculum for Children in the Moon Port Schools

FLOYD W. HESSLER

IN 1963 the Brevard County (Florida) Board of Public Instruction appointed a committee of 20 instructional personnel—teachers, principals and supervisors—to develop recommendations for a continuous type curriculum. This committee's report, "Selective Phasing: A Continuous Education," was approved for a number of schools to put into operation.

In 1964 a committee of 60 teachers, principals and supervisors was appointed to make recommendations for a curriculum which reinforced the previous report. This report was entitled "SPACE Curriculum Guidelines." It recommended that the curriculum be organized to promote the acquisition of skills through concept development.

In 1965 a committee of 45 persons was appointed to recommend improvements in the SPACE curriculum and to recommend additional skill and concept techniques. This report was given to the instructional staff for continued evaluation.

During the 1966 summer curriculum workshop, a staff of teachers, adminis-

trators and supervisors brought the SPACE plan up to date with all current research.

Five Stages of Growth

The SPACE Plan covers a 12-year program. This program is organized into five distinct stages. A Stage is a descriptive term used for the vertical grouping of pupils within the 12-year program. Stages I, II and III include the six-year elementary sequence. Stages IV and V include the six-year secondary sequence.

The horizontal organization of the SPACE Plan is called phasing. A Phase is a descriptive term used to designate a broad category in which pupils are assigned for academic instruction. There are three phases: (a) Basic, (b) Regular, and (c) Advanced. These terms are not used to describe abilities of children, but are used as an administrative tool to divide a given number of pupils.

All pupils are phased first on the basis of reading performance. Reading performance was selected for two reasons:

First, it can be easily and reliably measured, and second, there is usually a high positive correlation between reading efficiency and achievement in other subject matter areas.

An individualized advanced phase is Quest. In this phase students prepare reports, work up projects of interest to the student, and complete special curriculum activities to better prepare for future education.

Stage I is composed of the first two years of school. During this two-year sequence, children will learn to discover through self-exploration.

Planning good learning opportunities for young children is an important task and a demanding one. Some of these children have a father and mother to whom they can turn; some have only one parent in the home; others cannot remember either parent. Some have both older and younger brothers and sisters; some are "only" children. Some have always held the limelight in their homes, others come from homes where a child is expected to be seen, but not heard. Some have traveled extensively, here and abroad. Some children know how it feels to pull up their roots and move from place to place; others have known but one home and one community.

Working at the job of growing up and learning tasks that go with this job is very difficult. These tasks include the mastery of essential academic knowledge and skills. They also include learning to appreciate and participate in the sharing of human warmth and affection, learning to get along with age mates and achieving independence or becoming a person of worth in one's own right.

The curriculum for these pupils is nongraded. The nongraded process elim-

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inates the requirement that a youngster must spend a year in a class of set goals. The nongraded objective is to deal with individual differences, make progress more continuous and release young children from the pressures and tensions of failure and needless grade repetition. The plan of the nongraded school never demands that a child repeat what he already knows, even when a youngster is required to spend extra time in the primary area before he enters the Stage II program.

The first task of the teacher in Stage I is arranging opportunities for good experiences. The quality of the experiences that children engage in determines the quality of learning that takes place. Experiences, whether broad in scope or limited, must have meaning. The child must understand what he is doing and feel that it is worth doing. Each meaningful experience the child has contributes to those he has had in the past and will have in the future.

Education is a personal experience, developed rather than imposed. The instructional role of the school is to assure each pupil opportunities to develop skills which enable him to make intelligent decisions in order to behave effectively in terms of his own interest and of the interests of society.

It is no longer possible for a student to be called "educated" when he has covered a specific area of curricula. The knowledge explosion has demanded of the school a new program of "learning how to learn" or the development of skills for learning.

The SPACE Plan has divided the skills into the various stages. Skills within each stage are those skills which most pupils have at that level of devel-

opment. Each pupil is expected to proceed through these skills at his own rate.

The development of these skills is called a "continuum." A teacher or team of teachers may use this continuum as a diagnostic instrument to ascertain the specific skill weaknesses of a pupil. After a determination of the skill weaknesses is made, steps can be taken to correct the deficiencies and to guide the pupil in learning new skills.

The educational objective of the school is to establish and develop conditions for the following skill areas in all stage levels:

1. Learning strategy
2. More effective communication
3. Critical and creative thinking
4. Effective and efficient social behavior.

To develop these skills into a curriculum, a concept is selected and developed. The concepts selected by the teacher or team of teachers will determine the content which will be used in developing the skills and will contribute to the pupils' understandings and attitudes. As skills are developed under a continuous program of evaluation by the teacher(s), new skills are selected and the development recorded for each pupil.

The most important condition of school learning is the affective tone of the classroom. The child's relationships in the classroom, with the teacher(s) and his peers, determine the extent, the breadth and the depth to which he can reach out and use the classroom experiences. Research supports the idea that complex rational learning occurs best in an atmosphere that allows and encourages a flexible approach and a mildly pleasant sense of well-being.

The self-concept of a pupil is devel-

oped through attainment of skills and knowledge as the child adds power and depth to his understanding of the world around him. Achievement of a skill, whatever it may be, operates in multiple directions. It makes us feel good about ourselves to be able to do a thing well.

In Stage II the children range greatly in reading abilities. There are children who can barely struggle along in a pre-primer to those who enjoy the *Reader's Digest*, encyclopedias and other materials which would challenge the best efforts of the average pupil in his eighth or ninth year of school.

Each child in the Brevard County public schools is evaluated by a standardized reading test and by teacher(s) judgment. Following this evaluation he is placed in a phase group according to his skill development. He may be placed in the regular phase for science, regular mathematics and advanced reading. During the course of the year the teacher(s) may decide to transfer the pupil to another phase grouping. This is after close evaluation of the skills developed by the child.

In the fifth and sixth years of school, Stage III, pupils usually accept more responsibility for learning. The skill development during this period is determined by the judgment and insight of the teacher using individual testing means. The skills of this period are usually developed through unit teaching. Unit teaching provides strength to the school day. It provides action and yet disciplined control. It provides individual and group development.

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The beginning of the unit encourages firsthand-type questions, that is, go-and-see, or go-and-ask questions.

Unit teaching encourages audio and visual presentation such as talks, panels, dramatizations and tape recordings. The depth and scope of a unit are encouraged by the teacher, but are really the product of the interest of the pupils. As the unit progresses, the expansion of knowledge continues.

Stage IV is composed of students in their seventh, eighth and ninth years of school. These young people, ranging in age from 11 to 15, are a very special group in terms of growth and development. They differ markedly from each other in height, weight, rate of growth, sexual maturity, social development, academic skills and interests.

The junior high schools have teams of teachers set up to offer exploratory experiences, as well as to give increased attention to individual differences. Each student is assigned to a specific team according to his ability. This ability in each subject area is evaluated by standardized tests and teacher evaluation for placement in one of the phase groups. Students are phased in each academic subject area. Under the phased curriculum the student is always working at a level geared to his own growth.

Examples of Stage IV social studies general skills are: finding appropriate materials, outlining, taking notes, speaking with poise and accuracy.

Examples of discipline skills are: using charts and tables, reading graphs, solving equations, developing map skills, manipulation of equipment, observing and recording experiments accurately and developing topic sentences and paragraphs.

The 10-12 years of school (Stage V) are included in this skill development area.

This period of time commonly known as the senior high school brings together youngsters from all levels of intelligence and skill development. To provide educational opportunities for these youngsters, the skills are organized according to the individual student's level of achievement.

An example of the Stage V phased language arts curriculum is:

Phase 1—A curriculum designed for students who are deficient in reading.

Phase 2—A vigorous program of basic communication skills for marginal students

Phase 3—Beyond basic education for the student who learns in an average way

Phase 4—A curriculum with depth and concentration in the elements of composition and literature

Phase 5—Advanced Placement English for students who are able to earn college credits while still in high school.

The grouping of students with comparable skills and academic accomplishments provides opportunities for a more meaningful learning program.

Examples of language arts and social studies skills are: listening, reporting, group participation, cause and effect, interpreting, written communication, refining research techniques, observation and summarization.

Some techniques or resources used to develop these skills are: group discussion, research, map reading, use of the library, lecture, audio-visual materials, role playing, sociodrama, field trip, debate, seminar, guest speaker and independent study.

—FLOYD W. HESSLER, *Principal, Saturn Elementary School, Cocoa, Florida.*

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