

Curriculum News

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FIFTY professors in the field of curriculum, we reasoned, ought to know about the promising curriculum practices around the nation. So we wrote to the professors, asking them to name the schools they thought we should write to. The professors replied; we wrote to the schools; more than 60 schools replied; we summarized, and in this column we are synthesizing. The number of school systems in this study is not large enough for a thorough survey, but we believe we have found practices which illustrate some of the best and most interesting ideas and trends. It is our thought that the most promising trends of today will be significant factors in shaping the school of the future.

Primary Programs

Thirteen school systems wrote to us about their primary programs, in some instances called "nongraded" programs. The plans fall into three types according to treatment of the skill areas. Midwest City, Oklahoma, Cedar Falls, Iowa, and Sioux City, Iowa, are examples of programs where detailed systems of evaluating and recording have been worked out on a series of progressive achievement levels in the various skill areas. Thus, when each new year starts the teacher who receives the children can immediately see where individuals are working in each area of growth. This

has also been done in the Warner School of Nashville, Tennessee.

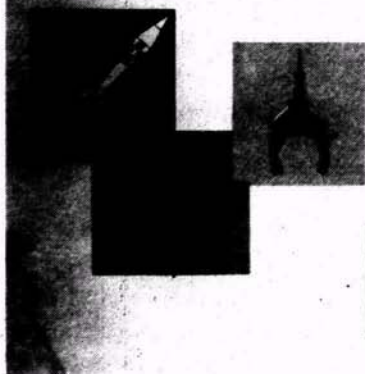
Elmira Heights, New York, Hillsborough County, Florida, and University City, Missouri, are examples of primary programs where reading development is used as the chief focus for recording and grouping, with other skill areas handled in a more standard fashion.

A teacher's intimate and continuing knowledge of children, in addition to a record system which passes from teacher to teacher, is the basis of programs in which one teacher stays with a class of children for the three-year period. Pontiac, Michigan, and Park Forest, Illinois, are examples. The Scott Avenue School of Whittier, California, reported a variation in which some rooms have children of three "grades" in them. Each year the oldest third of the group moves out and a new third, three years younger, moves in to stay for three years.

Although the chief objective of the primary plan is providing for more individualized learning environments, an almost universal side effect is a stimulation of "acceleration-deceleration"—of having some children spend a year more or a year less in the primary block of years. If each child is working in materials suited to his capacity-level, it can be seen that "skipping and repeating" will be replaced by speeding up and slowing down—a much more adequate base for making adjustments. In most instances

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of acceleration-deceleration, it is recognized that academic talent is only one criterion for judging the desirability of increasing or decreasing the length of time a child will spend in school. Social, emotional, and physical maturity are usually listed as necessary accompanying criteria. It is generally agreed that the academically-precocious youngster who is just average in other ways should be provided for academically but not removed from his age-group.

Highline (Washington) Schools describe a primary program which makes it possible for teachers of first and second grades to provide certain types of experiences, especially in reading, which could not otherwise be attempted. Only half of each class comes to school at 9:00 in the morning, permitting the teacher to conduct small-group activities. These children are dismissed from school an hour early in the afternoon, leaving the

other half of the pupils, who arrive at 10:00 a.m., for their hour of small-group work with the teacher at the close of the afternoon. This program may have important pilot implications for discovering more about the relationship between learning effectiveness and class size.

Grouping and Related Practices

A few school systems reported implementation of the nongraded idea in one skill area, while still maintaining most of the graded structure. One illustration is the Greenburgh School District #8 in Hartsdale, New York, where the program in handwriting instruction permits children to develop skills at an optimum rate for each, through a step-by-step sequential process. The Warburg Campus School at Hartsdale, New York, individualizes handwriting instruction through a similar program.

Grouping practices in reading, reported by several communities, were similar to the well-known "Joplin (Missouri) Plan." In this plan children leave their regular classrooms and are regrouped for reading instruction, according to the developmental level in reading rather than age or grade. Concord, Massachusetts, has developed a plan of this type in arithmetic and spelling, for grades three through six.

Englewood, Florida, has a "split-grade" elementary school, in that most rooms include children of two grades, as a deliberate practice, enabling the teachers to help selected children move through the program in a year less or a year more than the usual period of years. Although "graded," this plan has the flexibility of a nongraded school in that grades do not have strict time allotments for some pupils.

A number of enrichment programs in special subject areas were reported, sometimes implemented through an all-day grouping of gifted and superior pupils and sometimes through a non-graded structure or a part-time grouping. South Bay Union School District, California, reported its participation in a county-wide study in which a new arithmetic program has been developed for talented children. Richland, Washington, has foreign languages for fast learners at selected grade levels.

Ability grouping was reported by 20 school systems. Five of these grouped high-ability children in all-day programs, usually in grades 3-6 or 4-6. In East Meadow, New York, carefully selected children do the work of grades 4-6 in two years. In other systems reported, "acceleration" is made more possible but on an individual basis.

The Evanston, Illinois, Elementary School District #65 conducted a small

but pertinent grouping experiment: one group was segregated full-time, another for part of the time, and similar high-achievers in heterogeneous groups were given individual enrichment opportunities. The conclusion on the basis of this trial was that there was no appreciable difference between the three approaches, in noticeable outcomes, and that *all* efforts to help gifted children tend to pay dividends.

A modified grouping plan might be called "planned heterogeneous," or "cluster" grouping. Saddle Rock School of Great Neck, New York, divides children in a grade into five achievement levels. Then children are assigned so no teacher has the full range to manage; also, no more than one "cluster" of either extreme is placed in a class, and the children in the highest and in the lowest classifications are not assigned to the same room.

For slow learners, East Orange, New Jersey, reports special classes for "non-performing" children in grades four through eight, who are two or more years below their age-norm in reading and who score between 80 and 90 on individual I.Q. tests. (There are other provisions for those below I.Q. of 80.) In Oak Park, Illinois, tutorial centers have been established for underachievers. Children receive special help during scheduled periods until they have made progress and achieve closer to their ability levels.

Team Teaching

Nine school districts reported that they have been experimenting with some practices related to the "team teaching" idea. In some instances these practices relate also to the development of non-gradedness, in one or more skill areas.

Norwalk, Connecticut, has a systematic program. Aided by a Ford Foundation grant, they are studying whether some outstanding teachers might not better serve, and be more likely to stay in classroom teaching, if they would head up teaching teams—giving guidance to less experienced staff members. Where there were formerly three teachers paid on the basis of the same salary schedule, there are now one master teacher or “team leader,” one regular or “cooperating” teacher, and one non-certificated aide. The master teacher receives considerably more than was formerly paid. The regular teacher also receives somewhat more. The aide is paid a clerical salary. The experiment is intended to test whether pupils are getting as good an education or better than before, with the same expenditure.

The Franklin School of Lexington, Massachusetts, has a similar project. Three groups of teachers are organized, with members having the titles: Team Leaders, Senior Teachers, Teachers, and Clerical Aides. Also, children are re-deployed during the day and classes cut across grade lines.

The Englewood School in Englewood, Florida, has a two-class team made up of teachers of one fifth and one sixth grade class, and a three-class team composed of one third, one fourth, and one fifth grade class. The teachers cooperate in planning, with any needed direction supplied by the principal. Two or three classrooms combine for a variety of activities: reading and arithmetic are taught with regroupings that do not follow grade placement; some music, art, physical education, films and programs are conducted in groups larger than one normal class. One advantage is that one of the two or three teachers in a team can be free to do preparatory work.

In Atlanta, Georgia, the Skyland School had appointed three teachers to coordinate the work of other teachers, each responsible for two or three grades. Extra salary is granted. In addition, a full-time librarian handles instructional materials and works with the three teacher-coordinators. Still other practices were reported, each with some unique variation.

New Curriculum Elements

Foreign languages, introduced at the elementary school level, were reported by several school districts. Economic education, as a fundamental part of the curriculum, has been developed in Elkhart, Indiana, where units and materials have been integrated with social studies, especially in the primary grades.

Highland Park, Illinois, has instituted a unique approach for elementary school foreign languages. One hundred and six staff members, including the superintendent, learn conversational Spanish together. The children, in turn, learn from their teachers in informal but planned ways. A number of school systems use radio or television series to give systematic lessons, followed up by informal reinforcement by the teachers.

In Clayton, Missouri, a specialist who gives some instruction to the children in French also gives in-service help to the teachers—who conduct most of the program. A number of school systems have a foreign language in classrooms wherever the teacher has a language skill, but with no uniform program.

Several communities reported that they are successfully using “helping teachers,” or consultants, in the elementary schools. These are master classroom teachers who are released from regular assignments so they may be of general

service to teachers in procuring and organizing instructional materials, diagnosing and advising on learning and teaching problems, and generally helping administrators and teachers on curriculum development, child study, or in-service education.

Portland, Oregon, Cedar Rapids and Des Moines, Iowa, Great Neck, New York, and University City, Missouri, have master-teacher consultants giving a broad service to their schools, while other systems reported the use of consultants in more specialized ways. In University City the five Resource Teachers, together with elementary principals and others who give leadership in the subject areas, wrote a comprehensive resource guide for elementary teachers. The guide includes curriculum descriptions, an index of basic and supplementary materials, a community trip guide, and a collection of enrichment ideas contributed by teachers.

The Sand Hill School of Carrollton, Georgia, reports a cooperative effort in the Atlanta, Athens, and Carrollton areas. A publication entitled "Some Promising Practices in Improving School-Community Relations" suggests making wider use of school buildings, having parents evaluate school practices, and having parents appear as resource people in classes or serve as substitute teachers.

Grand Island, Nebraska, reports a program for public information which enables the community to evaluate its schools constantly. Daily radio broadcasts are made from tape recordings which have been made in classrooms; one page of the local newspaper is devoted to a weekly account of school news; a bulletin which periodically publicizes the best practices of the best teachers is available to the public as well as to the staff.

Many school systems make it possible for every parent to have periodic private conferences with the child's teacher at the elementary level. Two examples are the Upper Arlington Schools at Columbus, Ohio, and the Cedar Falls, Iowa, schools. These districts have placed the conference at the heart of the reporting process in the elementary schools. Cedar Falls has three parent-teacher conferences each year. In Upper Arlington a fall conference is followed by a "progress letter" in January, a "check-list" in April, a progress report from the parents, and additional conferences where needed.

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Junior High School

(Continued from page 511)

instruction and for extending personal and social contacts. Parents, students and teachers overwhelmingly endorsed the program. Its continued existence is one testimony of its worth.

Incidentally school staffs with a view (necessarily a brave one these days) towards the improvement of their instructional programs need not look for new curriculum development principles or processes. Long-established steps might include: (a) Studying the literature, the students, the community; (b) Formulating a statement of purposes; (c) Determining and implementing the design of the curriculum; and (d) Developing a program of evaluation.

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