

teacher to a group of children he cannot accept for such reasons as their mental ability, their race, or their socioeconomic status. In addition, all teachers can be recognized for the things they do best and should be provided increased opportunities to do them.

The twelve methods of providing for individual differences listed above do not exhaust the variety and ingenuity of school people in coping with this problem. Many schools use some forms of these procedures and others undoubtedly employ contrasting methods of providing for differences. Supervisors, principals and school staffs may find it profitable to use the dozen methods as a basis for discussion and begin-

ning attack on the problem in their own schools.

Such a list suggests too that there is no one best method of providing for differences which applies equally to all schools. Acceleration and retardation alone, or individualized teaching alone, will not solve all the problems created by the fact that children are so different. In many school situations probably some combination of these and other methods is desirable. Since causes of differences are complex, attempts to provide for them must necessarily be varied and flexible. The multi-pronged attack on the problem is most likely to succeed. Such an approach may be a key to total curriculum improvement.

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## *A Faculty Meets the Needs of Pupils*

FRED E. BROOKS

In the primary school program described in this article, teachers and parents have devised a means of providing a freer and more adequate instructional program for all pupils.

THE "graded" school system, which was inaugurated as an expedient device in the early history of American education, has been one of the most persistent of all plans of school organization. It has brought about some difficult problems, yet its main virtue still seems to be that no one has yet suggested a better plan of organization. The problems it poses are so well known that it is almost trite to mention them. These problems, however, are best indicated by the terms, "failure,"

"promotion" and "grade standards." Goodlad<sup>1</sup> has furnished a résumé of the research and theory regarding promotion and failure and has arrived at some conclusions that appear to most teachers of experience to be sound.

Whether sending the child on up the ladder of annual promotion even though he has not achieved skills commensurate with the grade standards is

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<sup>1</sup> Goodlad, John I., "Research and Theory Regarding Promotion and Non Promotion," *Elementary School Journal*, November 1952.

best for the child, best for the group or "best for the teacher" is still unsettled in the minds of most school teachers, supervisors and administrators. It is usually not too difficult, however, for the child or the parent to settle the question, for neither will look upon failure with a favorable attitude. Sometimes such automatic promotion may be considered more economical, insofar as the taxpayer is concerned, for under this system no child takes more than his allotted thirteen years to complete the public school program. Some individuals, too, have been known to consider it helpful if a slow learning child can be so retarded that his own overageness will be a cause for him to drop out. Whatever school people may do in this matter, however, they do not expect to find a panacea. We should, nevertheless, constantly keep trying to find an answer to the question, "What is best for the total development of the individual child?"

Many stumbling blocks thrown in the way of the child have long been recognized and plan after plan for removing these has been developed by forward thinking educators. Some of these plans have no doubt contributed to a more successful developmental program while others have undoubtedly caused new stumbling blocks to appear.

In listening in on a professional discussion of this problem, the observer might hear these statements: "No child should be promoted unless he can do the work." "Place each child on his own standard, there is no such thing as a grade standard." "If children are failed they become discouraged." "If you don't fail children they won't try

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—they know they will all be promoted anyway." And so on and on, ad infinitum. But what can we do about it? Continue the status quo—or make some kind of attempt at a solution? This was the problem which the staff at the Hawthorne School faced five years ago.

### Basic Conclusions

Discussion after discussion had been held around the lunch table, in the corridors and at faculty meetings. Letters had been written to schools which had made attempts to solve the "promotion" problem and the research was uncovered for study. Finally, the staff arrived at these basic conclusions which are not at all new:

*First*, that the range of ability (all phases) of the children in the first year of school is so great that any attempt to group them as a *grade* is impossible.

*Second*, that the rate of achievement varies greatly as the pupils progress from month to month.

*Third*, that a child should never be considered a failure if the task given him is too difficult for him to achieve.

*Fourth*, that some *factors* for noting progress in school are necessary and a method must be devised for recording this progress.

*Fifth*, that it is important for the parent to be kept informed about the child's progress at school and for the teacher to know about the child's development at home.

*Sixth*, that annual promotions are not necessary if an adequate system can be devised for accounting for the continuous progress of the pupil.

With these general conclusions in mind the teachers took as a basis two items which they felt they could use as factors for noting progress. These were, namely, the semester in school and the reading level. The number of semesters a child has spent in school is a factor even though the chronological age of the children at admission may vary as much as eleven months and twenty-nine days. (Which it does in this school system.) The reading level was determined by all the factors at the hands of the teacher, such as graded texts, tests and general performance. Hence this system of accounting was devised. The primary school consisting of the first three years (not including the kindergarten) was divided into six semesters with a reading level corresponding to each semester. Also, provision was made for a seventh and eighth semester and a seventh and eighth reading level.

The reason for these additional semesters and levels was to take care of the pupils who needed more time and for the pupils who could do higher levels of work. For example, pupils who enter the first semester of school are designated 1-R (readiness) if they are not ready to read but 1-1 if they do begin the reading program. Normal advancement is always shown with the two figures the same as 2-2, 3-3 or 4-4 but if a child is moving more rapidly this will be shown by 2-3, 3-4 or 4-5. If he is moving more slowly it will be shown as 2-1, 3-2 or 4-3. It is possible for a pupil to be designated at the end of the primary school as 6-8, meaning that he is in the sixth semester of school and doing an eighth level of reading, or a slow pupil who has taken four

years to be designated as 8-6, meaning that he has spent eight semesters in school and has reached the sixth level of reading, or he may be at an even lower level and designated as 8-5. All of this is merely for the purpose of pupil record keeping and any other system that would have the same general meanings would be just as good.

### Measuring Progress

After working this out three big problems presented themselves.

*First*, how can the parents ever be brought to understand this manner of thinking about pupil classification and progress?

*Second*, how can we, as teachers, know enough about each pupil to follow his progress individually?

*Third*, if a child progresses more slowly, won't he find himself at times with younger children and isn't this the same thing as failure?

The first problem was tackled by getting all the parents of the kindergarten children together and talking with them about it. Large discussion groups were held and then smaller groups, and the parents agreed that it might be worth a try. There was no opposition, but many questions such as "If my child is not ready to read what can I do to get him ready?" and "If it appears that he may need *four* years at first can he catch up if he does very well?" and "Will the teacher have several reading groups of different levels in the same room?" etc. The teacher invited mothers to the classrooms so they could observe the pupils in the process of learning to read. All reporting to parents was done by means of the parent-

teacher conference and no formal report was issued.

The second problem is a continuous one. The teachers meet frequently to discuss their standards of reading levels and are now using a folder type record system so that each child's accomplishments can be passed on to the next teacher. Basically, the levels correspond closely to the grade placement values in the primary reading tests and the graded texts. However, it is the general feeling of the group that the reading levels should be such that they are geared to the particular school organization and understood by all of the teachers in that organization.

The third problem is one of grouping. Since there are four beginning classes each September, they are divided into four groups as nearly alike as possible, with about the same range in each group. This is done by using the reading readiness test administered in the kindergarten, a social maturity test, a coordination test and the teacher's judgment. As much as possible all pupils are grouped so that they will remain with one teacher for two semesters. In May they are grouped again for the fall semester. If a pupil makes slow progress the first two semesters it is possible that the next time he may be placed with younger pupils. However, the factors mainly considered here are physical and social maturity.

We have found that some slow children can be grouped to their advantage with younger children at the end of the second semester, others at the end of the fourth semester and others at the end of the sixth semester. In most cases it would seem that it is not being with younger children that disturbs the child

and the parents so much as the feeling of failure. Can we take the emphasis off the chronological age of the child and think more about his developmental age? If we can, it would seem that an eight-year-old, slowly developing child is more apt to be happy with his peers who are seven than those who are eight and are considerably ahead of him. As a matter of fact our experience bears out this fact if the parents and teachers will but accept it and if the child is not made to feel that he has lost status somewhere by comparing ages with other children.

### **Parent Conferences Are Necessary**

In developing this idea of individual differences with parents many group conferences are necessary. Discussions are begun in the kindergarten and carried on at every opportunity during the three year period. These points are stressed over and over again with the parents:

*First*, children do not all grow and mature at the same rate so you should not think too much about the chronological age of your child. They do not all walk, talk or get ready to read at the same age.

*Second*, children do not work well under pressure and giving them a task to do before they are ready to do it is a form of pressure. It is not much more difficult to tell when a child is ready to read than it is to tell when he is ready to walk.

*Third*, children learn through doing many things. Give your child the same opportunity to learn about words that you do about walking, eating or health habits. Talk with him a great deal and

read to him. Enrich his environment.

Even though the parents may have had all their own experience in a graded school, it is not difficult for them to understand that annual blocks of work (called grade 1, 2 or 3) with hurdles to jump at the end which we call *promotion* are not at all necessary in the school progress of children. Parents also understand readily that children in any age groups vary widely in their stage of maturation insofar as their ability to master certain skills is concerned. Hence the teachers at Hawthorne School have become convinced that it is not actually the parents of the children who bind the school to the traditional grade arrangement. However, they have found that any change that is proposed must be thoroughly discussed with the parents.

While there are many problems left

for the teacher to solve in the primary school, it has become evident that the problems of promotion and failure have been eased. The teacher feels freer to teach the child according to his needs and the parent accepts the fact that the child may move more slowly without being socially ostracized because of failure. The child is not given any task to do before he is ready to do it but every attempt is made to keep him progressing at his own rate as nearly as it can be determined. The teachers are developing ways of knowing more about their pupils and are greatly improving in their conference technique. Also it has brought the teacher and parent closer together in the total job of educating the child. Does this require extra effort? Yes, it frequently does, but at this time it appears that the results justify this effort.

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## *Matching Ten Reading Levels in One Classroom*

**DON H. PARKER, RENA KING  
and RUTH A. HOLT**

A ninth grade English teacher is dismayed to find that her pupils range from grade three through grade thirteen in their reading ability. With consultant assistance, she institutes a program that provides materials and help to each pupil at his own reading level.

“—**A**ND IF you have an average classroom, let's say a ninth grade, you probably have a range of eight or ten different reading grade levels among your pupils,” said the speaker.

“Eight different reading levels,—in my room? And I'm using only one textbook? Oh, no! It can't be true,” thought the ninth grade English teacher in the

eighteenth row back. It was a warm, early fall afternoon. Around her sat some three hundred of the county's teachers. Maybe she hadn't heard correctly. She would ask the others later. But what followed was even more disconcerting.

“You ask,” continued the speaker, “how well your pupils *should* read? Possibly you are one of those who would

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