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THE URGENCY FOR INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION.

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THIS PAPER EXAMINES THE RATIONALE FOR GREATER INDIVIDUALIZATION OF INSTRUCTION AND CONSIDERS MEANS OF ACHIEVING THAT GOAL. THE AUTHOR RECOMMENDS THAT ADMINISTRATORS (1) RE-EXAMINE THEIR OWN CONCEPT OF THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF EDUCATION, (2) REDEFINE THEIR DEFINITION OF ACHIEVEMENT, (3) GROUP STUDENTS ONLY IN TERMS OF ACHIEVEMENT IN A PARTICULAR DISCIPLINE, (4) RECOGNIZE THAT THE SELF-CONCEPT IS A MAJOR FACTOR IN MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT, (5) MAKE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS A VARIETY OF LEARNING RESOURCES, AND (6) PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THE TIME AND OPPORTUNITY TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NORTHWEST DRIVE-IN CONFERENCE ON ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP (SPOKANE, WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 13, 1967). (DG)

THE URGENCY FOR INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION

by
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I appreciate having the opportunity to meet with you this morning and to bring you greetings from Louis Bruno and the staff of the Office of the State Superintendent. We are delighted that this Northwest Drive-In Conference on Administrative Leadership is scheduled here in our city of Spokane.

We like the general theme of this conference, stressing the importance of individualizing instruction. Certainly emphasis on the individual -- the dignity and worth of each individual -- is inherent in our democratic concept and in the basic values to which we adhere. Consequently, an emphasis upon the individual and the determination to help each achieve his potential form the foundation upon which the educational establishment must be built.

In mid-nineteenth century England there was a brilliant young logician and mathematician named Charles Ludwidge Dodgson. As a resident fellow at Christ's Church, Oxford, he wrote a book on symbolic logic which modern mathematicians are now rediscovering. Most of us remember him better, however, as a writer of whimsey and fantasy, who, under the pen-name of Lewis Carrol, gave us those delightful stories, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass.

In the first of these books is a line which I have chosen for my theme this morning. "Said Alice to the Cat, 'And would you tell me, please, which way we ought to go from here?'" I think this is an appropriate question for all of us who are genuinely concerned about the

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improvement of instruction and who recognize more specifically the urgency of individualizing instruction . . . which way ought we to go from here?

As I understand the purpose of this conference, it is to enable us (1) to explore together the rationale for greater individualization of instruction, and (2) to consider sound and practical ways of achieving that goal. And, it seems to be my assignment to open these topics for exploration and discussion -- to raise some questions and to clarify some issues relative to "which way we ought to go from here."

In discussing this topic I would like to present, quite briefly, some assumptions -- assumptions which to me at least -- not only justify the current emphasis on individualizing instruction but also indicate needs which make it imperative.

No two children are alike. No two people are alike. No two of you are alike. And in spite of any system of "grouping" which we might conjure, those differences will still exist. Somewhere within the past year I read, and I cannot recall where, an anecdote attributed to Dr. Paul Magnuson of the Northwestern University Medical School. He is said to have opened his lecture by saying to the class, "I want you to look around you and pick out a normal face." When the students looked puzzled, he chided them, "Can't you do that? Has the admissions committee let in a class without a single normal face? Are you all deformed?" And then he said to them, "If you learn nothing else from me, I want you to remember that every patient you will ever meet is different from any individual you ever saw before. His skin is different, his disposition is different, his metabolism is different, his body chemistry is different, his family history and his fears and hopes and aspirations are all different. You

will never find a normal stomach or normal spine any more than you can find a normal face in this classroom. When you have learned that, you will know the basis on which you must practice medicine." (Saturday Evening Post, 1-15-53, p.15)

And I would add that until those of us charged with the responsibility of educating children and youth have learned this same basic fact of individual differences we are not yet ready to teach.

As long as I can remember we have, as educators, espoused the cause of "individual differences" -- at the theoretical level. But at the practical level, at the action level, we have all too often contradicted it. In my opinion, the current need for individualizing instruction is to a large extent the result of our failure to practice what we preach.

Let me cite a few examples in support of that statement. For many years it was common practice to administer so-called "intelligence tests" to all pupils. Scores on these instruments were converted to "mental ages" and by dividing mental age by chronological age you computed the "intelligence quotient" or I.Q. The whole thing started, of course, with Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon, two French psychologists, who devised the first of these instruments. Later the German psychologist, Wilhelm Stern, developed the single index number which was given the name, "intelligence quotient." Next, to compound the situation, we began to talk about and to apply the concept of the "normal curve of distribution." Since the average I.Q. was a hundred, there obviously had to be as many students below a hundred as there were above a hundred.

With the general acceptance of the I.Q. as a measure of a student's intellectual capacity, other psychologists developed formulae whereby

scores on their testing instruments could be converted to indicate the relationship to an I.Q. For example, there are still permanent records which show an O.R. or "Otis Relationships" to the intelligence quotient. But enough of the history with which you are familiar.

Let us look at some of the consequences -- consequences which have all too often led us to disregard the individual and the needs of the individual in our instructional methods, in our organizational patterns, and even in our selection of instructional materials. Let me be specific.

We have assumed that the intelligence of an individual is a fixed quantity. On that erroneous assumption, we have proceeded too often to categorize youngsters -- to tuck them away into neat pigeon holes labeled "slow" or "average" or "bright" or "gifted." And we pass the record on from grade to grade, thus perpetuating the label.

Back in 1909, Binet, himself, made this comment -- and I am quoting directly -- "I deplore the fact that some recent philosophers appear to have given their moral support to the deplorable verdict that the intelligence of an individual is a fixed quantity . . . We must protect and act against this brutal pessimism. A child's mind is like a field for which an expert farmer had advised a change in the method of cultivation, with the result that in place of desert land, we now have a harvest. It is in this particular sense, the one which is significant, that we say that the intelligence of children may be increased."

Today in some schools we still "group" children according to I.Q. without recognizing that that index number represents at best a measure of a child's ability to perform a given sample task at a given time and without recognizing that his performance is to a large degree a reflection of his experiential background and his own concept of self.

As a result of our "grouping" practices we tend to limit the experiences of those who most need broadened and enriched experiences. Thus we perpetuate the neat and orderly categories and the "sparrows" and the "robins" and the "bluebirds" remain sparrows and robins and bluebirds -- except that most of the sparrows drop out!

Why, I ask you, have we in so many instances continued to ignore the individual and his needs?

Why have we continued to ignore the fact that nearly all so-called intelligence tests are culturally biased?

Why have we disregarded the research which shows that the traits and characteristics measured and which we seem to value in the schools are not necessarily those which provide the touch of genius, the spark of creativity or the aspirational drive which is the basis of achievement?

Why have we not learned a lesson from the research studies which show that a large percentage of those who enjoy outstanding success in their chosen fields of work were not rated in the top 10% by their high schools?

In recent years "individualizing instruction" has become a central theme in American education. And we have some outstanding examples of new programs of which we can be very proud here in our Pacific Northwest. I will not attempt to name them all, but special tribute should be paid to Ferris high school here in Spokane for its pioneer efforts. The new patterns of organization, such as modular scheduling, hold great promise.

However, we must be completely realistic in our approaches to individualizing instruction. We have in our Pacific Northwest many older buildings, both elementary and secondary. The buildings will have to be used for many years even though they are ill-adapted to many of the

current trends. You may have little space for truly independent study. There may be no adequate facility for large-group instruction. The resource center, so important in meeting individual needs, may be only a library in the most traditional sense. You can name other shortcomings in the facilities in each of your districts, I am certain.

But let us not jump to the conclusion that we cannot do anything about individualizing instruction within that traditional setting in which we find ourselves. I fear that we have too long offered excuses as a substitute for active leadership.

Let me suggest a few simple but effective ways of meeting individual needs -- and this is "old stuff" to many of you:

First, as a basis for action, re-examine your own concept of the central purpose of education. What is that purpose in the thinking of your teaching staff, of your school board, of your community? Is it the purpose of the school to transmit knowledge? Is it to teach basic skills? Is it to foster creativity? Is it to stimulate intellectual curiosity? Is it to indoctrinate? Is it, to use the words of Kelley and Combs, "to help each individual become a fully-functioning person"? Or is it to prepare students successfully to pass college entrance examinations?

Until you can answer these questions, you have no base upon which to build an educational program. You have no base upon which even to approach the problem of individualizing instruction. For that matter, you have no basis for planning a building, outlining a program, hiring a teacher, or buying a book.

Second, redefine your definition of "achievement." This follows logically. It gets right down to the essential purposes for which we are

attempting better to meet individual needs. Too often we are failing to individualize instruction because achievement in the school is measured only in terms of conformity, the rote memorization of facts. And when you evaluate achievement only at the lowest level of learning, teaching tends to be at that same lowest level.

I hope all of you administrators spend time in your kindergarten-primary rooms. There you are most apt to find instruction that is truly individualized. And it is wonderful to see these youngsters, curious about their environment, exploring, discovering, and most important, asking questions. But, unfortunately, as they move up through the grades, increasingly it is the teacher who asks the questions. I am sure you have all thought of that curious contradiction in the practice of education. The teacher who is presumed to know the answers asks the questions. Logically, the students, seeking knowledge and information and counsel as they seek to become fully functioning persons, ought to ask the questions. And the teacher, out of his background of experience and his reservoir of resources, ought to help the student find his answers -- and they may not be the pat answers at the end of the chapter.

My third suggestion, if you feel that some type of grouping is necessary, group only in terms of achievement in a particular discipline. Don't ever be guilty of categorizing youngsters as slow, average, gifted, etc. except in terms of specifics. Most grouping today is based fundamentally on achievement in reading and in computation. Now, please do not assume for a moment that I am saying reading and computational skills are not important in today's world. They are of great importance. But they are tools of learning -- and they are not the only tools of learning --

except in terms of the traditional purposes of the school, quite often unrelated to human needs. If you follow the practice of "grouping" or "tracking" in your school, how many of your groups or tracks are based on achievement in art, in music, the industrial arts, in human relations, in the behavioral sciences? How many of your groups are established on the basis of skill in inquiry, or on the basis of ability to generalize? These are important questions because we have long said that the rationale for grouping is to enable the teacher better to meet the needs of students. I would charge that much grouping has been perpetuated to make it easier for the teacher to disseminate information to a group without regard for individual needs and differences.

Fourth, to individualize instruction, recognize and act upon the well established fact that self-concept is a major factor in motivation and, therefore, in achievement. How far we can go if we will but recognize that each child brings to school a "self" -- a reflection of the ego processes which he has built through his own unique heredity and his own unique experiences. I like James McDonald's statement on this point:

> "If the child's self-perceptions reflect adequate ego strength he will see himself as adequate to the performance of curricular tasks as well as liking what he sees. He will be open to new experiences, ready to grow, willing to experiment and discover. However, when his self-perceptions are negative . . . curricular tasks will be seen as too hard and as imposed unreasonably."

The research completely supports McDonald's point of view. Think how much we could achieve if every teacher were to ask himself at the end of each day, "Have I given every individual in my class today the opportunity to enjoy success in doing something?"

That is a reasonable question. But to achieve a positive "yes"

answer, changes will have to be made in a lot of our classrooms. If every youngster is to have the opportunity to achieve success, we must base our classroom methods on the well-established principle that people learn in different ways, be they "bright" or "dull." They learn best in different ways even when their sensory faculties are intact and unimpaired.

You recognize the implications: classroom experiences cannot be limited to reading experiences any more than they can be limited to auditory experiences.

And that leads me to my fifth suggestion: Recognize that if instruction is to be individualized we must make available to students a variety of learning resources. This is an imperative because children learn in different ways. It is also an imperative because different things are learned in different ways. My favorite example of the latter principle: Try to teach a child to tie his shoestrings by the lecture method.

Modern instructional technology has made available to us a tremendous battery of learning resources. Publishers are now providing us with the finest books ever made available to the schools -- well written, attractively illustrated, well-bound -- beautiful tools for learning. But books, important as they are, do not meet the total need for learning resources. We must have visual material -- slides, films, flat pictures, maps, globes, models, realia. We must have auditory resources -- tapes, recordings, listening centers, radio and, of course, television which has probably done more to "educate" the American public than any other product of modern technology. Programed instruction holds great promise in meeting individual needs, although up to the present time the major emphasis has been on the cognitive area. But even in the affective area, programed instruction holds great promise.

We have talked for years about the necessity for a multisensory approach to teaching and learning -- probably two-thirds of you who are here have made speeches to your local PTAs on its importance.

Now, in our concern about individualizing instruction, is it not time to do something about it? May I suggest some ways to start by asking you some questions:

1. Are you still "teaching courses" from a single textbook regardless of the individual needs, interests, and achievement levels?
2. Are you still attempting to meet needs of your so-called "slow" learners by adopting a single textbook, allegedly "written down" to a lower level?
3. Do you give as much attention to the selection of non-print learning resources as to the selection of printed materials?
4. To what extent are single concept films, tape recordings, programed instruction an integral part of <u>all</u> classroom instruction?

Each of these questions is relevant to individualizing instruction.

<u>Sixth</u> -- and this is so simple I hesitate to mention it -- <u>give kids time and opportunity to think for themselves</u>. This does not cost the district one extra dollar. It does not require a single piece of new equipment. It does not necessitate a new facility (that means "classroom"). It requires only a teacher and supportive administrators whose aim is to get something out of the learner rather than to cram something into him. Teachers who are concerned about the individual must explore the strategy

of sometimes being silent. We give students too little time to think. And we too often assume that they think in the same way and at the same rate. Ned Flanders generalizes on the basis of several hundred case studies that two-thirds of the time in the typical classroom someone is talking, and two-thirds of that time it is the teacher.

The assimilation of knowledge takes time -- if that knowledge is to be of use in what Bruner calls the "generative thought processes" -- and after all that is the only function of knowledge. Too often the admonition, "Come on, think!" is followed by ten seconds of uncomfortable silence -- and then the teacher supplies the answer -- his answer.

You see, in my opinion, if we are truly concerned about individual needs -- to the extent that we are willing to give students an opportunity to think for themselves, this has implications for <u>teaching</u> and for the role of the teacher. It means the function of the teacher is to provide the minimum knowledge essential to triggering the thought processes. He provides, in effect, the generative structure upon which and within which the student works. In short, his major role is helping students learn how to learn. And since learning is a personal experience, the teacher's role must vary with each individual. Increasingly we must emphasize the <u>processes</u> and the <u>tools</u> of learning -- recognizing that content provides the <u>means</u>. The focus must be on the individual with our major goal the release of human potential, to the end that each child and each youth may become a fully functioning personality -- be he of high ability or low.

May I close with a short quotation from an ex-history teacher -- and a good one. I first knew him at Stanford in a social studies workshop.

When the war broke out, he was assigned to the Pacific area. During those war years he wrote a book -- that book was Tales of the South Pacific. And when that book became the basis of the Broadway hit, James Michener quit being a history teacher, but continued as a writer. In his second book, The Fires of Spring, he summarizes in a sense what I have been trying to say must become our focus in education:

> "For this is the journey that men make: to find themselves. If they fail in this, it doesn't matter much what else they find. Money, position, fame, many loves, revenge are all of little consequence, and when the tickets are collected at the end of the ride, they are tossed into a bin marked Failure. But if a man happens to find himself -- if he knows what he can be depended upon to do, the limits of his courage, the position from which he will no longer retreat . . . the secret reservoirs of his determination, the extent of his dedication, the depth of his feeling for beauty, his honest and unpostured goals . . . then he has found a mansion which he can inhabit with dignity all the days of his life."