

Individual Education and the 4Rs

An untraditional school design based on democratic principles gives students control over their own learning and promotes the development of responsibility, respect, resourcefulness, and responsiveness.

No matter how much more funding is added to our current school structures, schools will not improve significantly. The problems of education are *not* the result of faulty operation but, rather, of system design (Hanushek 1989, Glickman 1989, and Branson 1987). Traditional education is based on autocratic principles, where there is *order without freedom*. Students obey teachers simply because teachers are the authority—in other words, “Do what I tell you because I am bigger, stronger, better, smarter, and older than you.” In the past, this structure worked because students accepted adults as authorities and therefore were willing to obey. However, today’s students are no longer willing to be treated as inferior and to obey simply because they are younger and smaller than adults.

An innovative school design different from the traditional is Individual Education (IE). Individual Education is based on mutual respect, where there is *freedom with order*. Students make choices and share in decision making and, through this involvement, become responsible and committed learners. In short, the IE system is based on a position of true equality between adults and

children in an enterprise concerned with mutual development.

Our intent here is to briefly describe the IE system and, in so doing, to encourage educational leaders to use innovative models such as this one. By developing and implementing models different from our traditional system, we can make a giant leap in education, and schools can become enjoyable places of learning for all.

Based on Democratic Principles

Radically different from the traditional model, Individual Education is based on democratic principles that emphasize the development of Corsini’s 4Rs: *responsibility, respect, resourcefulness, and responsiveness* (Corsini 1979). Raymond Corsini, a psychologist (and co-author of this article), developed the system and first installed it in a

Photograph by Naucal Akel, courtesy of Forest Park School, Joliet, Illinois



As her classmates listen intently, Ellwyn Gulick of Forest Park School, an Individual Education school, entertains them by reading from a book she wrote

Catholic elementary school in Hawaii in 1972. In 1990 there were two IE schools using some form of the C4R model in Hawaii, six in the mainland United States, and one each in Holland and in Israel. These schools vary according to size; location (urban or rural); and age, race, and socioeconomic level of the children enrolled (Lombardi and Corsini 1988).

The principles on which Individual Education is based are defined as follows:

1. *Responsibility.* Under realistic and friendly adult guidance, students are responsible for their own education. They make active choices about how to learn—through classroom activity, independent study, computer-based instruction, and other options.

2. *Respect.* Students are regarded as people in charge of their own lives and decisions. Likewise, they are not permitted to interfere with others' learning. The school treats students with respect and expects them to respect others.

3. *Resourcefulness.* Students develop an awareness of, and the ability to control and direct, the resources needed to accomplish the required life tasks. IE schools have three distinct curriculums that help students become resourceful and therefore self-reliant, as well as a unique disciplinary program.

4. *Responsiveness.* This most important goal of IE cannot be achieved directly. Corsini theorized that it would occur as a result of achieving the first three Rs, and so it becomes the criterion for deciding whether the first three goals are attained. Responsiveness is the equivalent of the German word *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, which Alfred Adler (Dreikurs 1969) emphasized as the most important element in developing a fully functional person. In English, the word translates as: feeling for community, social interest, feeling of belonging, or concern for others. It may also be interpreted as "love thy neighbor."

Three Curriculums

Individual Education schools have three curriculums, and faculty spend approximately equal amounts of time in these three separate functions dur-

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ing the school day. The first, *academic*, consists of weekly units of the same content as in other local schools (in elementary schools, usually language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies). The difference is that it takes half the time (two hours instead of four) to be taught because (1) teachers use a more efficient learning model, mastery learning; and (2) the schools rely on intrinsic motivation, which promotes the joy of learning.

An additional two hours of the school day are spent on the *creative* curriculum, which includes topics students want to learn but rarely find in the traditional curriculum. For a creative course to be offered, instructors (school faculty or parents) must be available, and the subjects must be approved by the principal. During the past 17 years of IE's existence, more than 500 different creative courses have been taught, including art appreciation, cooking, computers, dance, English history, first aid, and judging animals.

The third curriculum is devoted to the *socialization* process. It includes homeroom activities like classroom meetings and Life Skills Training (Gazda et al. 1987), where students learn about problem solving, health maintenance, interpersonal communications, and purpose in life. The intent is to teach students how to cooperate and participate in a democratic setting,

Motivation

Because IE schools function on the basis of informed consent, rewards and punishment are never used, and competition is not promoted. Instead, students are encouraged for their efforts, and natural and logical consequences result when rules are violated. According to the IE philosophy, competition prevents students from feeling they belong and militates against school spirit. It also creates winners and losers, reducing students' desire to learn (Kohn 1986).

To prevent a competitive and reward-oriented atmosphere from developing, IE uses no letter or numerical grading system. Instead, teachers use the mastery learning model and provide factual, objective feedback individually and only to the student involved or, if the student agrees, to the parent also. For example, a teacher might say, "Monica has learned Language Arts Unit 114 (how to use semicolons) as listed on the progress chart and defined on the curriculum sheet." Consequently, students learn about their strengths and weaknesses in a nonthreatening atmosphere and, as a result, are more likely to be motivated by intrinsic reasons.

In an IE school, every student has a progress chart, which is an informed record of scholastic learning, mostly for students, parents, and teacher advisors. For each unit, a student receives a check for "credit" or "no credit." Students are encouraged to learn at their own rates while continuing to associate with students of their own social age. Should a student not achieve the mastery level, he or she simply retakes the test after additional preparation, until the material is mastered. Official records are based on standardized tests.

Thus, in an IE school, students who learn more slowly than their peers get a check for completion each time they master an academic unit. This procedure is unlike that in traditional schools where slower students receive poor or failing marks and, consequently, may feel ridiculed or humiliated for being "below" their age group academically. Similarly, students in an IE school who have exceptional ability in a certain

Schools Using Some Form of the C4R Model

Blooming Grove Academy
1100 N. Beech
Normal, IL 61761
Dina Emser, Director
(309) 454-7242

Forest Park School
1220 California Ave.
Joliet, IL 60432
James Poch, Principal
(815) 723-0414

Hale o'ulu School
91-1841D Ft. Weaver Rd.
Ewa, HI 96706
Ann Kawahara, Director
(808) 681-3121

Ho'ala School
1106 Kilani Ave.
Wahiawa, HI 96786
Sister Joan Madden, Director
(808) 621-1898

Hufford Junior High School
Larkin and Ingalls
Joliet, IL 60435
Sharon Marzuke, Principal
(815) 725-3540

For information about membership in Individual Education International, contact William Kiskaddon, 4404 242nd Pl., S.W., Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043; (206) 776-9740.

Jefferson Elementary School
401 S. Prairie
Pueblo, CO 81005
Dorothy Buksar, Principal
(719) 549-7575

Spring Grove Academy
Titusville, FL 32780
(407) 267-8959

Polaris School for Individual Education
4625 W. 107th St.
Oak Lawn, IL 60453
Lucille D. Brown, Director
(708) 424-2000

Teak Jan Roorda School
Tjissemma 6
9089 BG Wytgaard, Netherlands
Theo Joosten, Principal

Telem High School
20 Mismar-Hayazden St.
Givataym 53588, Israel
Ayala Ravid, Principal

to deal with a difficult student, can maintain order and respect by keeping a student from entering their classroom or by sending him or her out by using the Go signal. They do so in a friendly manner, without speaking, to avoid arguing with the student.

As long as they follow the second rule, students are free to enter or leave any classroom whenever they want. If a teacher is lecturing on something students already know, they are free to leave as long as they go to a supervised area. Consequently, teachers are free to teach those students who are interested in learning the content at hand. Students, on the other hand, are given freedom of movement in an orderly fashion along with responsibility for their own learning.

Key Elements

Next we look at some of the more unusual and key elements of IE schools (Clark 1985, Corsini 1979, Simpkins 1985, West 1986, Whittington 1977). First, admittance to an IE school is based on informed consent. Parents and students must understand how IE works and agree to follow its procedures, and the principal may deny admittance to any child on this basis. (Historically, no one has ever been rejected on this issue.)

Second, every student has a teacher/advisor (TA), who is the single most important person in school for that student. The position is similar to that of any adult who provides professional services. Students nominate the faculty members they desire for their TAs, but a teacher has the right not to accept the nomination. The student can change TAs, but TAs cannot transfer students to other TAs. The student and the TA interact in five major ways. The student: (1) meets daily with the TA in a morning homeroom for games and socialization with all other students; (2) meets monthly with the TA for private interviews to review academic progress charts and to discuss any problems or issues that may be pertinent; and (3) meets weekly for group discussions with the TA and other students who have self-selected themselves into this group. The TA: (4) is the major contact for the student's parents and (5) should the student

area may progress academically as fast and as far as they wish but can still socialize with their age group. Thus, students can be with their social mates at one time and their academic mates at a different time.

By participating in a noncompetitive learning atmosphere, each student has the opportunity for continuous successful learning experiences. When students feel respected for who they are, not what they should be, they gain a sense of belonging; then they are free to develop their potential.

Discipline

Individual Education operates on a simple disciplinary system based on three rules that carry natural and logical consequences for infractions (Dreikurs et al. 1982). All three rules have the same importance. They are:

- Do not do anything that could be dangerous or harmful.
- Always be in a supervised place or en route from one such place to another.
- If a teacher signals you to leave a classroom, follow the "Go" signal and leave immediately and in silence.

Infractions of these rules are handled in a preestablished manner made

known to children and parents before admittance to the school. For example, all students know and have agreed that the logical consequence for a sixth violation of the rules is a conference with the student, the principal, his or her teacher advisor, and his or her parents. The focus of this conference is not to punish the student but to generate alternative ways for the student to behave to prevent further infractions. Teachers report every rule violation in a matter-of-fact way and do not accept excuses from students for violating the rules. The IE disciplinary system follows closely the model of judicial procedures of the United States (Corsini 1979, 1980, Lombardi and Corsini 1988).

Probably the most controversial and confusing aspect of IE is the Go signal (the teacher points to the student and to the door), since it seems to be contrary to the general spirit of IE (See Grunwald 1985, Harrison 1985, Richardson 1985). However, democracy does not mean students can do anything they want—this is *freedom without order* and leads to anarchy. To be democratic, we must maintain *freedom with order*. Thus, teachers in an IE school, instead of interrupting learning

ever get into serious disciplinary difficulties, acts as his or her advocate.

Third, in an IE school students have five avenues for learning: *classroom attendance, the learning center, the library, tutoring, and home study*. Which method is used and in what combination are up to the student. For example, except for homeroom periods, a student may be in the library or in the study hall all day.

The fourth key element of IE schools is that they have no assignments of any kind. The very word *assignment* indicates a superior/inferior relationship. Teachers and teacher advisors may suggest special work, but it is the student's decision to accept their suggestions.

Fifth, parents take a five-session parenting course, which teaches the four goals of misbehavior, the psychology of encouragement, how to discipline with natural and logical consequences, and decision making through family meetings (Dreikurs 1964, Dinkmeyer and McKay 1976). They also learn more about the IE system.

Sixth, the school day usually has nine periods:

- Period 1—Homeroom;
- Periods 2, 3, 4—Academic Classes;
- Period 5—Lunch;
- Periods 6, 7, 8—Socialization and Creative Courses;
- Period 9—Homeroom.

The first eight periods are of equal length, the last period is a short one for cleanup and checkout.

Seventh, faculty are forbidden to discuss any student with any parent except under two conditions: (1) the student is willingly present, or (2) the faculty member is directed to talk to parents in the principal's presence. The IE philosophy is that teachers should operate as professionals serving students, rather than acting as parent surrogates.

Finally, the only mandatory program in an IE school is the socialization process. A student can refuse to go to academic classes, creative classes, the library, study hall, and so on, but is required to attend homeroom group meetings and TA conferences. However, in no case is there pressure to participate. Contributing to students' ability to function as de-

Contributing to students' ability to function as decent human beings is more important than making them smart or clever.

cent human beings, according to the IE philosophy, is more important than making them smart or clever.

Truly Democratic Schools

Undoubtedly, some who read this will have serious reservations that such a system will work with all students. Corsini estimates that about 1 to 3 percent of children do not adjust to IE schools; however, the general estimate is that 27 percent of students do not adjust to traditional schools (Hodgkinson 1985). Interestingly, the single most successful IE school consisted of students who were dropouts or pushouts (Whittington 1977).

Data collected on IE schools indicate that if children are given (1) freedom to make decisions about their own education, (2) guidance from adults they select themselves, and (3) constant feedback (through progress charts and disciplinary records), they will draw their own conclusions about learning, use good sense, and progress faster academically than in the traditional manner (Froemel 1980, Hooper 1982, Krebs 1982, Moran 1976, Pratt 1985, Pratt and Mastroianni 1981, and Spalding 1985). Early indicators based on quantitative research, doctoral dissertations, and questionnaires that examined classroom climate, locus of control, and academic performance show that:

- children in IE schools are happier, learn to love learning, and fit in well in the school;
- teachers enjoy the whole teaching process and are absent fewer days;
- parents indicate that their children willingly go to school;

● and children are better prepared for the reality of life after school (Armstrong 1985, Dubrovich 1985, Jones 1977).

We are bold enough to believe, and thus far the evidence of successful IE schools supports us, that a truly democratic school system, designed for the development of fully functioning human beings, could become a force for reason, consideration, and caring. We think this system—operating on the principles of mutual respect, logic rather than force, and generating a love of learning—is the single best option to replace our traditional school structure. □

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