

# HOMOGENEOUS GROUPING

## for Gifted Children

This article reviews practice and research in the continuing problem of the homogeneous grouping of gifted children.

THE NEED FOR attention to the education of gifted children has long been recognized. The development of provisions for this, however, has not kept pace with the research findings on the nature and needs of the gifted. To only a limited extent have special provisions been made for them. Acceleration, enrichment and homogeneous grouping are the major types of provisions. Few programs have been based solely upon only one of these. Enrichment has come to be an essential part of any provision for the gifted, while homogeneous grouping is practiced to some extent in every class.

But there are those who believe that formal provisions are necessary if the gifted child is to be adequately provided for. There is much evidence to prove that the gifted child frequently is neglected.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing this need for special attention to gifted children, in 1920 Cleveland, Ohio, began a program of special classes for gifted children. This, known as the Major Work Program,

<sup>1</sup> Walter B. Barbe, "Are Gifted Children Being Adequately Provided For?" *Educational Administration and Supervision*, Vol. 40, No. 7 (November 1954), p. 405-413.

was the beginning of a slow and spasmodic increase in the belief that gifted children can best be provided for in special classes.<sup>2</sup>

The program of providing for gifted children in the schools of New York City was started in 1922 by Leta Stetter Hollingworth. Even though Public Schools No. 64 and 11 had reported grouping rapid learners shortly before this time, "they did not carry with them the scientific research and evaluation begun by Hollingworth in No. 165."<sup>3</sup> These classes, known as Special Opportunity Classes, were given partial financial support by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

In an article in *Ungraded*,<sup>4</sup> Hollingworth, Cobb and others stated that the purposes of the program were:

First, the particular children in it must be educated—the class exists for them; but secondly, they must be studied—our knowl-

<sup>2</sup> Walter B. Barbe and Dorothy Norris, "Special Classes for Gifted Children in Cleveland," *Exceptional Children*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (November 1954), p. 55-57.

<sup>3</sup> Grace Loomis, "The Education of the Gifted Child," *Curriculum Bulletin*, No. 97, (December 12, 1951), Eugene, Oregon: School of Education, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Witty, *The Gifted Child* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1950), p. 55.

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edge of such children must be increased, for we have, after all, very little information to guide us in differentiating their schooling.

These early classes were entirely of an experimental nature and continued for a period of three years. Two groups of children were selected to be in the experiment. Group A was formed with children of 150 I.Q. and above, while Group B consisted of children with I.Q.'s of 135 and 154. All of the children were between the ages of 7½ and 9½ years and were accelerated in their school grade placement.

At the end of the three-year experiment, comparisons were made of achievement of the experimental groups and control groups of children who were of equal intellectual capacity but not in special classes. It was found that there was no great difference in the achievement scores of the segregated and non-segregated groups. In the evaluation, it was concluded that:

The advantages to be hoped for from the homogeneous grouping of gifted children lie not so much in the expectation of greater achievement in the tool subjects of reading, arithmetic and spelling as in enrichment of scholastic experience.<sup>5</sup>

Hildreth recently reported on another attempt at special schools in New York. In 1940, Hunter College in New York City received authorization from the Board of Education to organize an elementary school for gifted pupils. Children from the ages of 3

<sup>5</sup> Howard A. Gray and Leta S. Hollingworth, "The Achievements of Gifted Children Enrolled and Not Enrolled in Special Opportunity Classes," *Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. XXIV (November 1931), p. 261.

to 11 who test above 130 I.Q. and "show other evidence of being mentally gifted and having other favorable traits"<sup>6</sup> are eligible for these classes.

Admission to the school is limited to those children living within a limited area of the Borough of Manhattan who meet the necessary mental and social qualifications. There is no tuition charge. An effort is made to keep the number of boys and girls as nearly equal as possible. Because of the enormous number of applicants, the staff believes that admission on the basis of objective tests is a fair method. An interesting point which Hildreth makes is that "the range [in I.Q.] . . . was around 60 points; the groups were seldom more homogeneous than in other schools except that the minimum rating was not below 130."

In telling of the children in the Hunter program, Hildreth describes them as having attractive personalities and possessing vitality and vivacity.

The parents of the Hunter group are a cross sampling of the population. Their occupations vary from day laborer to business executive. The majority of the parents have had some college, were born in New York, and would be ranked in the high-middle income bracket.

At the present time there are 22 classes for gifted elementary children. In addition to the one regular teacher for each class, there are five full-time special teachers. All of the teachers have the M.A. degree. The physical plant is, in itself, unique. All facilities for which a teacher could ask are available.

<sup>6</sup> Gertrude Hildreth, *Education of Gifted Children* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 40.

The goals of the educational program as outlined by Gertrude Hildreth are:

1. Mental health and adjustment.
2. Health and physical education.
3. Learning to become an economically efficient citizen, both as producer and as consumer.
4. Acquiring skill in social relationships.
5. Learning about one's role as an enlightened and active world citizen.
6. Education for initiative and originality.<sup>7</sup>

Oliver<sup>8</sup> reports that an entire school is set aside in Baltimore for gifted junior high school students, while Allentown, Pennsylvania, brings superior students from all over the city to one school for "opportunity classes." A division within a school is described and the Cleveland Major Work Program is mentioned briefly as an example of this type. He mentions the differentiated high school programs in most cities where the college preparatory course, which is essentially for the gifted students, is offered to some, while a commercial curriculum is offered to others.

Colfax School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, operates a partial segregation plan to "provide for better living conditions for its mentally superior children." The entire school, from the third grade on, is on the platoon plan. It is described by Pregler as a "workshop" plan:

The plan provides the maximum opportunity for group acceptance of the individual child, it encourages the pupil to work to

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43-46.

<sup>8</sup> Albert I. Oliver, "Administrative Problems in Educating the Gifted." *The Nations Schools*, Vol. 48, No. 5 (November 1951), p. 44-46.

capacity, and it makes it possible for superior children to work with and be challenged by their mental peers. Furthermore, it has enabled the school to develop special methods and materials well suited to the teaching of gifted children.<sup>9</sup>

The gifted children at Colfax School are segregated in the skill subjects and mix with their regular home room in the special subjects. Pregler points out that by use of the workshop plan, the gifted child still remains a part of the regular class. When he leaves the regular class, it is just as if a child in the typical school would go to orchestra practice. Actually, it amounts to segregation for half of the day. All of the skill subjects are taught either in the morning or afternoon, and the gifted child leaves his regular group for this period of time.

Baker<sup>10</sup> describes the program in Detroit for mentally superior children. Generally, he says, Detroit has a "mild amount of extra promotion." At the elementary school level, most schools follow the platoon plan of departmentalizing subjects. At the junior high level, the screening of gifted children is done by means of weighted formula. Five points are given for intelligence, four for school achievement, and two for chronological age. Children are then segregated according to the total points which they have. At the high school level, Baker says, the program consists of little more than

<sup>9</sup> Hedwig O. Pregler, "Adjustment Through Partial Segregation," *National Elementary Principal*, Vol. 19 (September 1952), p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> Harry J. Baker, "Characteristics of Superior Learners and the Relative Merits of Enrichment and Acceleration for Them." *Supplementary Educational Monograph*, No. 69. Edited by William S. Gray. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, October 1949, p. 157.

the customary college preparatory courses.

Interest in provisions for the gifted has been outstanding throughout California. This is perhaps due to Terman's study<sup>11</sup> of gifted California youth.

A program described by Cora Lee Danielson, former supervisor of this work<sup>12</sup> was in operation for over twenty years. Los Angeles no longer has special classes but is attempting to meet the needs of the gifted through various other means.

In considering the merits of special classes, Goddard says that this is the best method by which the school can keep "the child happily employed with work that is educative, both because it is interesting to him and because it challenges his capabilities by calling for his best efforts continually."<sup>13</sup> The Educational Policies Commission says that in its broader sense, enrichment is a policy rather than a plan, and that special classes for the gifted have little justification if they do not provide enrichment. Activities especially appropriate for the gifted involve creative expression, ample opportunity for out-of-school contacts, and a chance for each child to learn more about his fields of special interest and to express his particular talents.<sup>14</sup> Witty quotes Schwartz as saying:

<sup>11</sup> Lewis M. Terman and Melita H. Oden, *The Gifted Child Grows Up*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1947.

<sup>12</sup> From personal correspondence with Miss Cora Lee Danielson.

<sup>13</sup> Henry H. Goddard, *School Training of Gifted Children*. Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Co., 1928, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Educational Policies Commission. *Education of the Gifted*. National Education Association of the United States and the American Association of School Administrators. Washington, D.C., 1950, p. 56-58.

The real purpose of the special class seems to lie in the assignment of tasks which challenge the child's interest and capacity, the enrichment of the curriculum to include a wide variety of experiences which are not possible in a regular class, the opportunity to think and to discuss with other children of equal ability the problems of life within their grasp, the development of initiative and independence of thought, and last, but not least, the realization of responsibility to the community, looking toward the use of their powers for the benefit of mankind.<sup>16</sup>

Carroll presents a strong argument for special education of the gifted:

... each child must receive the education best suited to his abilities and needs. To force upon all an education planned for average children, regardless of individual intellectual capacity, is to grant special privilege to the central group and to deny to the bright and the dull their rights.<sup>15</sup>

A larger number and greater variety of learning experiences can be had by students in a homogeneously superior class, partly because less time is required for routine drill and remedial instruction.<sup>17</sup> The enriched curriculum keeps the child's intellectual power active in an environment affording opportunities for association with children who are mentally and physically equal.<sup>18</sup>

To the argument that the slower child is stimulated by the bright child, Goddard answered that the slower child is not stimulated but frightened.<sup>19</sup> Instead of the special class making the gifted child feel superior, Carroll believes that it is the regular class where this happens and not the special class.

<sup>15</sup> Witty, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Carroll, *Genius in the Making*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1940, p. 253.

<sup>17</sup> Educational Policies Commn., *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> W. J. Osburn and Ben J. Rohan, *Enriching the Curriculum for Gifted Children* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), p. 186.

<sup>19</sup> Goddard, *op. cit.*, p. 27-33.

He says that in an unselected group the gifted child is constantly made conscious of the fact that he is brighter than his classmates, so that different classes eliminate one of the causes of inflated self-esteem.<sup>20</sup> Edith Carlson agrees with this view. She says that the "smugness, feelings of superiority, and other undesirable characteristics are alleviated when bright children are placed in special classes."<sup>21</sup>

Pregler recognizes<sup>22</sup> that there are advantages and disadvantages of each method of providing for the gifted child, but she believes, as do most educators, that it should be determined by what is best for the child. She believes that the partial segregation plan is the best yet devised for the particular situation in which she is located.

In a doctoral dissertation at Columbia University,<sup>23</sup> Alice Keliher strongly opposes homogeneous grouping as a provision of caring for the gifted. Her major criticism is that segregation adversely affects society. Throughout her dissertation, however, she is careful to note that segregation, *as it exists today*,

is not advisable. The dissertation, written in 1931, was aimed at the idea of complete segregation which was prevalent at that time. Today, in few programs is complete segregation followed. As is true about the Major Work Program, in Cleveland, Ohio, segregation, but not isolation, appears to be the more acceptable method.

Oliver summarizes present day thinking rather well in saying that more segregation does not assure the gifted child of a better education. The ultimate need of the gifted child is an enriched program, whether it is in a homogeneous or heterogeneous classroom.

In discussing the criticisms of homogeneous grouping, Oliver says:

There is considerable reason to believe that the alleged shortcomings [of special classes] are not inherent but are a matter of creating a proper environment and of establishing a proper attitude in the gifted, in the other pupils, in the teachers, and especially in the parents.<sup>24</sup>

While no definite conclusions can be reached about the best method of providing for the gifted, it is important to recognize that the gifted child is being neglected, and is in need of special attention.

<sup>20</sup> Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>21</sup> Witty, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>22</sup> Pregler, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>23</sup> Alice Keliher, "A Critical Study of Homogeneous Grouping." New York: Columbia University Press, 1931.

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