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THE Wilson Campus School at Mankato State College, Minnesota, is not the best school in the nation. We have all the obstacles facing education today, just as the American society in general has problems with pollution, conservation, drugs, budgets, cities, and minorities. We lack quality, we are not a model; but Wilson is an example of education's need for the ability to make rapid, massive, dramatic change. It represents a serious attempt to apply the concept of *humaneness*¹ in the day by day operation of a real school. If the principles given in the ASCD 1970 Yearbook are "right," then a great majority of the present schools are "wrong."

Wilson is challenging many education practices today. Monopolies are not always the big industries in America, nor are the only police states found among some foreign powers. Unfortunately, the worst example of a monopolistic police state in America is the public school system. We require students to attend school, require certain courses, require certain books, put "minus 10 wrong" on the paper, and give the child an "F"; we do not allow selection of teachers or rooms or mate-

rials. We have tests on Friday and dress codes every day. We still even paddle and expel students in some schools.

What is needed in every community in America today is a philosophy of alternative educational programs. In 1970, we really do not know what is best. Therefore, there should be a wild upside-down school, a semi-innovative school, and a structured school available to all students, parents, and teachers on an optional basis.

The current Wilson effort grew out of a previous conservative mold. Wilson, until 1968, had national exams and percentage comparisons. Our pupils went to college; the parents were satisfied; we had the usual share of strong and weak teachers. We had self-contained classrooms, "A" through "F" report cards, textbooks, required seventh-grade courses, period 1-2-3 schedules, dress codes, bells, and other examples of ritual and ceremony which still exist in most schools.

Wilson is engaged in about 63 changes. A few of them involve personalized programming, matching students and teachers, student development of curricula, optional

¹ Mary-Margaret Scobey and Grace Graham, editors. *To Nurture Humaneness*. 1970 Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1970.

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attendance, smorgasbord scheduling, individualized learning, 12-month school year, student freedom, individual progress reports, all-day kindergarten, emphasis on the affective domain, five-phase instruction, and a nongraded K-12 country school environment.

The Proper Match

Of these, the most important is *the match between the teacher and the student*. Learning occurs if there is a good relationship. Personality, perception, interest, sex, age, and skill are the factors to match. If the student relates to the teacher, the battle is on the way to being won. If there is an improper match, positive learning does not occur. At Wilson, each student selects all his own teachers and his advisor. No teachers are "assigned."

With the proper match, the *affective* domain then becomes the focus. Self-image, attitude toward life, being "turned on," good peer relationships, positive motivation, and perception of others are crucial. Wilson programs concern themselves first with this aspect.

The *psychomotor* domain closely follows the affective domain in importance. Gross motor, fine motor, visual motor, auditory discrimination, and others are keys in learning. Therefore physical education, industrial arts, home economics, art, and music are important courses at Wilson, especially in the primary years. Many even learn to type during this period.

Then comes the *cognitive*. Learning is easy in this area, limited only by the individual's potential, assuming that the match and the affective and the psychomotor areas are taken care of, and assuming the school has a continuous progress program and that the home environment allows the school to function with the individual.

Creativity is another concern here at Wilson. Why is it that in the conventional schools more dropouts occur among those classified as creative? Who said that math and social studies are more important than drama, speech, music, art, chorus, and other fine arts areas? At Wilson, courses growing

out of the Creative Studies Team have great importance. We truly believe in a balanced curriculum; English, social studies, and math are not kingpins, but are only equally important.

Further, we are concerned about individual learning styles, especially as these relate to progress in a self-paced program. Very few schools have paid attention to *learning styles*, but it is becoming more evident every month that this is an important factor in learning. Even simple illustrations, such as the fact that some students need quiet concentration and some prefer to study to the tune of noisy records, show the complexities, without even discussing the impact of listening, discussion, reading, writing, and seeing methods as these affect various individuals.

Being concerned with the affective, psychomotor, creativity, and learning style factors, as well as the cognitive, has probably done more to enhance *motivation* than any other single issue, with the exceptions of allowing students to choose their own teachers and develop their own courses of study.

Relevancy is another key at Wilson—the belief that the student best learns that which is meaningful to him at this moment in time. We are concerned about interest and frames of reference; we believe that curricular development should not be dictated by publishers, supervisors, legislators, parents, school board policies, and experts, but rather heavily engaged in by students. After all, whose education is it?

Wilson is concerned about the problems of students in urban, suburban, exurban, and rural settings. But as an example of the need for involvement in change and humaneness, look at Indian education, which a U.S. Senate subcommittee report stated "could hardly be worse" and labeled "a national tragedy—a national challenge." Indian education has been called "sterile, impersonal, and rigid" and seems to be part of the cause of some Indian problems. What have we done as a total national concern to enhance the Indian culture, art, costumes, customs, history, dances, legends, weapons, and beauty, and to bring about a better understanding of the Indian in America? If the analysis in a recent

book, *Our Brother's Keeper—The Indian in White America*,² is valid, the answer can only be summarized as pitifully little.

A Joint Project

Staff interest in helping in this area led to the selection of Wilson as one of six schools nationally to participate in a project on innovation in education, sponsored jointly by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Wilson, along with two other schools, is to contribute innovative educational ideas to three BIA schools; the Indian schools are to help the public schools develop new curricula and further understanding as related to the Indians in America.

To implement some of the programs and philosophies, Wilson follows a system of window-shopping regarding the selection of study areas. Students window-shop as any adult might do in looking for the right set of clothes. There is a shopper's guide available

² Edgar S. Cahn, editor. *Our Brother's Keeper—The Indian in White America*. Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1969.

to help him select, such as the ads one might find in the supermarket. If the student cannot find what he wants, he asks the management to help him order a special program.

Tied in with all of the efforts is the development of the early childhood years. Wilson has limited programs for three- and four-year-olds. But the five-year-olds are in school all day. We do not have a "mother hen" (six of the ten teachers are male) with them constantly; they wander throughout the building. We are interested in freedom, responsibility, and self-selection for these youngsters, but with some structure based on diagnosis, prescription, and guidance.

Further, part of the Wilson program calls for options. Courses can be mini or maxi. Pupils can go duck hunting whenever they want during the duck season, take vacations anytime during the year, work, sleep, stay at home, and generally "do their thing" as long as it does not hurt others. The opportunity for options is available to students K-12. We believe that humaneness involves choice of teachers, choice of courses, daily schedules, optional attendance, freedom of dress, and individualized evaluation (no re-



The match between teacher and student is important.

Photos courtesy of the author



A balanced curriculum includes a wide variety of activities.

port cards), as examples of some of the changes toward a humane school.

In this program, the year-round school concept is quite important. Students operate on a continuous progress, self-paced learning cycle; they may plug in, plug out, slow up, speed up, drop in, drop out, cycle in, cycle out whenever they desire. They may spend 3, 13, 33, 103 weeks pursuing an area. Wilson is open 12 months a year, closed only for two weeks during the winter, one week in the spring, and two weeks in the late summer.

Requirements at Wilson are quite fluid. We do not agree with the state department requirements and, therefore, do not specifically follow them. We argue against college entrance required courses and disagree with the present legislative requirements. We do not believe that all ninth graders in Minnesota need English, social studies, math, science, physical education, and one elective; nor do we believe that all second graders need an extra big chunk of language arts, a big

chunk of math, some social studies, minimum "book" science, and a little physical education, music, and art built around lunch and recess. What about home economics, industrial arts, foreign language, typing, environmental studies, and drama for elementary students? Wilson includes these and the instruction is on a 1-1 basis as much as possible. Groups are arranged when needed. The 1-1 and group arrangements are complemented by open lab and independent study opportunities.

The schedule is a daily smorgasbord menu. The student selects as much as is needed or desirable, when it is needed, for as long as it is needed. Students select the amount of soup, salad, hamburger, cottage cheese, milk, cookies, steak, peas, eggs, baked potatoes, jello, etc., that seems desirable for that day. Putting it in educational terms, the student determines the amount of each course he desires to study in a given day. For example, he may spend all day in the art

center. Each day a new schedule is developed for students to select the opportunities which they desire to pursue. They may go home for part of the day, if that best suits their needs.

The Lighted School

We are concerned about community involvement and the lighted school. We have Parent, Student, and Faculty Councils operating now, and we coordinate these through a Joint Council. They are not as effective as we would like, but we are working to improve communication. We still have not done a good job tying the non-parent taxpayers, the legislature, the state department, and the school boards into the school. Some parents are still not convinced. Usually in the second year of an innovative program, there is a "revolt" from the minority who are against change. Wilson recently had such a reaction, and again this proved to be true of a small

but very vocal percentage. Schools interested in change must be willing to face such unpleasantness.

Wilson believes strongly in evaluation. There is more research to support a Wilson type program than the conventional kind, but there is not enough of either. We cannot prove that Wilson's is the right program; yet neither is there proof that it is wrong. Conventional schools cannot prove they are right, but Wilson cannot prove they are as bad as we think they are. Wilson's evaluation is based on 1-1 relationships, diagnosis, prescription, affective domain, and student evaluations of teachers, plus outside evaluation by the Office of Institutional Research. Conventional schools have group comparisons, Iowa tests, "A" through "F" report cards, and emphasis on the cognitive, conformity, and authority. There is a great deal of research still needed in education.

To help a student through this type of program, each student selects a teacher who



Students operate on a continuous progress cycle.



Wilson School exemplifies the ability to change.

serves as his advisor, counselor, and consultant. Each teacher has 5 to 15 counselees; the teacher is involved in this selection process in that he or she agrees to work with the individuals who have made the requests. At Wilson, most students have a great deal of 1-1 contact, whereas in a conventional school, where there may be one counselor for 300 students, there is very little 1-1 contact for most students. If it were attempted, there would be a long line outside the door each day.

Do schools really need to make such a dramatic change as that which has occurred at Wilson this past year? In the 1970's, communication systems will be available by which, through home TV and push-button phones, we will receive instant answers from a regional retrieval information center. We will have an attachment to the TV sets to plug in home video cassettes so we can watch the Late, Late Show early, or any other favorite program or lesson we want to store on a cassette. The 1980's will find signed checks and credit cards on their way out. Electronic money is not far off. Should schools keep pace with the changes in their

surroundings? We at Wilson believe we should. Not everyone agrees, but remember, Socrates was forced to commit suicide by drinking hemlock after he was accused of impiety and *innovation*.

To implement such a program, teachers must be treated as professionals; they must be allowed to come and go and have optional attendance, freedom, responsibility, and a great degree of individualization and self-selection, the same that we preach for students. Teachers are human, too. This changes the whole authority structure—all present administrative designs must be revised.

Though each faculty member has gone through much frustration in the past year and a half, there have also been glimpses of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Wilson teachers are convinced that there is somewhere, somehow, a better way to educate boys and girls; for this ray of hope they continue to strive. The efforts at implementing a humane school can probably best be summarized by a note received from one of the staff members during this past year. It read, "Don, I am staying home tomorrow. This day has been hell!" □

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