A New School Takes Shape

HELENE M. LLOYD

"EDUCATION in New York City today faces the greatest challenge in its history. Our schools must provide a quality educational program in an integrated environment for all students. Revolutionary new concepts in education must be explored." These words were used by Bernard E. Donovan, the Superintendent of New York City schools, as he recommended the introduction of the intermediate school program to the Board of Education in January 1966.

The Superintendent's recommendation, with subsequent approval by the Board, provided the staff the opportunity to rethink the educational program for children ages 10-14 in order to improve academic achievement and to further integration. Out of the planning conferences and visitations came the specifics of a design for 14 Pilot Intermediate Schools.

What is the nature of these schools?

The 14 "Pilot Intermediate Schools" were schools organized for September 1966, for pupils between primary school and the four-year high school. Nine of the schools are classified as "special service schools," or schools in which extra remedial services and special assistance are provided; and five as "non-special service." One of the 14 schools begins at grade 5; the others, at grade 6.

Variety is also seen in the grade spans: in September 1968, the new pilot program will be in use in grades 6-7 in one school, and grades 5 through 8 in another. In the remaining 12 schools, it will extend from grades 6 through 8.

In all schools a minimum of approximately 25 percent minority group pupils are on register, with 10 of the schools having over half the population in this category.

To design and implement a new type of educational program to meet the needs of the middle years of schooling has required a mixture of innovation with the best of the old, blended with ingenuity, professionalism, and a great amount of hard work. Important areas of action are as follows:

A New Curriculum Emerges

The size of the giant task involved in fashioning a new type of school can be conceived, in part, by the curriculum changes necessitated within a short period of time. An innovative curriculum was needed for the September 1966 deadline; this deadline was

met. Twenty-one curriculum Task Force Reports were developed during the spring and summer of 1966 and delivered to the schools for teacher-supervisor orientation the last week in August. Implementation of these preliminary reports focused on keeping the curriculum suggestions innovative, fluid, adaptable.

Some of the reports furnish specific teaching guides that are now in classroom use. For example, one report is "Typewriting, Beginning in Grade Five." If one were to visit the typewriting rooms in the 14 pilot schools, he would observe teachers using the guides from the report, helping the children master the typewriter, and—the special by-product benefit when typing is taught at this age level—seeing that the children make extra progress in such language arts skills as reading, spelling, word knowledge, grammar, and punctuation.

Another of the reports is "Foreign Languages in the Pilot Intermediate Schools," which spells out the design by which *every* fifth or sixth grader has opportunity to study a foreign language (such study is not restricted only to the intellectually gifted, as was previously the case in New York City).

Several of the reports are being used by teachers and supervisors as valuable background material to improve the quality of teaching in various areas. Included in this category are brochures on "The Curriculum in Community Services," "Individualization of Instruction," "Multi-Media Resources for Teaching," "Oral-Aural Language Study in English," and "The Learning Laboratory."

Other reports combine several areas and are to be used with regular curriculum materials, as "The Humanities"; "Performing and Creative Arts"; "Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, and Human Rights"; "Fundamental Skills"; and "Home Living in an Urban Society." You may also overhear teachers discussing in conference a few reports prepared to determine the learning potential of an area for use in further curriculum development, such as "A Multi-Level Approach to the Teaching of Mathematics" and "Articulation of Mathematics and Science, Grade Six."

Since the staff of the Pilot Intermediate Schools had an important share in the original development of these materials, excitement is associated with their use and with the revisions now under way.

Educational Planning Is Stressed

Planning for diagnosis of each pupil's needs and for the individualization of his instruction was a basic part of the design of the new school. To help in accomplishing this, a team approach is in use in many of the Pilot Intermediate Schools. Teachers, counselors, and other specialists work with supervisors to plan for the total growth of individual pupils from their admission to the intermediate school to their discharge from it. The heart of the Educational Planning Team is the teacher—the school's basic guidance worker. To assist the teacher, the services of extra assistants to principals, guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, secretaries, school aides, and various types of teaching positions have been provided to each pilot school in proportion to need. As a result, the focus is on preventive guidance to meet the developmental needs of all children.

The most effective procedure for increased involvement of pupils and teachers in the guidance program has proved to be developmental small-group counseling. Recognizing that children of the same age, the same class, and the same school have a commonality of interest as well as a commonality of problems, the counselors met with groups of 12 to 15 children (or half a class) once a week or every other week for approximately 12 times during the 1966-67 school year.

Other approaches for meeting individual needs were also brought into action. For example, continuity in the educational progress of each child was established during the first year with the help of a special teacher assigned to each of the 61 feeding schools. Flexible module programming (modules of 20, 25, and 30 minutes) also allows for greater individualization. In addition, ways of using computerized scheduling to meet individual needs have been explored in these intermediate schools.

Innovation and Experimentation Take Root

Teachers, supervisors, children, parents, and others who have had a share in these Pilot Schools have been encouraged to innovate, to create, to experiment. In all 14 schools, for example, children are using mobile language laboratories (see illustration), tape recorders, overhead projectors, sound projectors, recordings. In a few schools, extended use is being made of programmed learning materials in dealing with the wide range of ability and needs resulting from heterogeneous grouping.

In most schools, special scheduling has resulted in common planning periods for teachers of a subject area; as a result, teachers share ideas, discuss children's needs, regroup pupils, and the like. In other schools, new ways are being explored for using teachers' specialized abilities through cooperative teaching and for coordinating the after-school study center's activities with the regular day school program. It is, however, in the area of innovation and experimentation that the creative resources of the school and community must be channeled to an even greater degree.

Special Teacher-Supervisory Training Begins

A new type of school brings with it changes that require teacher and supervisory training for even the most competent staff. Some of the success and solidarity achieved to date in the Pilot Intermediate School Project has resulted from the training for teachers and supervisors, conducted through Title I funds, which preceded the initiation of the project in September 1966 and its extension in September 1967.

Building on what has been learned to date, teachers and supervisors new to the pilot program are receiving orientation training through workshops held this spring and through visitation to observe pilot programs in action. State funds for teacher-supervisor training are being used to support a before-school workshop in August-September 1968.



New Policies and Record Keeping Are Required

As the staffs of the pilot schools worked to implement the new design, it was evident that new forms for record keeping needed to be developed and new policies relating to grouping and acceleration needed to be explored. As a result, committees representing the Pilot Schools, United Federation of Teachers, and supervisory groups have developed new record forms and report cards to meet current needs. Present policy in relation to promotion, retardation, and acceleration, have been evaluated. It was agreed that flexible guidelines for acceleration, rather than merely the use of the "Special Progress Class" concept, would be in effect.

Evaluation Is Highlighted

Are we merely pouring "old wine into new bottles" and labeling them Pilot Intermediate Schools? Are we merely modifying a junior high school or high school program and calling it by another name? Or are we moving toward the fulfillment of the decision of the Board of Education which stated, "With all the risks attendant upon large-scale change, the Board is convinced that the prospects of a really significant educational advance in the crucial years before high school are sufficiently great to warrant moving vigorously forward, as recommended by the Superintendent."

Bench marks already indicate that we are designing a school that may serve as one route to better education for children. The independent evaluation of aspects of that progress during the first year by the Center for Urban Education underscored the positive steps taken. In addition, the Bureau of Educational Research of the Board of Education is also inventorying aspects of the Pilot program not covered by CUE design in order to provide yardsticks for curriculum modification for introduction of new materials, for the use of innovations, and for other selected purposes.

A Look Ahead Is Taken

From the vantage point of the second year of the project, we already see areas in which further action is needed. For example:

- There is much still to be learned and understood about the urban children in New York City for whom the Pilot Intermediate School is being designed. Boys and girls from 10 to 14 in these 14 schools exhibit a physical, social, psychological, and intellectual range that bursts the accepted grade patterns and developmental sequences. How to use our Educational Planning Teams to greater advantage in learning more about these children must be determined.

- There is much still to be learned about ways of individualizing instruction in a heterogeneous class. What an intermediate-school-age pupil needs above all is to be treated and taught as an individual in order that he can achieve to his maximum, while at the same time having the opportunity of being one of a large group made up of pupils with a wide range of ability. How to fulfill this goal in a public school system demands more creative scheduling, more teacher-supervisory guidance, and much in-depth experimentation.

- There is much still to be learned about ways of using a school staff. How do we release teacher-supervisor creativity? Is the teaching job so complicated that some type of cooperative teaching is inevitable? How can we use the power of the teacher-in-training and of the school aide to better the educational program in our Pilot Schools? How can we encourage supervisors to capitalize to a greater extent on their own abilities and on those of teachers and pupils in tooling an educational program to meet local need? These are yet unanswered questions.

- There is much still to be learned about ways in which the community can assist in the shaping of these pilot schools. Every school is part of a community and needs to have the strength that comes from positive community support. U.S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe [1] stressed at a recent AASA Convention, ". . . school officials must not only accept the necessity for dealing with these new educational forces but must actively reach out for a working union with them."

- There is much still to be learned about a host of other things. The superintendents and the staffs of the Pilot Intermediate Schools would be the first to attest to this. Questions still loom greater than answers found; however, as long as this continues, it is a healthy sign.

As they work to fulfill the challenges given to them by the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education, the faculties of the 14 Pilot Intermediate Schools are learning by doing. Their success in diagnosing and meeting the individual needs of children is beginning to emerge as a striking challenge to those in the educational backwater at these grade levels. Their ability to involve whole faculties in creatively tooling the schools' programs is beginning to pay dividends. Yes, the New York City staff is moving aggressively forward to meet the Superintendent's challenge as its members work to shape a new educational program—the Intermediate Schools for New York City's children.

—HELENE M. LLOYD, *Assistant Superintendent, New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn.*

[1] American Association of School Administrators Convention, February 13, 1967. AASA 1967 Official Report.

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