



School Organization and the Individual

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THE organization of a school or school system is important in moving from traditional group-oriented teaching to more promising child-centered approaches. In a list of priorities, organization would come behind teacher-administrator commitment to individual approaches and the hard work that must go into their development. It might also follow the availability of a wealth of materials and additional adult resources. After all, there are numerous examples of all kinds of schools that have introduced some degree of individualized instruction. Jack Edling¹ lists nearly 50 cases of various types from among the many he could have selected and these are all different, all committed, and, to some degree, all successful.

Intellectual Growth and Organization

There is considerable evidence that when the desire is present, improved approaches can take place within any organizational structure. There is also evidence to indicate that some types of organizations lend themselves better than do others to meeting the needs of individuals. In reviewing the body of data relative to the needs of children and youth, there obviously is more to be concerned about than learning or intel-

lectual considerations, although these may be paramount.

The work of Inhelder and Piaget² on growth patterns in thinking provides clues to the need for an upper elementary or intermediate school separate from the primary school. The research of Gesell³ and others substantiates the need with regard to physical growth as does the writing of Paul Clarke⁴ and many others on cultural forces and social growth.

Using this type of data, Gerald Weinstein and Mario Fantini,⁵ in a discussion of the importance of recognizing the motivational power of an affective curriculum, suggest a three-tier curriculum. One tier, paralleling early elementary grades, is comprised of the basic skills and basic information and concepts of social studies, science, language, and other disciplines—"the generally acknowledged building blocks for the

² Barbel Inhelder and Jean Piaget. *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1958.

³ Arnold Gesell, Frances Ilg, and Louise B. Ames. *Youth, The Years from Ten to Sixteen*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956.

⁴ Paul A. Clarke. *Child-Adolescent Psychology*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968.

⁵ Gerald Weinstein and Mario Fantini. *Toward Humanistic Education: A Curriculum of Affect*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970.

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¹ Jack V. Edling. *Individualized Instruction: A Manual for Administrators*. Corvallis: Oregon System of Higher Education, 1970.

intellectual development of the child." The second tier provides for solidifying basic skill development and includes as an additional curriculum the exploration of personal preferences and individual interests. "Like the first tier, it is highly individualized." The third tier, paralleling the four-year high school, is the curriculum of concerns and the center of group inquiry, consisting mainly of an exploration of society's problems and issues. "Exploration of a common concern—world hunger, pollution, racial injustice—should lead to individual self-examination and the development of personality."

These three tiers, or levels, of curriculum are not seen as disconnected but as overlapping and, to some degree, concurrent. Certainly they are of necessity interlocking since, for example, group inquiry into problems could not function without the necessary basic skills and body of common information.

This type of curriculum, emphasizing as it does some levels of learning and a partially sequential order of studies, is only a part of the concern leading to a judgment about the relative advantages for individual students of any organizational pattern.

Physical and Cultural Clues

Evidence has been accumulating for more than 50 years that human growth patterns are undergoing subtle constant alteration in the direction of earlier maturation. The research clearly indicates that, physically, with each passing decade, youngsters are beginning their ascent to adulthood sooner. A careful analysis of the nature of early adolescent growth suggests several implications for the educator. Foremost is the realization that the learning process must be concerned with the child's growth needs. Since physical growth is a powerful factor in influencing learning, school programs should enable youth better to understand physical growth changes, to create goals which will enable all boys and girls to acquire knowledge about maturation processes, and to attain physical success.

Implications for school organization must also consider factors related to cultural forces. The student develops toward maturity through interaction with the cultural environment. "Environment" refers to a set of conditions over which a youngster has limited control and to which he must learn to adapt. The degree to which he is able to demonstrate adaptive adjustments affects his personal development.

We have stated that the biological development of youth has undergone a significant trend toward earlier physical maturation in relation to chronological age. Culturally, a comparable trend is evident. Therefore, the educator must consider (a) that the physical factor of maturing at an earlier age has challenged youth's security, and (b) that the impact of a significantly changing culture has put tremendous demands on youth which cannot be met in the same ways as in the past. It is all too evident, furthermore, that students develop in vastly differing cultures. Youths from environments of poverty and repressed minorities find adjustment to a cultural environment basically different from their own extremely difficult.

These considerations spell out by implication where the needs are for individual attention and to some degree suggest the organizational plan which can best lend itself to individual and group needs of children and youth.

Comments on Organizational Patterns

Working perhaps backward from the weakest organization, it seems most apparent that an 8-4 organization lends itself least well to the necessary flexibility. The weakness of the 8-4 organization today is the same as when it was attacked before the turn of the century, only more so. It does not lend itself to the implementation of the findings of adolescent psychology; it cannot provide breadth of program necessary for preadolescents; it continues primary teaching methods too long and ill-prepares students for the too sudden change to secondary school methods; it provides poorly for personal, social, and

educational guidance; and it weakens the needed attention to primary children by the constant presence of the complex problems of preadolescents. Districts and schools which still maintain an 8-4 organization have struggled to make adjustments favorable to youth in grades 6-8, with little success. It cannot provide needed options and is not conducive to the best that is possible in individualized or group instruction.

The four-year high school, including as it does the ninth grade, is probably better than the three-year secondary school which resulted from the development of junior high schools. Inclusion of the ninth grade in the junior high school was never properly accepted. Reluctance to accept this arrangement related to college requirements and to the very nature of ninth grade students. Placement of the ninth grade and the very name "junior high school" may have been two of the great blunders of education in the 20th century.

High schools have made some of the best adjustments to the needs of youth in the past 10 to 15 years. Many are shaking off the limitations of the Carnegie unit and are reorganizing around greater curricular and organizational patterns. These advances make possible greater attention to individual pacing of students, to flexible time blocks and increased options, to a more realistic approach to career education through the development of vocational cluster programs, and to alternate schools designed to prevent and retrieve dropouts.

The 6-3-3 plan including a junior high school, at its very best, is far superior to the 8-4 organization in lending itself to improved treatment of individuals. Gruhn's⁶ six functions of the junior high school are as relevant now as when they were first written: integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation. The dissatisfaction with the junior high school lies in its obvious desire to be a high school; and this applies not only to its trappings, uniformed bands, interscholastic

athletics, proms, mature social events, but also to its teachers and teaching.

Too often teachers in junior high schools are misplaced high school teachers waiting for a chance to move up. They have had little training in methods conducive to proper growth of preadolescent youngsters, including special training in individualizing instruction. Even more than high school teachers, junior high teachers use lecture methods and subject matter based approaches.⁷ It is not our wish to discount junior high schools too greatly. The very best have in recent years made strong attempts to rebuild programs around the needs of their student population. The very best, however, is very rare.

The most promising organizational plan—promising greater attention to individualized instruction—is the 4-4-4 or 5-3-4 plan which includes a middle school at its heart. In such an organization the primary (or elementary) school benefits by having an administration and staff that are solely concerned with providing learning programs and related facilities for young children. The first tier of education, the development of basic skills, is made more effective and economically more efficient. The advantage to the elementary school when upper grade children are removed to a middle school has been understated in most rationales for a 4-4-4 plan. Yet it is in the middle school where greatest benefits of the organization are evident.

The middle school has a large enough number of youngsters of like needs intellectually, physically, and culturally to be able to build a program with proper balance. It includes opportunities to exercise group inquiry, to offer options that intrigue the interests and motivations of early adolescents, to allow students opportunity for self-directed and self-sequenced study, and to practice and appreciate the arts. It also includes guidance necessary for children who are at an age when they feel most strongly the emotional and social anxieties and tensions. □

⁶ William T. Gruhn and Harl R. Douglass. *The Modern Junior High School*. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956.

⁷ Glenn R. Rasmussen. "The Junior High School—Weakest Rung in the Educational Ladder?" *NASSP Bulletin* 46 (276): 63-69; October 1962.

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