

"Quest" for an Alternative

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For three hundred years or more, schools have been denounced for their capacity to destroy children's spontaneity, curiosity, and love of learning, and for their tendency to mutilate childhood itself.¹

STATEMENTS such as this one by Charles Silberman, author of *Crisis in the Classroom*, reached a peak of intensity with the coming of the 1970's. As the decade begins, there is an expanding awareness of the fact that the essence of such denunciation is indeed legitimate. In light of this realization, new energies are being directed toward the development of alternatives in curriculum design.

Concomitant with this awakening is a realization that prospective teachers must have experiences that use approaches which constitute an alternative to the traditional forms of instructional programs. If prospective teachers are not exposed to alternative curricular designs, the chances are that as teachers they will perpetuate the traditional instructional programs and styles that at present are under attack.

Campus Laboratory School

An institution which has the potential for short-circuiting this vicious cycle of same producing same, but which for the most part has been singularly ineffective and negligent in doing so, is the Campus Laboratory School.

¹ Charles Silberman. *Crisis in the Classroom*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1970. p. 262.

Recognizing this gap between potential and practice, the Campus School, State University of New York, College at Cortland, sees its "raison d'être" for the 1970's as that of an institution committed to translating the theory of openness in curriculum decision making into generalizable practice, and to instituting procedures for dissemination of this information.

On the basis of this commitment the Campus School at Cortland College has initiated the Quest Program, a program founded in the hope of truly being able to realize the motto of the State University of New York: "Let each become all he is capable of being."

One of the initial decisions by the teaching members of the Campus School faculty was the adoption of an organizational structure conducive to openness. The traditional unitary, stair-step organization of children and teachers was replaced by a multi-aged, vertical approach. The basic units of the school are:

Early Childhood	Ages 3-6
Primary	Ages 6-8
Intermediate	Ages 9-11

The children in the Primary and Intermediate units are only committed to a 1½-

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hour time block daily for instruction in language arts, reading, and math. On the basis of his interests, the remaining 4½ hours of the school day belong to the child, in the sense that he makes the decisions as to what areas of instruction he will pursue. The interest area offerings include: art, creative language arts, French, health, home economics, industrial arts, instrumental music, personal guidance, photography, physical education, science, social studies, Spanish, and vocal music. In addition, many interest areas are sponsored by parents and other members of the school community.

The children schedule themselves weekly with the guidance of their family room teacher. Their freedom of choice enhances the parent's involvement in the school life of the child, in that the parent has *direct* input into the choices which the child may make. The child's schedule may change from week

to week in every area except that of the required basic subjects.

As a result of the freedom inherent in this organizational pattern, every child, teacher, or parent is relieved of the constraints of grade designations and predetermined stereotypes of what any child should be, at any given time. The responsiveness of the system to the needs of the child provides an opportunity for an alternate approach to curriculum development. The unfolding of the curriculum in the Quest Program occurs at that moment of interaction between student, teacher, and subject matter at issue. Through the establishment of an environment which encourages dynamic, personal, self-determined curriculum development, every person involved, from student to student teacher, is afforded the freedom of pursuing an interest with real commitment. In addition to this freedom, the student



Photos by Bill Clymer, Graphics Department, Cortland College

The pupil assumes responsibility in decision making.



Pupils in science laboratory show benefits of multi-age interaction.

is given the opportunity to assume responsibility in decision making and in the carrying out of his commitments. Significantly, the students in the Quest Program are involved in all aspects of the valuing process as described by Rath, Harmin, and Simon.² They are actively involved in: choosing freely from alternatives, the continuous evaluation of the consequences of their choices, publicly following through on their choices, incorporating these choices into their behavior, and acting upon their choices repeatedly over a period of time. Involvement in this process enables a student to develop a sense of purpose about learning and to gain a sense of direction as to what he would do with his life.

Evaluation

Evaluation by the teachers, students, and participants is considered an essential ingredient in the development of this "opened" program. A paradigm has been

² Louis E. Rath, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon. *Values and Teaching*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1966.

established which incorporates the conventional process and product components.

Within the parameters of the program itself, however, a model for assessing the changes that take place in the behaviors of the learner is in the developmental stage. The intent is to develop a scheme which will reflect the philosophical tenets and unique features of the Quest Program. Traditionally, evaluation has focused on the cognitive products to the exclusion of affective goals, and has been teacher centered. Within the proposed evaluation model the student and parent, in addition to the teacher, will be involved in specification and assessment of such things as the interests, attitudes, values, and personality adjustments of the individual learner.

When operating an open school, the first question confronted by a faculty in the development of a method of evaluation is, "Who decides what is to be evaluated?" In answer to this question, it has been proposed that the teacher, on becoming familiar with the needs of the child, would then, in conjunction with



Boys experience freedom to pursue interests.



Personally involved learning is encouraged by the teacher.

the parent and child, mutually agree upon the expected outcomes. It is a joint interactive process among the teacher, parent, and child and emanates from the particular needs of the child. In developing these projected outcomes the teacher, because of his professional training and knowledge of the individual needs of the child, will provide for everyone's consideration a tentative list of the types of outcomes that could be formulated.

Learning, being a unique and personalized matter, logically demands that the learner be as actively involved in the decision-making process as possible. Since in this model the student is actively involved in this process and not a pawn of external forces, it is believed that he will accept a major responsibility for his own learning.

The evaluation of these shared expectations will be in terms of discrepancies that might exist between the intended and the

observed. At some predetermined point or juncture in the academic year, the teacher, parent, and child will assess the progress the child has made in reaching these outcomes. The participation of parents in the evaluation process will intensify their involvement with the school. For the child, his participation will develop his ability to appraise himself and make responsible decisions.

In summary, it is obvious that the "opening up" of the schools, in terms of curriculum design, is an imperative. One of the first places where this must take place is in the Laboratory Schools affiliated with the teacher education institutions. The program described here, with its emphasis on openness and personalization, is but one attempt to provide an alternative experience to the typical forms of instruction, curriculum design, and evaluation. □

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