

Dedham Plan May Contain Education's Magic Formula

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second and final portion of the talk given last week to the Birmingham Rotary club by educational authority Lawrence Farmer, education writer for The New York Times and now special public relations assistant to Michigan State University Oakland's chancellor.

Number five and last is the Dedham Plan. In this Boston suburb, school officials think they have found the magic formula that will enable every child—gifted, average, or slow—to develop at his own rate and in the same classroom. It is a team-learning plan in which the students are divided into groups of two or three workers, comparing notes, comparing answers and correcting their own papers.

The Dedham Plan, in my estimation, makes obsolete most of the talk of special programs for the gifted or classes for the slow learners and a good many other expensive ideas proposed in recent years.

How to provide a school program that will develop every child's full potential is education's biggest job AND its chief PROBLEM. The Dedham Plan, of its performance over one school year, comes closer to doing this than anything I have seen or heard of.

Over 1,200 pupils, representing all of the 4th, 5th and 6th grades, are involved in this experiment, which exploits the basic truth that kids LIKE to work together.

Dedham Plan Works This Way:

Here is how it works: When you walk into a classroom, there are no rows of desks. Instead, there are "little" desks of four or three scattered all over the room, but the youngsters are all busily talking together and there is a constant conversational hum—not distracting—and there is no chaos.

Each little group consists of two or three youngsters of more or less the same ability. The makeup of the groups changes by subject matter. If they are working on arithmetic, they will discuss the problem, help each other work it out and then they will compare answers.

Thus, a wrong answer will be obvious unless they are all wrong—then they will look up the answer in the book. But instead of doing 20 or 25 problems, as is the usual practice, these youngsters do only four before moving on to the next day's lesson.

More Discussion, Less Repetition

The theory is that the teaching and learning process involved in the actual discussion is a more effective process than repetition. There is a bonus for teachers—they have no papers to correct, no homework whatever. As soon as a group finishes one day's lesson, it can move on to the next day's lessons.

Full one-third of the fourth and sixth graders and nearly as large a proportion of the fifth graders have done two years of arithmetic in one year. In other words, there are many of the sixth grade kids who have passed seventh grade brothers now in junior high school—a situation that has created some family problems.

A spelling book lists these youngsters about a month. The school authorities are busy trying to keep ahead of them with more advanced vocabularies. In such things as geography or history, the team may go into depth.

For example, where the text book might devote a page to coal-mining, each member of the team might read an entire book on the subject, write a report and help get up a pictorial presentation.



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will be at the level of today's technicians. This means, on up the scale, that the good careers and professional jobs are going to be available largely to young men and women with graduate degrees, but as the need for more and more education increases, we must continually extend the portion of a man's life devoted to education.

Manpower Scarcer

Education is rapidly becoming—and soon will be—the scarcest commodity in our whole economy, and we can't afford waste anywhere—either in the educational process or in the way they are used by industry or government or by education after they get through school.

In other words, it doesn't take much imagination to see that at the bottom of things the business of education and how well it is run is as important to the welfare and the military security of this country as anything that you or I can think of.

At MSU, we think that the business of teaching the youngsters the techniques of earning a living are secondary things; that we simply cannot afford to use our time and resources to do this if it takes time away from training them for life.

If we can train them to have a critical intellect, they will be smart enough to pick up the trick of any trade, whether it is in another professional school or in the job.

Senior Citizens To Have Special Low Course Fees

Officials of the division of adult education of Wayne State University and the University of Michigan have announced a special plan to encourage the Birmingham area's senior citizen to participate in this free market. This in turn may have considerable significance and is for the future of testing and guidance programs.

The interest among the kids is so great that disciplinary problems have vanished. The teachers told me that all they had to do was threaten to make the youngster work by himself and he was instantly brought into line.

The state achievement tests show that in all the subjects in the curriculum, the fourth grade pupils have exceeded normal growth for the school year by 4-1/2 months; the fifth grade by 3-1/2 months; and the sixth grade by 3-1/2 months.

This means, in other words, that in all subjects, these kids have done on an average a year and a half's work in one year. These are some of the youths at work.

Interested older adults may call or write the Division at 60 Earnsboro, Detroit 2, for further details.

Wants to See More Testing

I hope MSU and local schools can explore and test some of the exciting possibilities the Dedham Plan offers for not only the Royal 12 year-span of elementary and secondary education, but radically revising and up-grading the curriculum from high school through college. This could save dollars through a more efficiently run educational structure.

Further as our advancing technology and the rising sophistication of our society means that every job is going to require more education. Indeed, tomorrow's laborer

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