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ABSTRACT

Continuous progress education (CP) provides for the individualization of all significant aspects of learning, including materials, content, objectives, methods, pacing, and student-teacher relationships. It is based on the proposition that no general prescriptions are equally appropriate for all students. A brief description of Hood River Valley (Oregon) High School shows how one CP program is set up. Any school establishing a CP program must consider four principal components: (1) program scope and sequence, concerning curricular goals and course arrangement; (2) selection of instructional materials; (3) the management system, governing recordkeeping, materials quality, individual student plans and conferences, the learning environment, physical arrangements, and use of aides; and (4) the teacher-adviser system. Examples of five more CP programs, using different program structures and covering different subject areas, come from Andrews (Texas) High School, Howard County (Maryland) School System, Bishop Carroll High School in Calgary (Alberta, Canada), P. K. Yonge Laboratory School in Gainesville (Florida), and Chalmette (Louisiana) High School. CP programs offer 10 educational benefits, including student accountability, flexible scheduling, increased school holding power, curriculum enrichment, and avoidance of ability grouping's negative effects. (Author/RW)

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CONTINUOUS PROGRESS EDUCATION

An ideal that works

But Does It Really Work?

The fact that most state legislatures have passed minimum competency requirements is indicative of the mood of the country. Citizens want assurances of cost-effective educational programs. Results of minimum competency testing are frequently viewed as the report card for a school district and its schools. Actual test scores are published and broadcast by local news media sometimes accompanied by unfavorable editorial commentary.

When various plans to provide educational accountability (including minimum competency requirements) are carefully analyzed, a number of common components stand out. These are:

- Clear standards or objectives are determined in advance, including the mastery level;
- Instruction is provided to assist students in reaching the desired objectives or standards;
- Tests are used to determine a student's success in reaching those objectives; and
- Additional instruction is provided for students who have failed to meet the standards or levels that have been set.

These are also the essential elements of continuous progress education, an instructional pattern that invariably gets approval at the idea or theory level, but seldom has been put to work in the classroom. This lack of application may be the result of a lack of clear understanding of what is involved, combined with a feeling that, sound as the idea may be, it's not workable in practice.

The purposes, then, of this Curriculum Report are (1) to review the particulars that define the idea of continuous progress education (CP for short); and (2) to show how several schools have adapted the idea to the realities of the classroom and the school schedule.

Characteristics and Misconceptions

Continuous progress education is recognition in practice of what sensitive educators have known for years; that no two learners approach a learning task in quite the same way or use the same knowledge and skills to master the new learning. As a result, no general prescriptions--lectures, discussion, individual study, textbooks, collateral references, workbooks, or whatever--can be equally appropriate for all students in a class group, even though the overall objectives of the course are accepted as common for all students.

Put another way, the continuous education concept undertakes to provide for the individualization and personalization of learning in all of the significant aspects of learning; that is, in objectives, in content, in materials, in methods of learning, in the time and pace of learning, and in the relation of the learner to teachers *and others* who can contribute to the student's learning. It can also be said about CP that it is

- ✓ A system that provides an alternative to ability grouping as a means for individualizing learning;
- ✓ A series of curricular and instructional alternatives that permits a student to pursue a topic or subject to whatever depth his or her interests or goals may dictate;
- ✓ Based on the proposition that some objectives are essential for all students, some are appropriate for many but not all, while still other objectives are suitable for only a few; and
- ✓ Dependent on skillful professional analysis of a learner's development as the base for helping the student plan his or her study program.

It is equally important to bear in mind what CP is not. It is

- ✗ Not a plan to replace student-teacher interaction with learning packets, guide sheets, or programmed learning devices;
- ✗ Not a way to prescribe independent study for all students;
- ✗ Not dependent upon radical changes in school building design;
- ✗ Not educational anarchy where students do only what they choose to do;
- ✗ Not more costly than traditional instructional approaches.

Continuous progress programs are and should be as individualized as are the study plans of young people in them. In fact, a school may find that not all of its instructional areas and faculty are ready to convert to a CP plan. A brief description of the way in which one secondary school is making use of continuous progress may make the concept clearer.

HOOD RIVER VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL, 1220 Indian Creek Rd., Hood River, Oreg. 97031
Contact: Charles S. Bowe, principal

The staff of Hood River initiated a continuous progress program in the fall of 1970, when the school was opened. They reasoned that a curriculum built on the concept of CP would help the school realize its ideal of individualized instruction for all students.

Customary curriculum structure and scheduling procedures were modified to permit students to move flexibly through and between courses. The usual time constraints were lifted. Courses were developed on a unit basis, where each unit carried the equivalent of one-tenth of a Carnegie unit of credit. Most courses consisted of 10 units, or one credit, but some courses contained as few as three units.

A written set of objectives, instructional activities, and assessment procedures exists. Curriculum guides covering all courses and units in each field have been prepared. These serve well as the bases for teaching units and courses and for assigning grades as students complete units and courses.

Scheduling procedures permit students to move from course to course at any time during the school year. A student can complete a course sooner than the expected time, or he or she may take longer than usual to finish a course. Under this plan students can meet graduation requirements in less than three years, or, if need be, take an additional year to do so. Strict guidelines for scheduling have been developed to control student accountability.

Each member of the professional staff serves as an adviser for between 15 and 20 students, with five or six from each of the school's three grade levels. This teacher-adviser or "guide" plan provides each student with a staff advocate and a support group to assist in developing and carrying out individual study plans, including post-high-school goals, and steps to reach those goals. Counselors work with their own guide groups, serve as resources for all groups, and handle difficult situations on a referral basis.

A fully computerized record-keeping system backs up both the continuous progress and the "guide" features of the program.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

Many questions surface when a school's faculty and administration begin to consider the possibility of implementing a continuous progress curriculum. Is it more expensive to organize and operate than the traditional curriculum pattern? How can teachers manage to keep track of all those individual student programs? Where will all the new teaching/learning materials come from? What inservice activities will be good for helping teachers get ready for this change? Will parents and students buy this new plan?

It is not possible in this short discussion to answer these and many other concerns that must be resolved in the course of adopting a CP curriculum design. A few of them will be considered in the next page or so, but experience supports one reassuring generalization: Such questions as these are answerable, since there now are schools that have been following this design, successfully, for some years.

Continuous progress education is not controlled by a monolithic body of pedagogical dogma complete with its own guru. The concept provides a guiding light to what can be a better land, but each school must plot its own way. Common to these various approaches, there are four principal components each school must be prepared to address.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE Robert Mager's oft cited quip, "If you're not sure where you are going, you're liable to end up someplace else and not know it," is a reminder that good teachers have a sense of what they are about, of the goals they hope to have their students reach through a series of units or courses. This understanding when formalized is commonly referred to as "scope and sequence." The element of S&S most important here is the clear and particular statement of performance objectives against which the teacher can measure a student's learning.

There are two primary ways in which continuous progress schools deal with the S&S essential. Some schools organize their curricula by using traditional subject-matter divisions; e.g., social studies is made up of world history, American history, economics, and so on. Scope and sequence are planned separately for each of these courses, and a student can move through the series of objectives thus defined at his or her appropriate learning pace. Although the courses are not necessarily sequential, they are organized to facilitate individual progress; when a student has completed one course he or she can move easily to another one in the same academic field.

In a second approach, goals and objectives for an entire subject area are identified. Skills are organized in a hierarchical manner with fundamental objectives preceding more complex ones. Once a continuum of objectives has been specified, various course titles can be associated with a specific cluster of objectives.

In either case, a pretest or diagnostic test is usually used to determine a student's readiness for placement at some point in the course continuum. This diagnostic process attempts to measure the student's previous learning and to determine the most suitable entry point.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS Once the scope and sequence of a course or program have been determined, it is time to select the activities, events, and strategies necessary to enable students to move toward the goals that have been proposed. The materials suggested for use in the learning process can take many forms. In some schools these are teacher-developed learning activity packets or contract activity packages. In others they are commercially developed materials appropriate to individual progress.

A few schools have decided to make use of guidesheets keyed to existing textbooks. In this case, it is important to recall that textbooks are not customarily written with the individualization of learning in mind, and consequently, the guidesheet-with-traditional-textbook is likely to be the least effective learning resources for a CP program.

Most schools with experience in using a CP plan have learned that no one approach to instruction and materials is best. A combination of materials, along with group teaching and contractual learning, are needed to provide adequate resources for the multitude of differences among students. An eclectic approach to materials and methods becomes even more essential as new research demonstrates the variety of individual learning styles.

Whatever the combination of resources and procedures that a school may choose, a successful continuous progress curriculum must provide:

- Carefully designed instructional objectives;
- A variety of materials and activities selected with those objectives in mind; and
- Processes and materials for the assessment of the individual student's learning and the evaluation of his or her achievement.

MANAGEMENT SYSTEM Probably the primary reason that teachers and administrators avoid the continuous progress idea is their concern about how to manage the total enterprise. It may work, they argue, in special schools with small and selected student bodies, but not in the general run of secondary schools. Many people think that students become disorderly when they are involved in highly individualized programs. They feel that if learning is individualized for all students in a course, the teacher will have too many variables to control. They fear that what seems to be a logical and orderly system of instruction in theory can end in disorder and chaos.

Such fears are by no means groundless, as is clear from the experiences of many teachers who have attempted to individualize student progress without first thinking through the entire undertaking, or who have tried to produce the appearance of continuous progress by tinkering with their traditional methods and materials. But we offer again the evidence of schools that have employed the CP approach for several years.

What follows are a few suggestions gleaned from the daily operations of continuous progress schools and the literature about them. The list, of course, is only a sample of techniques and not a comprehensive guide to program management.

- Materials that are well developed and of interest to students are critical to an orderly approach to instruction. Recent research on learning styles shows that activities geared to the individual strengths of students are more likely to stimulate their interest and drive than those aimed at the middle of the class.
- Good records must be maintained--either manually or by computer--on each individual student's progress. Both processes can be found among continuous progress schools. Although computerized records do speed up the process and save teachers time, they are not a necessity, as evidenced by the entirely adequate manually kept systems schools have developed.
- Teachers should know where each student is in his or her study plan on any given day. In essence, the traditional group lesson plan is replaced in CP by a personal lesson plan for each student or related group of students. One school, for example, color codes its learning packages so that anyone observing the class and knowing the legend can tell visually the stage at which each student is working.
- Individual student plan forms are developed to help students use their time wisely and remain on task. Such plan forms frequently

ask students to respond to three questions: "What are you planning to accomplish during this period?" Then later, "What did you do during that period?" And finally, "If you accomplished less than you had planned, explain." The teacher reviews these forms regularly, and works with students to improve their plan making abilities, their study skills, and their budgeting of time.

- Individual student conferences are held frequently. When a student completes a unit of work, a conference helps to establish where to go next in the scope and sequence. A conference can also be based on an observed student difficulty that calls for intervention by a teacher (guide, adviser).

- Students should be assigned to the most appropriate learning environment in which to accomplish the task at hand. Often this is the classroom or a resource center, but it may also be the media center, the library, or the community. The key is matching the work to be done with the best place in which to do it.

- The organization of teaching and learning spaces should be such that students do not get in one another's way. Quiet areas, group study spaces, and viewing centers can be created and operated simultaneously with proper ground rules. For instance, students can use headsets when listening to an audiotape so as not to bother other students who are reading or viewing filmstrips. Students can learn (be prompted) to use quiet tones when engaged in group discussions.

- Teacher aides or volunteers can be enlisted to distribute and assist with the use of materials and equipment. Student aides can also help.

► TEACHER-ADVISER PLAN In most continuous progress schools, an adviser-advisee system is part of the individualized instruction approach. Under this system, each member of the school's professional staff is asked to serve as an adviser to 15 to 25 students. The adviser meets with his or her advisees individually and in groups. The adviser is involved in decisions regarding a student's course placement, instructional setting, and next steps in the learning process. The adviser attempts to know the student better than any other professional in the school, and uses this information as a diagnostic tool for helping other teachers design appropriate learning settings for the student. The teacher-adviser does not replace the professional guidance counselor, but rather extends the guidance referral capabilities of that professional.

New developments in methods of testing and observation are helping teachers to become more skillful in diagnosing how individual students learn most effectively. Although research on individual learning styles is a relatively new area of study, a body of knowledge is accumulating that suggests success is more likely when teachers are able to match their teaching styles to the learning styles of individual learners. Using their knowledge about the individual's preferred approaches to learning, teachers and teacher-advisers can map out the learning paths that appear to be most beneficial for the students to follow.

In some of the schools named on the next few pages a continuous progress program was implemented on an all-at-once basis, which admittedly is more easily

accomplished when opening a new school. Others on the list went about the transformation more slowly. In at least two instances, only part of the instructional program was remodeled initially on a CP basis. Then, as these efforts became successful, other areas were stimulated to make the same move.

Exempli Gratia

Following are descriptions of the ways in which a number of schools, like Hood River Valley High, are applying the continuous progress concept in one or more subject areas.

ANDREWS MIDDLE SCHOOL, 405 NW Third St., Andrews, Tex. 79714
Contact: Forest Scott, principal

Students are taken wherever they are upon entering Andrews, and allowed to go as far as they can in a subject during the three years they are in the school. A good example of continuous progress at Andrews is provided by the mathematics program.

When a student enters the school, he or she is given a pretest, the results of which are analyzed and serve as the basis for placing the student at an entry level in mathematics. Clusters of objectives have been developed for each of the math instructional units. When a student has finished a given unit, he or she is given a posttest to determine to what extent the objectives of the unit have been reached, and what next steps are most appropriate. Sometimes the student must continue to work on the same unit with different learning materials until objectives are mastered. Other times, the posttest results indicate that the student can move through the series of units in the mathematics program at a more rapid pace than would be possible in a traditionally organized mathematics curriculum.

HOWARD COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM, Rte. 108, Ellicott City, Md. 21044
Contact: Gordon Hayward, supervisor of language arts

The Howard County continuous progress program in language arts is an articulated design with instructional objectives sequenced in literature, composition, and spoken arts from the elementary through the high school years. Students are assigned to objectives in this sequence according to their current levels of performance. They progress through the sequence as rapidly as their interests and abilities permit.

The sequence of objectives is divided into six phases of development. The objectives of Phases I through III are those the average student will master:

- Phase I in elementary grades 1-5
- Phase II in middle school grades 6-8
- Phase III in grades 9-12

The objectives of Phases IV through VI are designed for students who learn at rates beyond those of the average student and who complete Phase III objectives before the end of high school.

- Phase IV objectives are equivalent to those mastered by the average college freshman
- Phase V objectives are those mastered by the above-average college freshman
- Phase VI objectives are those mastered by gifted college freshmen and who are ready for advanced placement

The language arts continuous progress program extends across eight high schools in Howard County and has been in operation for approximately six years.

BISHOP CARROLL HIGH SCHOOL, 4624 Richard Rd., SW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
Contact: Ralph Vigna, principal

The entire Bishop Carroll High School curriculum is based on the concept of continuous progress. The relationship of performance and credit is emphasized rather than the traditional one of time and credit.

All programs have specifically designed instructional units called learning guides. Each learning guide specifies:

- What is to be learned (objectives, goals, concepts);
- The diverse types of activities and resources required to achieve the specified competencies; and
- Evaluation criteria to measure whether the student has achieved the performance level prescribed.

In this program, student learning has become more efficient and effective. Students neither waste time waiting for others to catch up nor are they frustrated by that which is too difficult. It is apparent that achievement intensifies student motivation. Each student has time to devote to programs that are particularly interesting to him or her or that are related to the student's ambitions or hopes for the future. The only limitations are those that are self-imposed by individual abilities, personality, and creativity.

A continuous progress approach is used in each of nine areas of knowledge identified as the basic curriculum. This provides a minimum level of exposure for all students. The nine are:

(1) English-language arts; (2) fine arts; (3) health, fitness, and recreation; (4) modern languages; (5) mathematics; (6) practical arts; (7) sciences; (8) social sciences; and (9) philosophy and religious studies.

P. K. YONGE LABORATORY SCHOOL, College of Education, University of Florida, 1080 SW 11th St., Gainesville, Fla. 32611
Contact: Barbara Kaiser, director, Reading/Writing Lab

The Developmental, Individualized Reading/Writing Program currently being developed and tested at the middle school level of P. K. Yonge exemplifies the staff members' belief that the acceptance of the student as an individual and the understanding of language are interrelated processes.

Individualization is first demonstrated when students are assisted in evaluating their own language strengths and weaknesses. On the basis of this evaluation, each student determines his or her own language improvement goal through a personal one-to-one conference with a teacher. The role of the reading/writing teacher, accordingly, becomes that of counselor and facilitator in the learning process. The materials and strategies recommended to the student take into account, in equal parts, the student's choice of personal goals, individual learning preferences, and his or her learner self-image. The feedback and reinforcement the student receives in this process is essential to success in the learning task.

Students are scheduled into the reading/writing laboratory each day. Available resources include teacher-developed and commercial materials geared to the interests of middle level students. Individual records for each student are maintained by the lab director and are accessible to students.

CHALMETTE HIGH SCHOOL, 1100 E. Judge Perez, Chalmette, La. 70043
Contact: Wayne Warner, principal

Curriculum guides for each of eight subject areas serve as the basis for a continuous progress curriculum and the related instructional program. The guides specify learning objectives in terms of three hierarchies: (1) essential learning; (2) exploratory learning; and (3) in-depth opportunities. These objectives provide teachers with direction in selecting varied learning activities based, insofar as possible, on diagnosed individual student learning styles. Student choice is incorporated into the selection of appropriate activities.

At Chalmette High, students do not receive credit until the essential learning in a course is completed. All credit is recorded in terms of partial credit earned as determined by the ratio of the objectives mastered in the three hierarchies compared with the total objectives listed for the course. Student progress is monitored continuously to ensure that the learning tasks are purposeful, and that students remain on task.

Faculty members and administrators view continuous progress as analogous to what happens when students are asked to run a race: all of them can run the distance of the race, but some can run that distance faster than others. It is a matter of variance in time but not in achievement. When students do not complete the objectives for a particular course in a given school year, they resume the work at the beginning of the next school year or during the summer. In no case is a student required to repeat the entire course to obtain credit for it.

Students spend their school time in three types of instructional settings: (a) large groups, (b) small groups, and (c) individualized study. Large-group sessions are scheduled every two weeks in each of the subject areas. These are motivational in nature and are aimed at encouraging young people to pursue further learning in the subject-field. These large groups are followed by small-group discussions in which students have an opportunity to interact with other students and the teacher. Individualized study usually takes place in resource centers where students use activity sheets designed by teachers to help them meet course objectives.

Students develop their own study schedules with the help of their teacher-advisers. Student accountability is furthered by having students carry their study schedules to class each day to be initialed by their course teachers or by resource center staff members.

Benefits of Continuous Progress

Many advantages can be derived from the adoption of a continuous progress curriculum design, as teachers and administrators who are involved with programs of this kind will attest. Here are some things these practitioners report about the impact of CP programming in their schools.

- Students are held accountable for demonstrating mastery of the objectives of a course or of units within a course. The system is, therefore, more accountable than traditional course organizations. Students cannot go on to the next learning sequence until they prove their mastery of prerequisite sequences. If they do not demonstrate mastery, they are "recycled" through different materials and activities to help them attain the requisite competence.

- Students receive credit for what they have learned. In the usual school context a student who has acquired command of, say, less than 60 percent of the course's subject matter is likely to be labeled a failure and be required to repeat the course. In contrast, under a CP plan a student starts where he or she left off. Repeating all of a course is not necessary when only 40 or 50 percent of the objectives remain to be mastered. This kind of flexibility also makes it possible for students to earn more credit.

- Student scheduling is much more flexible. Courses previously treated as singletons with only a few students enrolled can be offered at any convenient time. Individual and small-group schedules are the norm rather than "what fits best with the most."

- ★ Ability grouping with all of its accompanying negatives is avoided. Research on ability grouping shows that very few students benefit from this method of school organization, and negative social consequences are observed where it is employed. Continuous progress allows for many forms of more effective grouping.

- ★ Teachers are brought to think more critically about the curriculum and instruction. Teacher-made tests, for example, must be developed with the objectives of a unit or course clearly in mind.

- ★ The holding power of the school is increased as students find the program more challenging academically and more responsive to their intellectual and post-secondary-school goals.

- ★ Gifted and talented students are challenged through acceleration, enrichment, and in-depth investigation of areas not previously included in the school's curriculum. Students may accelerate through the regular curriculum, thereby creating time for areas of study that might not have been available to them in a more conventional program.

- ★ A school can make its gifted and talented program open to all since it is demonstrated mastery that counts, and not scores on intelligence tests or other screening devices.

- ★ The "advanced placement" feature of continuous progress usually does not lead to many early graduations. Instead, most students choose to remain in school to reap the benefits of the enriched, individualized curriculum that continuous progress makes possible.

- ★ The continuous progress plan makes it possible for the small high school to offer a much richer program of studies than under the traditional scheme of course offerings. With CP, students learn to accept much of the responsibility for their own learning, and the teacher becomes only one of many different resources to which the student can turn for help.

The essence of these and other values to be realized from the continuous learning concept has been well captured by a teacher in one CP school:

> Even though continuous progress is thought by many people to be an innovation, we on our school's English team...see it as just common sense teaching. It involves taking the student where he is and moving him as far as he can go. It involves providing alternatives in everything he is doing and allowing him to share decision making as much as is possible so that he begins to take some responsibility for his own learning.

KUDOS.....This issue of the Curriculum Report was prepared by JOHN M. JENKINS, director of the P. K. Yonge Laboratory School in the College of Education at the University of Florida, Gainesville.

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