

● Letter to the Editor

A Nongraded School

Des Plaines, Illinois

Editor, *Educational Leadership*

Dear Sir:

I would like to inform you and your readers of a new and unique school.

The Shelley Nathanson School (K-6) opened its doors September 1966 to more than 800 pupils. The Nathanson School has been organized as a nongraded school and is architecturally constructed to implement the concept of team teaching. Grade levels have been removed and replaced by teams of pupils and teachers. A group of children is assigned to a team of teachers (consisting of from 3 to 5 teachers) for a 2-year period. Each teaching team is provided with a daily planning session at which time their students are scheduled in music and physical education classes.

The teaching team has the task of cooperatively planning all of the children's learning activities. One member of each teaching team has been designated as team chairman. The team chairmen meet weekly with the principal to consider overall school problems and matters relating to in-service activities. The teaching teams are responsible for making professional decisions, constructing materials for pupils, setting the appropriate pupil-learning opportunities, determining evaluative procedures to see if their goals and objectives have been achieved, suggesting resources for pupils, pooling their ideas, and utilizing their individual strengths. The teaching teams also determine how children will be grouped for instructional purposes.

The teachers need not worry about encroaching upon the domain of the next highest grade. They are free to select from a wide range of books in the library-materials center without concern for their grade level. The teacher can become creative and challenge all pupils regardless of the child's developmental level. The typical A, B, C, and D report card has been replaced by the pupil progress report.

The academic section of the building consists of six clusters of classrooms. In place of three typical self-contained classrooms, each cluster contains two classrooms with movable walls, plus three seminar rooms for groups of from 12 to 15 pupils. The hub of the six-classroom cluster is the learning-materials center. All rooms open into a huge library center. Besides shelving, and tables and chairs, the library center is equipped with 42 individual carrels for independent study.

The plan at the Nathanson School is an attempt at excellence by giving each youngster a broad and personalized instructional experience. Students learn by seeing, listening, and doing. Seeing and listening are, of course, done individually. Sometimes all of the pupils of a particular team are brought together for a large group presentation to see and to listen. Children also learn by discussing and working through problems. A large part of the child's day is spent in these small seminar discussion groups. Before a child can discuss, he needs to do some kind of reading. All children need to read, write, and formulate their own ideas. We have set up a school day which permits youngsters to do independent study.

We would be pleased to share whatever knowledge we have obtained with all visitors who come to our school.

Sincerely,
FRANK A. DAGNE
Assistant Superintendent
East Maine School District #63
Niles, Illinois

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Pp.: 28 Price: \$1.00 (cash only)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036

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