SOME FEATURES OF THE DALTON PLAN

STATED negatively, the Dalton Plan is a comprehensive effort to escape what is formal and mechanical in education. Stated positively, it is a fluid procedure, extremely sensitive to the needs of the individual as such and of the same individual as a member of a social group, and it is always ready to respond quickly to the stimuli coming out of these two sources. Elementally, it is a reorganizing formula in education which necessitates far-reaching readjustments.

To the rank and file of our profession, noted for their conservatism, the adoption of the Dalton Plan is a revolutionary act, and it is increasingly violent as the time necessary for making the change effective is shortened. It involves new ideals and objectives, frequently by a transference of emphasis. Likewise it involves new attitudes. It necessitates a different treatment of subject-matter and results in a sweeping modification of existing administrative devices. It throws a spot-light beam upon the individual pupil without alienating him from his social group. It tends definitely and clearly to remove responsibility in the educational process from the periphery of pupil experience and to fix it more nearly at the center. It makes necessary a new testing technique and it creates a new teacher-pupil relationship.

There are some outstanding features of a Dalton school which are easily recognized. There are others—and among these are some of the most important—which are not easy to recognize, but are elusive, difficult to discover, to analyze, and to evaluate.

I.

The absence of a uniform daily class schedule is characteristic of a typical Dalton school. This stands out in marked contrast to the organization of the traditional school, which requires a pupil to spend a fixed time period each day in certain specified classrooms and study halls. Both schools tend to be somewhat alike in that each usually requires a pupil to carry a minimum amount of work. The Dalton school, however, is not likely to be so rigid as the traditional school in fixing upper achievement levels for the most capable pupils and, at the same time, it is not likely to be so rigid as the traditional school in imposing upon the low-capacity pupil an impossible amount of work. In any case the Dalton school does not depend upon a uniform daily class schedule.

Inconsistent as it may seem to be, the Dalton school does depend upon a daily schedule of work. But it is not uniform. In fact it may vary for each pupil in attendance. And the responsibility for schedule-making, generally regarded as a function of the administrative officers, falls in the Dalton school upon the individual pupil. Each plans his own daily schedule of work on the basis of his present needs and he continues to do so as long as his results are satisfactory. When he fails to plan wisely in this respect, the fact is quickly apparent and his faculty adviser comes to his assistance.

In practice the individual pupil tends in schedule-making to increase the length of his period of application in a given subject. Frequently he will spend an entire day, sometimes two or three days, in the English classroom until the unit of work which he
has engaged to do is completed. He may then plan his work in the natural sciences or in the social sciences on the same basis. This arrangement is possible in practically all departments of a school with the exception, it may be, of certain beginning language classes using the direct method, and in shorthand and typewriting where the economical advantages of group instruction may seem to be outstanding.

From this it is to be correctly inferred that the visitor in a Dalton school would be quick to observe the absence of regularity in the passing of pupils through the corridors as they go from one classroom to another. The fact that each pupil follows his own schedule makes this a natural condition. In view of this it may seem reasonable to suspect that in a Dalton school there is a constant stream of pupils traveling from one part of the building to another, causing incessant disturbance. “No uniform class schedule means uncontrolled pupil movement,” it may be argued. As a matter of fact the opposite is true. What has been secured in this respect in the traditional school by the imposed bell system is possible in a more complete degree in the Dalton school through the operation of the individual pupils’ schedules of work and by the interference of the teachers whose business it is to make an investigation of any pupil whose practise it is to leave or to enter the classrooms frequently, or to be seen often in the corridors. Actually, the Dalton Plan efficiently operated is likely to result in appreciably diminishing the number of pupil transfers as compared with the number occurring in the traditional school.

II.

The written unit assignment is an outstanding feature of the Dalton school. It usually contains a block of work, having unity and coherence, which will, with the pupil’s assignments in other fields, require about three weeks for completion. Being written, it affords opportunity for the teacher to be definite in setting up the task, making necessary on the teacher’s part a high degree of familiarity with the involved subject-matter and greatly diminishing the opportunity of the pupil “to forget” the lesson.

The written unit assignment, generally known as a contract, may vary in form and organization but the typical one includes the following: the name of the school, the teacher’s name, the number of the contract, the time equivalent, the topic or name of the task set up for the pupil, a brief introduction, the purpose or aim, an outline of the work to be done by the pupil, a list of references, and miscellaneous elements which may naturally “belong” to a given contract. For example, under the miscellaneous elements falls an item such as “Catch-words,” which would include words found in the subject-matter not in common usage or having perhaps a special connotative value in the text or reference setting.

In the Dalton school the contracts are mimeographed and each pupil, upon meeting the qualifications for advancement to the next assignment, is given a copy. The length may be one page of material or it may be two, three, four, or even more.

To receive credit for one unit of work which represents successful scholarship in a class equivalent to one hundred eighty recitation hours the pupil must complete a certain number of contracts. This number is recognized at face value and accordingly noted on the permanent records of the school. It is therefore possible for a pupil under the Dalton Plan to make progress at his own rate.

The written unit assignment is supplemented by the teacher who gives oral instruction whenever it seems desirable to do so. Usually this is done in two ways: first, the teacher when giving out a contract will sketch it briefly with the pupil receiving it; second, the teacher will more commonly call a group meeting of the pupils having
received a contract at about the same time and will present it to them orally. In this way there is the double surety of causing pupils to understand what is before them.

The contract is a unit. In American history, for example, the contract may deal with the topic, "The Revolutionary War." It will involve colonial policies, causes, comparison of the strength of the colonies and of Great Britain, the course of the struggle and the results, all so related in the activity as to give to it "the feel" of completeness. Observation of the unit assignment in practice justifies the conclusion that its advantages reach far beyond those of the oral, daily, short-range assignment.

III.

In the Dalton school the typical classroom is a laboratory. In it the pupil does the major part of his work. The general rule is for the pupil to do his history contract in the history room, his English contract in the English room, his algebra contract in the algebra room, his biology contract in the biology room. Here he works under the immediate supervision of his teacher. He forges ahead without assistance unless he meets with a problem which seems to be too difficult for him to solve. At this point he goes to his teacher for help and having received it he returns to his task to proceed to its close. The responsibility for progress is individual and falls upon the pupil. The teacher is present, among other things, to help him when help is necessary.

However, the pupil is not isolated from his group. From time to time the teacher calls group conferences which continue in session long enough to satisfy the purpose for which the meetings are called. It is here that the pupils learn to give and to take, to modify their views to express their opinions in the presence of others and for the common weal,—in fact, how to live and to work as members of society. Such opportunities for group meetings are frequent in the typical Dalton school and of them advantage is taken as a means for continuing in the educational program those valuable experiences which are so conspicuous as a part of the traditional recitation hour.

The appearance of the Dalton classroom, commonly called laboratory or "work-shop," may have little in common with that of the traditional classroom. The pupils are frequently not required to be seated in any assigned order. About the teacher's desk may be gathered a small group in conference with the teacher. Others may be observed here and there about the room, each engaged in his task. One may be searching for a reference book on the shelf of the room library; another may be setting up apparatus for an experiment. In a workshop accommodating twenty pupils there will perhaps be no two of them engaged in doing exactly the same thing. To the visitor or the first impression is likely to be one of confusion. But when, upon interviewing each boy and girl present, he discovers that each is doing a definite piece of worth-while work and that each knows what he is doing and why, the impression of confusion gives way to something else.

IV.

The Dalton school employs a definite testing technique which may vary from school to school. Nevertheless there are certain factors likely to be common to all.

One of these is the self-applied test. On the teacher's desk will frequently be found mimeographed copies of a true-false, or other new-type test covering a given contract. When the pupil feels that he has completed the work on this contract, he may secure a copy of the test, take it, and grade his results, using a key provided for that purpose by the teacher. The grade is not recorded because the purpose of the test is to provide the pupil with an opportunity for discovering for himself his own proficiency. If he finds that he is not prepared, he returns to his work and continues with his preparation. Again, the pupil is
The individual conference has incidentally a direct bearing on the testing program. When a pupil has completed preparation on a contract, he makes an appointment with his teacher and at that time reviews the work he has done. This conference is a test to the degree to which the teacher makes it one. However, it ought to be pointed out that the educational philosophy underlying the Dalton Plan makes no special effort to justify the individual conference as a testing device but rather as a rare opportunity for the learner to learn and for the teacher to teach. In the process of doing these two things, and incidental to them, it is inescapable that the teacher should derive from the individual conference information necessary for evaluating the character of the pupil's achievement.

At this point it is relevant to point out that in the Dalton school there is no such thing as a "failing" pupil. Pupils make progress at different rates according to their different capacities. The term "slow-progress pupil" which has been accorded a position of respect and dignity in the vocabulary of professional, traditional catch-words is from the Dalton viewpoint filled with the meaning of injustice when applied to a particular pupil. Its implication that one pupil's achievement should be measured by another's and that the first should be designated as "inferior" because it fails to match that of the second is in a large degree without significance. It remains to be revealed whether there is a more equitable principle for determining the value of a pupil's achievement than that of evaluating it in terms of its relation to the pupil's capacity to achieve. Granted that a technique for this is lacking, the fact remains that a technique for arriving at comparative values on the basis of the achievements of different pupils is open to serious question. If it be granted that more progress has been made in recent years in developing a technique of comparison, its significance seems to be that our efforts have been largely misdirected from the problem inherently fundamental in what we are attempting to do in the whole task of education.

The traditional written test has a place in the Dalton school, but it does not occupy the over-shadowing position generally accorded it in the traditional school. It is most commonly utilized when a group of pupils report themselves ready for a specified exercise.

Observation of the pupil at work is another measure of the pupil. The pupil whose rate of progress is consistent throughout the year, who has the earmarks of a busy person, who evinces interest through intelligent inquiry and application, who shows skill in using the tools with which he works, and who gives evidence of powers of self-mastery is regarded as a successful worker. These things have an important bearing upon his rating.

In closing this brief review of testing in a Dalton school, it should be pointed out that testing as such is relegated to a minor place in the school's program of learning and teaching. It is valued most for its services in the analysis of pupil habits and in discovering the kind and degree of teacher assistance necessary to meet the existing situation.

In an exposition such as this it is impossible to make reference to all of those distinctly Dalton features which give promise of exercising a definite influence on the development of educational practices and procedures in the future. Those herein listed do not appear in their order of importance; if so, it is accidental. And, at the same time, no apology is submitted in extenuation of the omission of such features as the pupil group-teacher conference, pupil participation in contract-making, the place of the teacher in a Dalton school, and such other features as, combined with the
foregoing, constitute what is known as the Dalton Plan of education.

R. B. Marston

STUDENT LOADS IN TEACHERS COLLEGES

During the session of 1927-28 the Course of Study Committee of the State Teachers College, Harrisonburg, Virginia, wished to ascertain the requirements for graduation and the student load in similar institutions. A questionnaire of twelve items was accordingly compiled by Dr. W. J. Gifford and sent to all teachers colleges that offered four-year curricula. Replies were received from most (77) but not all of them.

Both questions and tabulated answers are given below:

Question 1. What is the number of units required for graduation: quarter hours? or semester hours? or session hours?

In order that a comparison might be facilitated the answers were all tabulated in terms of quarter hours as shown in Table One.

Thus it will be seen that a total of seventy-five colleges answered and that the median requirement was 188+ quarter hours for graduation from the four year curricula, while the minimum requirement was 180 and the maximum was 216. The decided preference for 180 and 192 hours is probably explained by the fact that 12 quarters of 15 hours each makes the 180 quarter hours and 12 quarters of 16 hours each equals 192 quarter hours and facilitates the distribution of the load equitably by quarters. The same mathematics is applicable to a distribution by semesters and terms.

It will be noted that 40% of the institutions that reported require 192 quarter hours and 29 1/3% adhere to the minimum requirement of 180 quarter hours.

Thirty-three colleges estimate their requirements on the quarter hour basis, thirty-eight on the semester hour basis, and four on the session hour basis.

Question 2. If you have the qualitative system, how many quality points are required? Where is your system described in print?

To this question eleven colleges stated that the system was not in use while fifteen failed to answer, making a total of twenty-six institutions that do not record themselves as using the qualitative system. Fifty-two colleges used it in some form. Therefore, the system is in use in about two-thirds of these colleges. Five colleges that use the system gave no explanation of it.

Thirty-three colleges require as many quality credits for graduation as class credits. As far as could be ascertained from the data given, this was equivalent to requiring the student to average the second passing grade. For instance, if there were four passing grades of A, B, C, and D, an average of C was required when D was the lowest passing grade.

The remaining fourteen colleges have varied systems. Two require an average of C and the load of the student is reduced if this average is not maintained. One requires half as many quality as grade points when D equals 4, B equals 2, C equals 1, and D equals 0. One requires one-third as many “credit points as hours.” Four require one-fourth as many quality points as credits. One requires three-fifths of the grades to average 80%. One requires two-thirds as many quality points as grade points. One college requires 208 quarter hours and 350 quality credits. One requires “2 per course.” One requires three-fourths as many quality credits as there are quarter hours. One requires that 75% of the quarter hours be C or better.

In estimating quality credits, the prevail-

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<th>2</th>
<th>2</th>
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