

Individualizing Instruction in Hawaii's Primary Grades (The 3 on 2 Program)

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The philosophical commitment of the new Master Plan for Hawaii's educational system is to individualize instruction. In an attempt to arrive at an operational approach to this concept in selected schools, an extra teacher has been placed with two classrooms of primary children. There are approximately 210 three-teacher teams within the State. Three on two, an acronym for an organizational pattern which employs a team of three teachers working with a group of approximately sixty children, provides exceptional possibilities for meeting the needs of individual children. In the many visitations to 3 on 2 classrooms, the author has observed a variety of approaches for meeting the learning needs of young children. There is, however, a basic management and philosophical theme which is dominant. The following account illustrates the type of learning that is taking place in many of our 3 on 2 classrooms.

Six-year-old John usually arrives early for school but does not have to wait for the bell before entering his room. His arrival time being approximately fifteen minutes before school is to begin, he likes to go directly to his room. Upon entering and receiving a greeting from the teacher who has volunteered to help the early arrivals, John places his personal belongings in his cubicle, and proceeds to the attendance box. Shuffling through the name cards, he finds his name, places it in the attendance chart pocket, and picks up a lunch count tag, putting it in the proper column marked for purchasing lunch. He then strolls around the room examining the learning centers in order to familiarize himself with new materials and deciding how he will spend his morning.

The learning centers contain a variety of materials: art, music, physical education, phonics, writing, library, basal reading, S.R.A. kits, math, listening posts, films, filmstrips. John is capable of making decisions about his learning because his teachers' instructional objectives include development of responsibility and autonomy toward learning.

During a recent conference, John and his teacher agreed that in selecting his learning activities he would include reading stories in a basal reader, practicing his subtraction and writing as part of his choices. He understands that these activities will be completed or he must justify his selection of other materials. He also understands that if he starts "goofing off" his teacher will ask for his plan sheet, and an evaluation of his behavior will take place.

Once John has decided on the learning centers in which he will work, he writes the numbers of the centers on his plan sheet and then takes his folder (which contains his plan sheet and serves as an envelope for his daily work) with him to the planning bulletin board. Here he chooses his first activity and takes a ticket for that learning center out of its pocket and puts it in the pocket board where his name is located. The ticket system provides the teacher with an easy locating mechanism, and it serves to control the number of pupils in a learning center. The planning board also has tickets for the library and lavatory, providing children with responsibility for appropriate behavior outside their classroom.

Being more independent than some of his classmates, John goes about his "business of learning" without having to wait for others. His friends who are not as independent and need teacher help meet with their homeroom teacher when the morning bell rings. These boys and girls bring their plan sheets with them, and under the guidance of the teacher plan for part or all of the large block of time set aside for individualized learning.

John notices that his name has been posted on the board to meet with his teacher at 9:30 for a reading skill session. During this time he and the other children needing help in a specific reading skill are given instruction by the teacher.

The individualized session ends at 10:00 a.m. and John and his friends clean up and then meet with their homeroom teacher. The teacher discusses with the students

their experiences while working by themselves. During this period, she helps children learn how to evaluate their activities in terms of time, materials, and difficulty of tasks attempted. Such evaluation sessions provide opportunities to share with others, which give children personal satisfaction as well as an opportunity to imitate good student models. After the evaluation period, the remainder of the day is spent in group activities similar to the program in most first grades.

Sometime during the weekly activities, and possibly daily, one of John's three teachers will have an individual conference with him in which the two of them will look at his planning folder and evaluate his progress and plan future learnings.

John is learning responsibility; he's learning the difference between freedom and license; he is finding out that what he thinks and does is important. He is not being trained to blindly accept that which the teacher thinks is important, and is not learning that what he thinks has value only if he receives public approval from his teacher. For John, learning is a private cooperative affair which he enjoys sharing with his teacher and friends.

In this school setting, teachers are attempting to develop more autonomous learners, thus meeting at an operational level the State of Hawaii's five broad goals, i.e.:

- "1. Acquires skills, knowledge, and abilities for decision making
2. Acquires skills, knowledge, and capability for job entry or for entry into the next level of education
3. Develops interpersonal relationships
4. Develops positive self-concept
5. Develops autonomy in learning"¹

These goals can only be partially attained in a teacher centered classroom where a teacher makes most of the decisions regarding materials to be used for learning, assignment of tasks for learning and assessment of achievement. In an over-controlled teaching atmosphere, the right of student decision making has been denied, and skills in decision making become superficial or non-existent. Three on two teachers have created a classroom atmosphere which provides students with more responsibility for their learning.

Basic academic learning is an integral part of the 3 on 2 program containing similar academic objectives as a traditional program. The difference, however, is the manner in which concepts and skills are to be learned. Under a traditional program, many children waste valuable learning time either waiting for the teacher or for other children.



For example, should a teacher hold flashcards for drill in word recognition, when a Language Master machine or a pupil partnership instructional situation can free the teacher and reduce waiting time for children? In many of our traditional classrooms there is a dearth of materials; children become bored with the small variety of practice material. Team teaching provides an opportunity for pooling materials, freeing a teacher to supervise parents in the making of materials, and an opportunity to brainstorm more creative ways of developing instructional materials. Principals are also redeploying funds appropriated for textbooks. Teachers are finding that they do not need as many textbooks when children are using the books and other materials at different times of the day.

Interpersonal relationships are enhanced through individualized learning that emphasizes not only learning by oneself but through seeking the assistance of other children. Grouping of children in a 3 on 2 classroom is very flexible. Skill groups are brought together for a day, or for several days, but a child remains in the skill group only for as long as he needs teacher help in acquiring the skill. The teacher also sets a predetermined amount of time to be devoted to the teaching of a skill. If the child has not attained an understanding of the skill or concept within the predetermined time, the instructional group is abolished and notations by the teacher are made regarding which children will need to be taught the skill or concept at a later period in the semester. Such flexibility provides for grouping



children for reasons other than skills alone. Interest and friendship are examples. By not overteaching a skill or concept which a group of children are having difficulty with, children are ready to try again at a later time that which was difficult for them to ascertain previously. Flexible groupings broaden children's relationship with their peers. Such grouping also reduces the stigma attached to the intellectual caste system set up by the three group reading classifications presently in operation in many classrooms.

Homogeneous grouping, whether for reading within a self-contained classroom or by ability grouping within a school, provides two serious handicaps for children. The first handicap deals with fitting the child to a preconceived teaching standard. In any traditional basal reading group, there are some children struggling to stay with the group, while others find the basal reader non-challenging. Under these circumstances teachers do not look at individual learning needs but gear their instruction to a hypothetical average student. Homogeneous grouping also inhibits a positive self-concept. The normal distribution curve takes its toll. Bright children become discouraged because the teacher again regulates instruction that is either too difficult for some or too easy for the very bright, and, as anyone who has taught a low ability section has discovered, these students have a poor self-image. The vertical K-1, 1-2, 2-3 grade grouping mandate, by the Board of Education, provides for heterogeneous classrooms in which teachers are

looking at the needs of individual children. The use of learning centers and teacher-pupil conferences provides for instruction to be both meaningful and private, reducing the ego shattering experiences of public announcements of failure.

Evaluation of the Program

The recent evaluation of the 3 on 2 program shows that the majority of personnel involved in the program like it. Administrators feel that: teachers are handling their own classroom problems, as referrals to their offices are very few; teachers are more creative and resourceful in a team teaching situation; teachers are more flexible and are individualizing their program. In addition to these advantages, the administrators who were surveyed stated that teachers had more time for professional purposes, that better utilization of the staff was effected, and a better relationship between pupil, teacher and learning was taking place.

Teachers from forty-five teams were surveyed and they confirmed that individualization is practicable and worthwhile. From the teachers' point of view, flexible grouping, professional interaction, more satisfying working conditions, and individualizing of instruction are the strengths of the 3 on 2 program. Success in school, having a choice of teachers with whom to relate, minimum waiting time when a teacher is busy (as there are others who will help), and a much richer program were the advantages expressed by the pupils.

3,548 parent questionnaires were sent out by the evaluation team. Eighty-six percent of the questionnaires were returned. The majority of the parents who responded liked the program (67 percent), while only 8 percent of the parents responded negatively. The positive responses indicated that children were getting more individualized attention, liked having three teachers, were benefiting from being in mixed grades, and that there was an increase in the rate of their child's development. The enthusiasm for the program has generated plans for additional teams for the 1970-71 school year.²

Individualizing instruction in Hawaii's primary grades is becoming an operational reality, but a note of caution

1 "... Toward a New Era for Education in Hawaii," *Master Plan for Education in Hawaii*, Dept. of Education, State of Hawaii. April 1969

2 *Progress Report 1968-1969, 3 on 2 Program*, Office of Instructional Services, Dept. of Education, State of Hawaii, November 1969.

needs to be inserted, otherwise the halo effect of this successful program may overshadow some of the problems that exist. The major problem is a lack of an overall support system for the 3 on 2 program. A team teaching program that emphasizes individualization requires a comprehensive in-service training program for all personnel. Teachers must learn a new set of instructional behavior and understand an entirely new teaching philosophy. Facilities must be adapted, resource personnel must understand the concept of individualization and adapt their area of specialty to the ideas inherent in individualization. New materials and equipment are needed, requiring in-service training of administrators so that they expend funds more wisely and are able to justify requests for additional expenditures. Teachers in the 3 on 2 program are using an excessive amount of their time and energy in attempting to meet the material demands of an individualized program. A concerted effort should be made by State personnel to give the teachers materials, otherwise discouragement will erode the excellent gains that have been made.

Hawaii's Department of Education and the State Legislature, particularly Senators D. G. Anderson and Nelson Doi, should be commended for their forward-looking commitment which made individualizing instruction a reality in many of our primary grades.



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