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ABSTRACT
        This paper provides an historical and contemporary
overview and criticism of individualized instruction, beginning with
the Dalton Plan and Winnetka Plan of the 1920's. While there appears
to be a proliferation of new individualized methods and procedures,
they have existed in several forms in the past and have been utilized
on a large scale, international in dimension. Although individualized
systems are designed to provide opportunities for self-pacing by
students, critics have charged that this method results in the
devolution of teachers to mechanics and trainers. Individualized
instruction is further criticized for its lack of opportunity for
group interaction and for its lack of flexibility, as the planned
curriculum has been broken down into multiple subunits, each
requiring the student's attention, regardless of his needs.
Individualized systems seem to promote linearity, continuity, and
insularity where some argue that a more holistic and synthesized
approach would be more appropriate. Demands for accountability will
continue for some time and individualized systems lend themselves to
objective evaluation of student learning, albeit the subjective is
often ignored. Scrutiny and criticism of the individualized approach
should be continued. Concomitantly, the most creative approaches
possible within the scope of individualized instruction should be
sought. (JDS)

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

A WRITING TEACHER LOOKS AT INDIVIDUALIZATION

HIGHER EDUCATION 36C
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
RAYMOND E. SCHULTZ
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By Sue Mincks
July, 1976

"You sit on the bed by the empty
birdcage, run through your
exercises and let the cow of
your mind eat its way out of
the haystack that has collapsed
on it."

Tom Robbins, Even Cowgirls Get
The Blues Boston: Houghton
Mifflin Company, 1976 p. 262.

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This paper had its beginnings in the suggestion by the professor for which it is written that I attempt to do a research paper for his course which would be relevant and meaningful to me. As a teacher of composition in a community college, I was drawn to one of the questions that constantly challenges all teachers: How can I, as a teacher, attempt to meet the individual needs of a whole classroomful of students - each with her/his own abiliites/skills, interests, experiences, potentials, goals, and level of motivation? I expected to find, in my research, some helpful accounts of how individual teachers (or departments or schools) have responded to this challenge. And I did in fact find some articles of this nature. But more importantly, I discovered a plethora of material which described and sometimes evaluated the new educational products/methods which can be lumped together under the term "individual- ization". I became increasingly aware of the large contemporary move- ment in this area, and all that it incorporated and implied. I became acquainted with the large number of descriptively named new educational systems which include Individually Guided Education (IGE), Individually Guided Instruction (IGI), Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI), Self-Paced Instruction (SPI), Personalized System of Instruction (PSI), Competency Based Instruction (CBI), Competency Based Education (CBE), Performance-Based Programs (PBP), Individual Mathematics System (IMS), mediated instruction, criteria-based instruction, criterion-referenced instruction, performance based education, performance contracting, and the contingency managed approach. I found that the writings in this area often mention learning activity packages (LAPs), unipacs, mastery, behavioral technology, operant conditioning, behavior modification, feed- back and revision loops, behavior training, guaranteed learning, and, most especially, accountability. I discovered that whole colleges[1] as well as whole writing programs within colleges[2] have been re-structuring their teaching using the new individualized approaches and that in some states legislation is turning accountability into a mandate.[3] In this paper, I wuold like to look at some aspects of this current movement in individualized instruction: what does it consist of?, how does it compare with older plans for individualization?, what criticisms has it encoun- tered?, and what is its future?

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Actually, individualized education is not a unique or new approach. The idea of fitting the curriculum to the students' needs and academic achievement levels was first established in our earliest schools, where students from every grade level were taught in one room. Later, the period of the 1890's to the 1920's contained many educational experiments in the area of individualization and produced plans for implementation which were highly publicized and promoted. The two most famous and successful plans from this period, the Dalton Plan (Dalton, Mass.) and the Winnetka Plan (Winnetka, Ill.), achieved varying degrees of success in different locations. I found it interesting that the basic components of these two plans from the 1920's include almost all the important components of the current individualized approaches.

In 1925, the Dalton Plan had been implemented in more than 1500 schools in England, 450 schools in Japan, 250 in China, at least 200 in the United States, 50 in India; was designated as the official method in Holland and Moscow; and was gaining followers in Norway, Germany, Poland, Austria, and Spain. This plan was developed by Helen Parkhurst who insisted that her plan was "a vehicle for the curriculum rather than being a plan based upon any particular curricular content."[4]

> Students were given a series of subjects to learn within a given block of time, typically twenty days. However, they were free to pace themselves through each of the subjects. They were also free to move about the school building at their own discretion to study in any one of the given "laboratories" which were set up for each subject.[5]

Parkhurst's idea of self-pacing is an important component of today's individualized approaches to learning; her plan for free movement within the schools is comparable to today's "flexibly scheduled" schools; and her use of laboratories closely parallels the use of today's instructional materials center (IMC) or learning resources center (LPC).[6] Also in the Dalton Plan, students were responsible for choosing the learning mode which they deemed most appropriate for themselves; many of the current individualized approaches include this component. Student contracts are an offshoot of the Dalton Plan and also an integral part of many of the current systems.

The Winnetka Plan, which operated successfully in Winnetka, Illinois

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from 1919 up until the early 1940's, also contains

> ...many of the characteristics of "innovations" in the 1960's
> and 1970's. For example, Washburne, the originator of the
> Winnetka Plan, stated as his first principle that the teacher
> should "Decide the exact amount of knowledge and skill to
> be mastered in the individualized subjects. State this in
> terms of goals of achievement." Washburne's "goals of a-
> chievement" are almost identical with the "behavioral ob-
> jectives" or "specific performance objectives" of the 1970's.[7]

Washburne also anticipated one of the principles of today's programmed
textbooks by advocating a test for which only one possible right answer
could be supplied. In addition, he suggested the use of "assignment
booklets" which have many of the characteristics of today's unipacs or
learning activity packages. Washburne also included the idea of mastery
in his plan:

> "Permit each child to progress through his assignment sheets
> or individual instruction books at his own rate, testing him
> on each unit of work as soon as he completes it. Never allow
> him (unless he is subnormal in mentality or health) to proceed
> with one unit until ne has mastered the preceeding one."[8]

Another integral part of both the old and current approaches is the use
of permanent sources of information so that students can pace themselves
through the material: lectures, group work, and demonstrations usually
become peripheral/motivational in individualized education. Thus, self-
pacing, flexible scheduling, the use of learning centers, self-selection
of learning modes, contracts, specific performance objectives, learning
activity packages, and mastery were all present in the individualized
approaches of the 1920's. In fact, the only other basic and important
features of the new approaches which don't seem to be a part of the older
plans are the use of proctors and the focus on immediate feedback.[9]

These older and current plans have more than their basic components
in common. Both advocate an educational model built on the idea of effi-
cient production: "...there is something especially contemporary about
the way in which proponents of the Dalton Plan drew upon analogies with
industrial production techniques."[10] I think it's also important to
know that many of the earliest important conributions to the contemporary
systems approach derived from industry and the military. In A Systems
Approach to Community College Education, the author traces the historical

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development of the current systems approach to instruction. Early con-
tributions to this approach include an early post World War II flowchart
that focuses on the trainee-instructor relationship,[11] an application of
electrical engineering concepts to the problems of management and economics
developed by a professor of industrial management,[12] an important report/
assessment of the art of instructional systems design which was produced
under a contract with the Department of the Army, and "A Model for De-
signing Instructional Systems" which came out of a 1964 U.S. Air Force
workshop.[13] This military association is further strengthened when we
find that Fred Keller, who designed the Personalized System of Instruc-
tion, first came in contact with the approach in a military training cen-
ter. Later, he applied the principle of immediate reinforcement to the
early training of Signal Corps personnel in the reception of Morse-code
signals.[14]

Keller states that in his method, the teacher becomes "...an educa-
tional engineer, a contingency manager."[15] Writers who have a less fa-
vorable attitude toward this teaching method often refer to the teachers
who employ it as trainers, mechanics, and technicians.[16] Bhaerman, a
critic of systems-technology approaches, defines the new role of the
teacher as the "...educational engineer and the educational executioner."[17]
Both the older and newer individualized approaches have been widely cri-
ticized for incorporating a mechanistic approach to learning.

Other criticisms have been applied to both. For example, a frequent
criticism of the Dalton Plan was its lack of group work.[18] This criticism
is often applied to the new approaches. Studies have suggested that stu-
dents suffer from isolation and monotony in individualized classes.[19]

One study concluded: "It may be that the old notion that students learn
from each other is even more important than we thought: that the classroom
situati n does indeed provide a beneficial feedback ...,including the
chance to learn from the mistakes of others and the sense that the student
does not need to respond to every question, but can learn from people who
do respond."[20] One college which operates on a self-paced system attemp-
ted to incorporate group interaction by making twenty percent of its
course modules into seminars. Before joining a seminar, students check
out materials and prepare. Their level of participation in the seminar

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is rigidly structured: "The students are expected to participate in the discussion, and their contributions are noted by the instructor and are used as the basis for assigning mastery to the topic. Failing to participate or to give significant information, they are asked to repeat the seminar with another group."[21]

This approach to group work seems to me to effectively exemplify another criticism of individualized approaches: how much individualization is actually taking place? One critic from the 1960's explained the failure of the earlier plans as follows: "In curricular plans based upon individual instruction, the individualization has been largely illusory. A considerable mechanistic quality has limited such schemes, and the fact that the individual students came through the successive turnstiles at their own pace has been made to signify more than it actually means."[22] Keller's system for self-pacing still places the final examination at the same time for all students "with certain exceptions", at the end of the term.[23] Most individualized approaches rely upon a pre-planned curriculum which has been broken into small units thus allowing little flexibility for altering the content to meet the individual needs of different classes and individual students. The concept of individualization can be obscured by the carefully managed approaches to learning which purport to be based on it. In an article called "Writing for Nobody", Edward White states,

> We are being routinely asked in our culture to accept images
> for substance, media for messages. If we can all agree that
> something is going on, it doesn't much matter if it is really
> going on or not. And if everyone can pretend that certain
> mechanical activities teach writing, it is much easier for us
> to live with ourselves and our responsibilities.[24]

The manifestations of mechanistic characteristics, the question of actual individualization, and the lack of community typified by the minimization of group work have all been included in the criticism of both the older and newer individualized approaches.

The opinions and evaluations of the effectiveness of the current methods of individualization vary greatly and sometimes appear to depend more on the periodicals presenting the views than on any commonly accepted criteria for evaluation. Some periodicals, such as Educational Technology,

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Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, and Programmed Learning and Educa-
tional Technology tend to focus on the positive aspects of individualized
instruction while other periodicals tend to present a more balanced pers-
pective.[25] It seems important to me to enter into a discussion of some of
the areas in which I think the new approaches to individualization are
most susceptible to criticism. In order to do this, I'm going to have to
stray a little further away from the ideas and attitudes previously ex-
plored in this paper.

If all these ideas were known and tried and criticized years ago,
how is it that we are currently confronted with a resurgence of activity
in this area? I think that we can see that certain aspects of our con-
temporary culture indicate a reliance upon science, technology, industry,
and the military for our perspectives on societal structures, values, and
definitions of progress. In The Revolt of the Masses, Ortega y Gasset de-
fines "mass man" in terms of inertia rather than size, and calls him a
"primitive" because he regards civilization as his ancestors regarded
nature in pre-history - as an automatically self-renewing, self-perpetua-
ting force. He contrasts "mass man" with "civilized man", who recognizes
that civilization, like art and eroticism, is an artificial creation. He
states that the civilized man's most important quality is the capacity to
be open to the insecurity of discontinuity. The civilized man realizes
that civilization is not static, but must constantly be worked at, worried
over, made and remade. The enemy of civilization is insularity. Its cri-
tical point is signaled not by the absence of growth - because it can pro-
liferate profusely - but by whether the growth is linear rather than diff-
erenciated, duplicative rather than discontinuous.[26] My strongest criti-
cism of the new individualized teaching methods is that they reinforce
continuity and linearity. The idea of mastery, of proceeding from one
carefully predetermined step to the next predetermined step, seems to me
to promote a continued reliance on continuity and linearity. This approach
to the educational process appears to promote insularity and a view of ci-
vilization more like Ortega y Gasset's mass man's outlook than one that can
emerge from the capacity to be open to the insecurity of discontinuity.
Students need more than prepackaged "knowledge" and a carefully managed
approach to learning in order to prepare to participate creatively in to-

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day's complex world.

Many critics have focused on the limits mastery learning places on content. For example, "The current accountability craze is forcing us to resort to exams calling for information reflecting a student's ability to memorize, not to synthesize or analyze. We stress the objective and minimize or ignore the subjective. ...We end up by stressing the measurable and ignoring the intangible areas of interpretation or even creativity."[27] Can we afford to neglect these areas as we prepare for the future? Can we rely on a method that promotes individual approaches to problem solving in an era when group interaction and problem solving techniques appear likely to be of crucial importance?

Two writing teachers went on an island retreat to try to find an answer to the question of who should determine what a student needs to know. They reviewed and evaluated and searched and probed. They discussed their students: "We have students who are not in touch with themselves or their world because they are not in touch with the language and images which compose their own personal world."[28] They finally decided to try "an approach to teaching which asserts that the experience of learning is more important than what is learned."[29] Here are the goals they decided on:

    1. To reunite the senses and feeling;
    2. To emphasize self-definition and self-actualization;
    3. To create an atmosphere where failure can be seen as a
       natural part of the learning process;
    4. To develop a problem solving methodology through a question-
       centered rather than an answer-oriented environment; and
       finally,
    5. To encourage creative rather than standard or linear res-
       ponses as necessary for survival in a complex world.[30]

It's highly unlikely that these goals could be approached using mastery learning techniques. It also seems unlikely that a course in which the content is completely open at the beginning could be included in a mastery oriented curriculum. During my senior year in college, I took a course called "Senior Seminar" which was particularly stimulating and relevant for me. I'm including the course description here, because I think it also demonstrates the creative approaches which lie beyond the scope of the new individualized systems of instruction:

    .The real purpose of this course is to decrease the student's

dependency on the teacher, for in the long run all education
is self-education. The nature of the course will depend on
the student in it, and might be organized along these lines:
(1) Independent projects: re-reading works that have influ-
enced you deeply, sharing them, digging around in them.
(2) Reading together some works that attempt to see life
(and literature) whole. (3) Investigating the creative pro-
cess, both as an artistic endeavor and as an attitude toward
life. Speculating on the possibilities for creative living
in the world today. (4) Creating: I will expect students to
make an honest effort to be creative in some form--any--form.
Much of this course will be devoted to an attempt to ground
learning imaginatively in experience, to unify what you know
with what you have lived, and are living. Goodbye to educa-
tional roles; hello to education. Please try to keep the
following hour free, so we can follow our minds and not the
clock.[31]

Some of the proponents of individualized education appear to offer
a far too simple answer to a vastly complex problem. This criticism ex-
ists in various forms as a large part of the published criticism. In a
recent article, Lionel Trilling made a statement which could serve as a
dictum for those proponents of individualized education who feel that they
have found the answer to our current educational problems:

> Any doctrine, that of the family, religion, the school, that
> does not sustain this increasingly felt need for a multipli-
> city of options and instead offers an ideal of a shaped self,
> a formed life, has the sign on it of a retrograde and depri-
> ving authority, which, it is felt, must be resisted.[32]

Students and educational needs vary tremendously and any one approach
which purports to offer the solution demands close scrutiny.

Irrespective of the limitations inherent in accountability/indivi-
dualization, we can be sure that the new modes will continue to find
supporters. Our country's continued reliance on an outdated definition of
progress[33] will undoubtedly continue for some time despite the fact that
various events/aspects of our contemporary culture would seem to at least
encourage exploration of other directions: despite Vietnam, Chile, the
threat of nuclear war, Watergate, our dwindling resources, the poor and
sick and exploited in our country and others around the world, and numerous
other indications that "it isn't working", we continue to rely on the indus-
trial-military definition of progress. This creates a favorable atmosphere
for an approach to learning which uses the industrial model and was used

in military training; we will continue to experience the growth and proliferation of what one critic calls "know-nothing accountability".[34] Despite the negative opinions/assertions I indulged myself in, I don't doubt that accountability will be with us for some time, at least until we see much more evidence of a re-definition of progress taking place within our society. Even the National Council of Teachers of English, who labels the new behavioral teaching mode as a "possibly dangerous activity" and feels that defining English within this mode may result in "real damage to English instruction", does not advocate resisting the new teaching methods. Instead, the Council advocates that teachers be open-minded while engaging in "a careful appraisal of the possible benefits and the present limitation of behavioral definitions of English with reference to the humanistic aims which have traditionally been valued in this discipline."[35] My reccomendation would be that we continue with our scrutiny and criticism and that we seek out the most creative approaches possible within the scope of this teaching approach.

There are already some indications of the potential for creative learning within an individualized approach. Worcester Polytechnic Institute uses an innovative campus-wide program for undergraduates which is "individually structured, student-centered, project-oriented, with strong components in the social sciences and the humanities." Besides their own self-paced program (the WPI Plan), they make use of other self-paced programs such as "individually prescribed instruction". They have four degree requirements: the "competency", an exam requiring students to demonstrate their understanding of their major fields; the "sufficiency", designed to confirm that students have a grasp of the humanities as an essential component of their lives; the "major qualifying project", in which students solve a problem in their chosen fields; and the "interactive qualifying project", which "relates students' major field to the larger world, specifically to human and societal needs and values."[36] In 1974, WPI opened a Washington Project Center where each year 80 undergraduates and 8 resident faculty members work to complete qualifying projects by assisting governmental and nongovernmental agencies in solving a wide variety of real-life problems; many projects are in bioethics and ecology. One interactive project, for example, explored the values involved in deciding which patients

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should get priority in access to rare therapy equipment. This college, with a high degree of dependence on individualized teaching methods, seems to be preparing its students for the future in a creative and challenging way. Obviously, this approach can't meet the needs of all students; for one thing, it appears to be oriented towards four year full time students, a segment of the student population which is currently declining. We should continually search for the ways to criticize and resist the use of the new individualized methods when their use seems inappropriate and damaging to our development, and the wisdom to use them to their most creative potential when this use appears beneficial.

Writing this paper has been a meaningful experience for me; I found that attempting to determine my attitude toward individualized instruction has had the effect of making me look at the totality of the educational experience/process - what it entails, what it means, what it can be.

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NOTES

[1]Robert J. Toft. College IV:Individualized Instruction for an Entire College (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, Ed. 100 362, 1974); Erwin L. Harlacher. Competency-Based Learning Systems (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, Ed. 097 C87, 1974); Warland D. Wight. "Obtaining Competence with Competencies: A Case Study in Higher Education," Educational Technology, XIV, No.11 (1974).

[2]Susan Wittig. Three Behavioral Approaches to the Teaching of College-Level Composition:Diagnostic Tests, Contracts, and Computer-Assisted Instruction (Bethesda, Md.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, Ed. 099 887, 1974); "English Programs in Three Two-Year Colleges," College English, XXXV, No.8 (1974).

[3]James F. Day, "Behavioral Technology: A Negative Stand," Intellect, CII (February, 1974), 304.

[4]Frank M. Grittner, "Individualized Instruction: An Historical Perspective," The Modern Language Journal, LIX, No.7 (1975), 325.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p. 327.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., pp. 330-331.

[9]Every individualized approach does not include all of the components I listed, I tried to cover the basic features of most plans. I have taken some liberties in lumping individualization, systems approaches, accountability, etc. together in this paper - it's important to keep in mind that I'm referring specifically to the individualized approaches within each method.

[10]Grittner, p. 327.

[11]David E. Barbee, A Systems Approach to Community College Education (Auerbach Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 60.

[12]Ibid., p. 62.

[13]Ibid., p. 67.

[14]Fred S. Keller, "Good-bye, Teacher...," Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, I, No.1 (1968), 79.

[15]Ibid., p. 88.

[16]Day, p. 304.

[17]Robert Bhaerman, "Accountability: a Short Course," American Teacher, LVII, No.8 (1973), 16.

[18]Grittner, p. 331.

[19]George Royce and James Shank, "Scorecard for Individualized Instruction," The Science Teacher, XLII, No.9 (1975), 28.

[20]Judith Budz and Terry Grabar, "Tutorial versus Classroom in Freshman English," College English, XXXVII, No.7 (1976), 656.

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[21] Toft, p. 3.

[22] "The Curriculum and Individual Differences," Individualizing Instruction: The Sixty-First Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education cited by Grittner, pp. 327-328.

[23] Keller, p. 81.

[24] Edward M. White, "Writing for Nobody," College English, XXXI, No.2 (1969), 167.

[25] A balanced view can be found in: Kenneth T. Henson, "Accountability and Performance-Based Programs in Education: Some Pros and Cons," Intellect, CII (January, 1974), 250-52.

[26] Irving H. Buchen, "The Limits to Individuality: Past and Future Mass Models," Intellect, CIII, No.2361 (1974), 185.

[27] John Pekich, "Behavioral Objectives: A Danger to the Spirit," Community College Review, (June, 1975), p. 23.

[28] Timothy E. McCracken and W. Allen Ashby, "The Widow's Walk: An Alternative for English 101 - Creative Communications," College English, XXXVI, No.5 (1975), 557.

[29] Ibid., p. 561.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Gerald Grow, course description for "Senior Seminar", Engish 195, San Francisco State University, Fall, 1970.

[32] Lionel Trilling quoted by Herbert I. London, "The Case for Non-traditional Learning," Change, VIII, No.5 (1976), 27.

[33] Contemporary future theorists (P.Slater, T.Rozak, T.Peich, P.Ehrlich, J.K.Galbraith, and others) have focused their attention on the traditional concept of progress and its inability to relate to current and future needs/problems; a subject too broad to elucidate here.

[34] Bhaerman, p. 3.

[35] "Resolutions Passed by the National Council of Teachers of English at the Fifty-Ninth Annual Meeting," College English, XXXI, No.5 (1970), 529.

[36] George W. Hazzard, "For the Technological Humanist: the WPI Plan," The American Biology Teacher, XXXVII, No.1 (1975), 19.

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