

DR. VERN ROSCOE CRAMER

"Let's not forget that the 'great idea of universal education' for the children of all parents originated in America," said Dr. Vern Roscoe Cramer during a conversation in his quiet office in the UMD library building.

Currently teaching a course in elementary school organization and administration at UMD's second summer session, Dr. Cramer is a recognized authority on junior high schools and their development.

As a member of the National Junior High School Education committee he has addressed national associations throughout the country, such as the New York City meeting in 1951, Milwaukee in 1954, Atlantic City in 1955 and the Chicago meeting in 1956. These speeches have all been published.

As principal of Switzer Elementary school and West Junior High school in Kansas City, Mo., he has put new ideas into practice in his own schools. Since 1950 he has dedicated much time to the development and re-organization of junior high schools on a national level.

"I am fully aware of the current criticism of our school system," he stated. "Actually we are doing a better

job in education all the time. But for many years junior high schools have been neglected."

"In our school we use what we call a 'block of time'," he explained. "We have a staff of 85 teachers and 1700 pupils, and we allot two and one-half hours out of each school day for the teaching of language arts and social studies."

Language arts, he elaborated, includes reading, spelling, writing, written and oral language, speech and listening. Social studies include geography, history, civics and citizenship.

He emphasized that junior high students must have many class experiences to clarify their interests and needs. In addition to the language arts and social studies in the "block of time", there are other subjects in single periods, such as arithmetic, physical education and health and various special interests subjects, music, arts, science, homemaking, industrial arts and others. "In farming areas, for instance, we may be teaching vocational agriculture as one of the special interests courses."

"For fifty years," Dr. Cramer continued, "junior high schools have been conducted as senior high schools. The teacher has to know at least 150 children, and has to teach language arts or social studies for five periods each day to separate classes. This allows very little time for any guidance.

"The National Committee believes it would not be too difficult to re-organize junior high schools more on the order

of elementary schools. The home room teacher would then have only sixty children to teach and would do a better job under the 'block of time' system than is possible when teaching 150 pupils in separate subjects and separate class periods.

"You see", stressed the Missouri educator, "children in junior high schools in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, are early adolescents or early youths. They are in a somewhat different stage of life from those in later adolescence, in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades. Many of their needs are different.

"That's why we believe the junior high school is a distinct institution which should provide for early adolescence. Seventh-graders still have something in common with the childhood stage, and also something in common with later adolescence, therefore the junior high school should not be a copycat of the senior high school. Neither should it be an overgrown elementary school.

"In a nutshell", summarized Dr. Cramer, "we are trying to develop a good continuity of education from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. We want to smooth out the gaps."

A native of Fredricksbug, Mo., he taught rural schools, was superintendent of schools at Linn, Mo., for five years and of Lebanon, Mo., for nine years before becoming principal of Switzer Elementary school and West Junior High school in Kansas City. For seventeen summers he directed the University of Missouri School of Mines teachers college at Rolla. For the past thirteen summers he has lectured on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. In addition he has conducted workshops in fifteen

states.

Dr. Cramer is a member of teachers', elementary principals' and secondary school principal's associations of national, state, and local educational organizations. He is married and the father of three children.

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