

What Has Happened to the JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL?

“Originally conceived as a downward extension of secondary education, the modern junior high school—despite its label—now appears to be increasingly an upward extension of elementary education.”

IN THE United States, the junior high school is about as old as the automobile. Shortly after Duryea chugged down the streets of Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1893 in his first automobile, a new intermediate school was erected to house the pupils of the seventh and eighth grades in the Richmond, Indiana, of 1895. But the beginnings of high production in the automobile industry did not come until the years 1909-12. And the real beginnings of the junior high school movement in America were not until 1909-10 when Columbus, Ohio, and Berkeley, California, organized junior high schools. Mass production of junior high schools followed as Grand Rapids, Michigan; Los Angeles, California; Concord, New Hampshire; Evansville, Indiana; and a growing host of other school systems joined the junior high school procession.

Like the Model T, the junior high school vehicle got under way auspiciously and with considerable fanfare. Educators quickly climbed aboard what

seemed to them an excellent way of correcting numerous ills evident in the American school system during the early 1900's. Riders came aboard hoping to achieve one or another of the early functions of the junior high school. Included among these early purposes were:

1. Effecting economy in time through earlier offering of college preparatory subjects, the elimination of duplication, promotion by subjects, and departmental teaching.
2. Improving articulation between elementary and secondary education by introducing an intermediate step and gradually inaugurating the elective system.
3. Improving the noticeably poor holding power of the schools and reducing the heavy number of failures and repeaters by new and richer content, vocational work, departmental teaching, and other features.
4. Making possible a program better suited to the nature of early adolescents by providing needed special facilities, by organizing vocational training for those who left school early, and by homogeneously grouping the pupils

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to help take care of their individual differences. A program better suited to the early adolescents could also be made possible by segregating them from the younger children and the sophisticated older adolescents to the benefit of all three groups, and by providing guidance services to assist with the many kinds of problems which accompany this age level.

5. Providing for exploration by offering short-term or try-out courses, by testing, counseling, and exploratory work to discover pupils' interests and abilities, and by offering vocational orientation work.

During the 'tens and 'twenties of this century, both the automobile market and the junior high school movement boomed. Some thought the infant educational institution to be a veritable cure for all ills. At the annual NEA meeting in 1916, one educator declared enthusiastically that the junior high school was "sweeping the country." By 1920 many informed professional men were crusading for the junior high school. Surveys recommended it in community after community.

During the decade 1920-30, the number of junior high schools underwent an amazing growth. In 1920 there were about 100 separate junior high schools. By 1930 there were 1,842. From only about one-half of one per cent of the secondary enrollment in 1920, the figure rose sharply to 20 per cent by 1930. Articles on this uniquely American school flooded the professional periodicals. By 1930 more than twenty-five books on the junior high school had appeared.

However, the onrush of the junior

high school vehicle slowed down during the 'thirties and 'forties. Though the number of junior high schools continued to increase somewhat, some of the zeal characteristic of the proponents in the early years diminished. Between 1931 and 1947, only two books on the junior high school appeared. A corresponding decrease in the number of magazine articles may be noted. Some educators began saying that the junior high school movement was largely a failure. One predicted that the junior high school would "gradually pass from the picture as a separate school." The junior high school vehicle, which once rode heavily laden with eager educators, seemed to be losing some speed and many riders.

Yet an educational Nostradamus might well predict that the junior high school years will become an increasingly important school segment in the next decade. He might base his prophecy on such signs as the following:

1. The recognition by the United States Office of Education of a "currently growing interest in the junior high school." On the basis of this conviction, the Office has launched a number of projects. These include the holding last February of a National Conference of Junior High Schools, and the publication of a number of circulars, bulletins and bibliographies dealing with the junior high school.

2. The authorization and inauguration of a three-year study on the education of young adolescents by the Southern States Work Conference.

3. The recent study conducted by the New York State Education Department. This comprehensive and cooperative effort resulted in publication of

A Design for Improving Early Secondary Education in New York State.

4. The increased activities of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals in this area. This association, incidentally, has continuously both reported and supported the development of the junior high school movement. The organization encouraged the study of the junior high school even during the years when it seemed to be an educational orphan.

5. The activities of the California Association of School Administrators which developed a handbook for junior high school educators and, more recently, has produced a color film, "The Junior High School Story."

6. The mounting number of recent publications dealing with the junior high school. Included in this number is *Junior High School Trends*, by Leonard V. Koos, one of the early guiding lights in the movement. Another contribution is *The Junior High School—Today and Tomorrow*, by Gertrude Noar, for many years a capable junior high school principal. Gruhn and Douglass have just revised their book, *The Modern Junior High School*.

7. The interest of frontier curriculum groups, particularly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, in the core curriculum. The ASCD recently published the booklets, *Developing Programs for Young Adolescents* and *Preparation of Core Teachers for Secondary Schools*. The core curriculum is found much more frequently at the junior high school level than at the senior high school level. The well known 1950 study by Grace Wright of the United States Office of Education revealed

that 86 per cent of the core-type programs existing were in grades 7, 8 and 9. A study by the present writer involving 8 per cent of all the junior high schools in the country shows that 12 per cent of these randomly selected junior high schools are using a "problem-centered block of time." One-third of the junior high schools practice "correlation of two or more subjects" and an additional one-third report a "fusion of two or more subjects."

A New Model

The junior high school in America may be undergoing a renaissance. This neglected area may soon be back in the limelight. The "forgotten teaching area" may be overlooked no longer.

Perhaps educators should look carefully at the present model of the junior high school. The vehicle proved to be more than a strange experiment. As it was refined it proved to be a sound and sturdy conveyance for the middle school travels, more comparable to the modern station wagon. It has served well as a testing ground for experimentation with newer practices. It is more functional than other secondary school models. There are reports of more improvements and increased production in the years ahead.

Discerning educators will quickly notice that this year's model is substantially different from earlier versions. This institution is no Model T. The modern model does not fly the banner of departmentalization. The large chart, setting forth the supposedly "unique" functions of the junior high school is not in sight. The slogan, "Economize time with a junior high," no longer appears in the advertising.



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Some familiar faces are missing among the riders on the junior high school station wagon today. Lost are most of the educators concerned with drop-outs. Today they are working over at the senior high school. It also rides without the vocational educators. They too are working at the senior high school, and some are at the junior college. The proponents of ability grouping are not nearly so numerous among the goodly company. Supporters of promotion by subjects in a completely departmentalized structure are few and far between. Educators championing earlier college preparation are conspicuous by their absence.

Despite these losses, the station wagon is full. New riders have come aboard. The core curriculum advocates are especially well represented. Psychologists are comfortably seated. (But in

their briefcases they no longer carry the works of G. Stanley Hall, who characterized the adolescent as "a new being" and whose psychological disciples crowded the earliest models. The psychologists today are carrying books on human growth from the womb to the tomb.) Industrial arts men who emphasize general education have taken the seats of the vocational educators. And look again. Some elementary educators are aboard. Though the junior high school was originally conceived and carried out as a downward extension of secondary education, the modern junior high school—despite its label—now appears to be increasingly an upward extension of elementary education.

Many of the older riders are left. Some have been loyal since 1910 when the experimental models got under

way. Those concerned with reducing failures and avoiding excessive retentions still ride. The supporters of education for democratic citizenship have an established seat. Guidance-minded teachers continue to travel.

No calliope, blaring brassily, follows the junior high school vehicle down the street today. The riders do not seem to be crusaders for the junior high school trademark. We hear less discussion of the importance and virtue of "separateness."

After all, there is not much sense in continuing a crusade after the crusade has gained its goals. The battle to reorganize secondary education has largely been won. The fad has become a fact. Four year high schools now make up less than half of the secondary schools. United States Office of Education figures derived from the 1951-52 Biennial Survey reveal that only 18 of the 48 states still have 50 per cent or more of their secondary schools organized as four year or regular high schools. Maryland has no four year schools left. The District of Columbia has its entire secondary school population housed in either junior or senior high schools. Seven other states have 15 per cent or less of their secondary schools remaining as four year high schools.

From the standpoint of enrollment the victory of the junior high school or reorganization movement is even more certain. Of every 100 secondary pupils, only 25 are enrolled in four year high schools. Forty are on the registers of either junior or senior high

schools. The remaining 35 are entered in junior-senior and undivided five and six year high schools. With new buildings being erected and consolidation continuing, there are indications that reorganized secondary schools will become even more prevalent.

The present model of the junior high school has a different destination. It heads for a good educational program for young adolescents. The modern riders are less concerned about particular grade organizations and administrative arrangements. They believe there are many "roads to Rome."

Those who ride the modern model in the junior high school movement look like a competent group. They seem to know where they are going. For maps, they have research and techniques denied their pioneering predecessors. They now have considerable experience under their belts. They are aware of changes in the role of the junior high school—changes which have grown out of shifts in the cultural context and modifications in generally accepted psychological and educational theory.

The riders welcome additional passengers as the junior high school does seem to have been neglected by many in the decade just past. And supporters of the modern junior high school vehicle are certainly needed, for the education of young adolescents is a perplexing and important problem. With the goal of a good educational program for early adolescents as the destination, the junior high school vehicle seems to be going somewhere today.

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