

Pace Setters in Education

By JAMES L. OLIVERO

(Dr. Olivero is assistant secretary of the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards of the National Education Association, the nation's leading public school organization. Here he takes a look at Catholic schools.)

If the schools of tomorrow are to be significantly better than those of today, they will have to be significantly different. It is my impression that several Catholic schools across the nation are doing their share to hasten this state of affairs. Their innovations include team teaching, open and closed circuit television, non-graded programs, flexible scheduling, and programmed instruction.

Let me give a few specific examples.

In Salesianum School, operated by the Oblates of St. Francis, in Wilmington, Del., closed circuit television is used for team teaching in English, history and religious instruction. Class time is divided into 10-15 minute periods. A television teacher first presents basic material to all classes, individual classroom teachers then take over the alternate periods for discussion and conclusions. The specialized four-man educational television staff includes director, producer, and electronic specialists for operations and maintenance. Students sometimes operate the studio and produce their own shows under faculty supervision.

Venanzo Christian High School is a non-graded school in Oil City (diocese of Erie), Pa. The philosophy behind its instructional program is that students should have more responsibility for their own education and the freedom to make mistakes, that tracking and

grouping should not come from an "on high," that students should be prepared for an age of controversy, and that both students and teachers should be unshackled.

The students are free to choose which of six phases or levels of a subject they wish to study, the new phases ranging from special assistance to individual research. A new grading system translates phases into grade points. Team teaching, flexible scheduling and teaching cycles in English, social studies, and theology allow this study phasing and staff concentration.

The new facilities of Loretto School, operated in Kansas City, Mo., by the Sisters of Loretto, are custom designed for a non-graded program, and students progress at their own speed. Teachers are assigned to areas of specialization and have the help of lay assistants and high school seniors who receive credit for their tasks. The non-graded program has been in operation for six years in the lower school. The curriculum and structure of the upper school is being reorganized to permit continuous individual student progress throughout the elementary and secondary years.

These Catholic school programs are all significant, the fact that they are using different approaches to achieve common objectives speaks for the imagination and creativity of the school personnel. The lesson to be learned from them is a lesson in "process for change." But change does not always come easy to educators, and the Catholic school system on the whole is no exception. Perhaps because Catholic schools are unique, they have some unique problems which tend to inhibit change. Even though I run the risk of oversimplification, it

seems apparent to me that three roadblocks are having a negative influence. They are:

1) The lack of communication between educational institutions. Efforts need to be made to disseminate information about what teachers are doing to improve instruction. Not only are we naive about educational opportunities and alternatives, but we are prone to "re-invent the wheel" every time we have a supposedly new idea. By knowing what someone else has already done, we can exploit the progress and avoid the pitfalls. The pathway to innovation is often lonely; we need all the assistance we can muster.

2) The effort to secure "outside" monies for research projects and planned innovations has been neither powerful enough nor persistent enough. Everywhere people are demanding quality education and teachers as seeking ways of administering classrooms so that children can "learn"—but improved education is most certainly related to additional financial sources.

3) Relatively little utilization of auxiliary personnel (teacher aides) is evident in the Catholic schools. If education is to be improved, teachers must find time to think, to plan, to analyze, to treat—indeed, to teach. Collecting money, selling tickets, supervising lunchrooms and a score of other Mickey Mouse activities are not directly related to instruction. By bringing supportive personnel into the schools, the job of teaching can become more manageable, more rewarding, and more substantive. Each of these ingredients is likely to result in more effective instruction—and better learning.

Catholic schools, of course, also face many of the same problems as other schools—too many rules designed for five per cent of the student population but inflicting undue control on the other 95 per cent.

too many teachers who talk too much; too many administrators who are "pencil-counters" rather than designers of curriculums; too few resources. But both public and private schools today are better than ever before; we have better teachers and administrators, more resources, and perhaps, the most significant element of all, and attitude on the part of most parents and students that an education is not only needed, but wanted. Our forecast is sunny if we can avoid the complacency problems.

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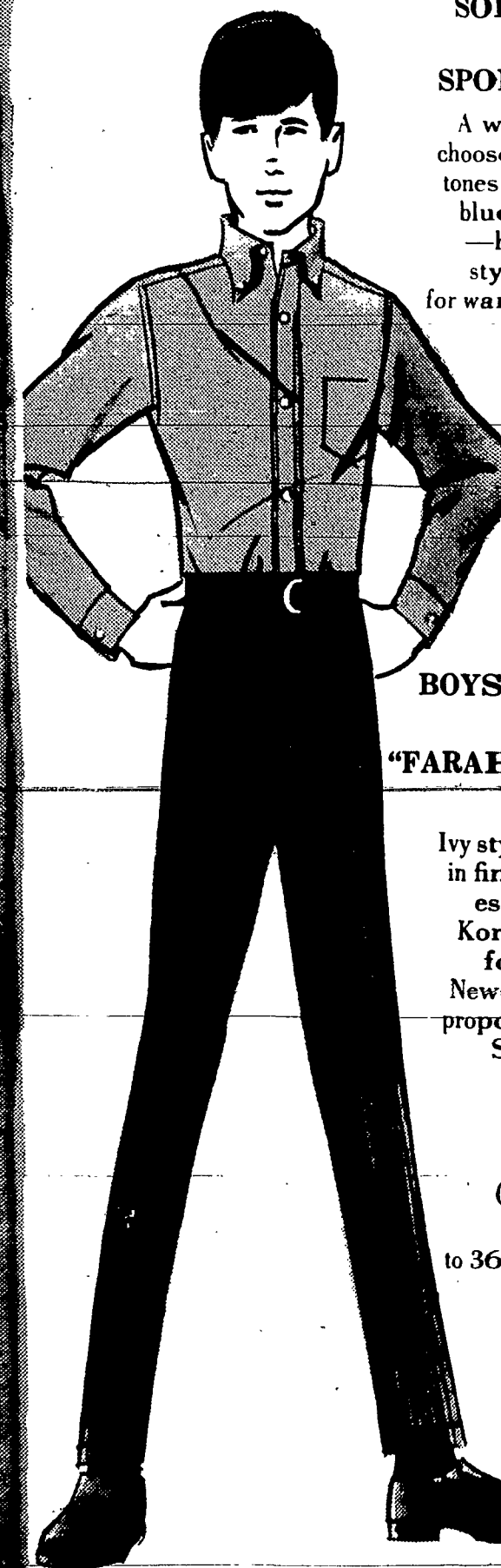


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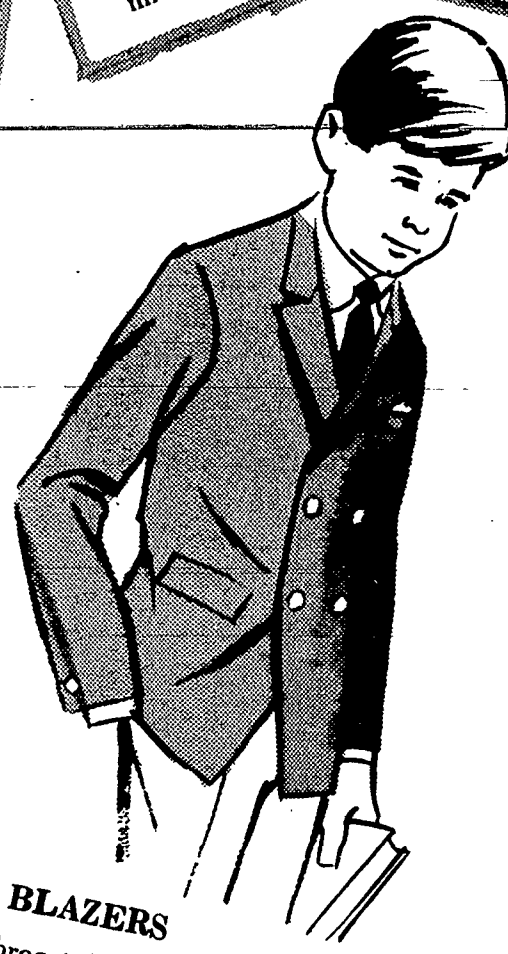


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