

*When any one element is changed,
a shift results in each of the others
until a new equilibrium is established.*

"HEY, MAN, this is great! Now we can sit and talk to the guys during our free time without having some study hall teacher breathing down our necks."

"It's just like college, you are on your own to study."

"Now I can spend all of my extra time working in the wood shop designing and building my stereo cabinet."

These are some student reactions to being allowed wide freedom of choice as to where and how the pupils can spend their unscheduled time.

Under the system, students may work in quiet study rooms or go to the library. They may go to science laboratories, shops, the typing room, or the language laboratory. Students are encouraged to visit teachers in their classrooms or planning centers, and sit in on another section of some class that is giving them trouble.

A student can rehearse with his debate team in the corner of the cafeteria or just sit and talk with friends. He may not stroll the halls or leave the campus but otherwise may exercise his best judgment regarding the use of his time when not in class.

This arrangement of how students may spend their out-of-class time is just one of the many innovative programs inaugurated at University City High School during the past two years.

IMPACT OF INNOVATIONS

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It is an example of how teachers, administrators, students, and entire communities throughout America are receptive to new ideas in education and, indeed, are searching for new and hopefully better solutions to many of the age-old problems.

This spirit of inquiry and receptivity to innovation presents unlimited possibilities for improving the educational opportunities of boys and girls and is commendable and overdue. Along with these opportunities goes an equal degree of vulnerability because new practices breed uncertainty and anxiety.

Educational leaders have learned to live with these less than predictable results when considering an innovation. The normal practice is to gather all of

the information obtainable about the possibility for success of a new plan. If the odds of succeeding appear to be sufficiently favorable, the plan is put into effect. The next step is to evaluate the newly instituted practice in a thorough and objective manner and continue, modify, or reject the plan on the basis of the findings.

To Serve Youth

In University City we believe that the schools exist primarily to serve the youth of the community and the society in which they live by helping them to become responsible, perceiving, self-directing, and self-educating individuals who are capable of making wise decisions and value judgments. To achieve this purpose the focus is switched to the individual student and teacher and their daily experiences and relationships.

Team planning and cooperative teaching are used. Teachers frequently work with small groups and with individuals while a spirit of student freedom and responsibility is developed. A new kind of schedule is used, the building is being modified, and a new grading system is in use. These new programs and others were introduced in an effort to help achieve our goals.

As each change was being contemplated we tried to anticipate its impact on the individual students, the total school program, and its long-term effect on society. To provide better methods of predicting the effect of an innovation prior to its injection into the educational milieu, we devised a complicated and perhaps less than reliable, but extremely useful model.

This theoretical model depicts the

various aspects of the learning process as being the separate but interrelated elements of what the chemist would call a system in dynamic equilibrium. Elements within this equilibrium include the student and the view of him as a learner, the view of the learning process, the role of the teacher in the learning process, and the philosophy and objectives of the school.

Also included are the curricula, teaching strategies, materials, instructional facilities, and the school organization, as well as the rules under which teachers operate, the use of paraprofessionals, and the schedule of classes. Other important elements in this equilibrium include student conduct and discipline problems, the community, and all aspects of public relations.

Dynamic Equilibrium

Each of the elements in this dynamic equilibrium exerts both direct and indirect pressure on each of the other elements. When any one element is changed, a shift results in each of the others until a new equilibrium is established. Awareness of all of these micro-reactions and study of the individual relationships between all of these elements places us in a better position to predict the eventual outcome of a proposed modification of one of the elements.

For example, we have already mentioned unscheduled time for students as our alternative to the conventional study hall. As we moved in the direction of an increased emphasis on student freedom and responsibility, the entire equilibrium shifted in a variety of ways. A chain reaction resulted that affected the students, the teachers, the

program, and the facilities of the school.

Three large rooms that were formerly used as study halls were converted into team teaching areas with flexible space available for large groups, medium groups, conference rooms, and planning centers. This freed enough other classroom space for one wing to become available to be converted into a library. The interior walls in that wing were all removed, which permitted the space from the hallway to become usable. The small court surrounded by the wing was covered and a new library of almost 13,000 square feet was created with a minimum of expense.

New and surprising demands were made on shops, laboratories, art studios, the cafeteria, the student center, and the snack bar. Teachers who were assigned to study hall duty became available for student conferences and were allowed more time for team planning. Cafeteria schedules were changed and other school routines were modified.

Student attitudes about school became more positive and teacher attitudes became more tolerant as most students showed they could use their time wisely. The community became involved as parents reacted to student opinions and the resulting effects go on and on. Every item mentioned in the equilibrium was affected directly and indirectly by the new positions of the other items.

In order to predict the effect of this innovation upon the total educational program of the school, each of these micro-reactions must be studied separately and a new model of the entire equilibrium must be built.

Other examples can be used. It will be found, however, that all aspects of

the instructional program will be affected by each entry of an innovation into the system. A careful use of this model will increase substantially the accuracy of the predicted impact of an innovation on the child, the family, the community, and society.

School Objectives

As this model is used, everything must be measured in terms of the objectives of the school and these objectives should be stated clearly in terms of student and teacher behavior. At each point, ask the model if the specific change being considered will move each of the items in the equilibrium in the direction of the desired student behavior. This is the key question and must be answered objectively and accurately.

Also examine honestly the motives behind the proposed innovation. Many excellent ideas are doomed to failure because they are used as an expediency or as a means of lowering the cost or the effort of the educational process. Any motivation for change other than the pure desire of giving every child a better learning situation and any innovation that is not based soundly on the best information available about how students learn should be given little chance for success.

Some schools appear eager to adopt well-publicized new programs that imply a different philosophy of education without being willing to endure the painful process that is usually required to produce real change. This change occurs in the attitudes and actions of teachers as they work with students, and unless change occurs at this level an innovation cannot produce the optimum advantages to the learner. Inno-

vations appear to be popular and sometimes even necessary in order for a school to maintain its status, but those which are embraced as methods of enhancing the image of the school or the administration are superficial at best and frequently do more harm than good.

The method of judging an innovation repeats the use of the conceptual model that was employed as an aid in predicting the success of the new plan. The new program should be judged by measuring its effect on the entire educational system and how each element of that system has affected every individual child. One should again view the elements of the learning process as they appear in dynamic equilibrium.

Measure as accurately and honestly as possible the change that the new practice has brought to each element in the equilibrium and evaluate the effect that each of these changes has had on the learners. At each point ask if the specific change that occurred moved each of the items in the equi-

librium in the direction of causing the desired student behavior. If desirable change has not occurred at this level, the new program must become the subject of serious concern and reevaluation.

The evaluation of our program has been made primarily through observation and listening to the interchange of the students, faculty, and community. A survey taken after one semester on the new system showed that a majority of the faculty and 86 percent of the students felt that they were pleased with the way they spent their unscheduled time. Through numerous sessions of listening to student and teacher reactions, it was determined that neither students nor teachers wanted to return to the old system.

Unquestionably, a new spirit has emerged in University City High School. It is evident as you watch teachers plan together, find classes where teachers do not do all of the talking, and find students and teachers searching together and interacting in a delightful way. ☺

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