

“. . . And One To Grow On”

THERE was a time in the history of our public schools when promotion from grade to grade was based on rigid standards of achievement. Child Study specialists helped us to see that such practices did not contribute to the welfare of some children, particularly those who were slow in developing and those whose academic abilities were below the average.

Consideration of the issues involved led many schools to adopt a policy of automatic or social promotion, so that each child was moved from grade to grade with his age-mates, regardless of his level of academic achievement. This policy resulted in wide differences in achievement within classrooms and focused attention on the need for grouping procedures and for individualized instruction.

Studies of school entrance age and of “primary school” units then gave evidence that there is no easy solution to the problems of helping children move through school in a way that will result in social and emotional well-being as well as in adequate and appropriate achievement in the various areas of the school curriculum. Studies of drop-outs show that when students with poor academic achievement reach the junior and senior high schools, where academic pro-

motion is more typical than social promotion, and where reading ability becomes more crucial than in previous grades, many low-achieving pupils leave school at their earliest opportunity.

Two procedures are currently being tried in some Kansas elementary schools in an attempt to assist children in making optimum achievement without interfering with their social adjustment. Both procedures involve an extra year of school, one at kindergarten level and the other between the third and fourth grades. Action research studies involving both procedures are here described.

Another Year of Readiness

Immature kindergarten children from several eastern Kansas classrooms who seemed to have little chance for success in learning to read were selected to complete an additional year of readiness in the kindergarten. In each case parental approval was secured and great effort was made to have the second kindergarten year different from the first. In some cases children were placed in afternoon rather than in morning classes, in others they were placed with teachers whose procedures were different so that the second year of experience would be an extension of the first rather than

merely being a repetition. In every instance special effort was made to keep these selected children from feeling any sense of failure in connection with this second year of readiness.

During the following year the selected children were treated as normal first grade children and participated in all of the routine activities of the classroom. These children were then promoted through the grades, just as were their classmates.

When a number of these children had finished third grade, a random sample of 30 was selected for study. This group consisted of nine girls and 21 boys. A comparison or control group of 30 children, 12 girls and 18 boys, was selected from the same group of schools.

Both groups were made up of immature children for whom kindergarten teachers had predicted poor success in learning to read. The experimental group spent an additional year in the kindergarten while the control group proceeded directly into the first grade. An achievement battery and a group intelligence test were given to the children in both groups.

Since the experimental group was a year older than the control group there was considerable difference between the two groups in mental age. However, the intelligence quotients of the two groups were not appreciably different.

Comparisons were made between the two groups in arithmetic reasoning, arithmetic computation, reading comprehension, reading vocabulary and in the number of primers and first readers completed in the formal reading program of the first grade. (The comparison of books completed in the first grade was thought to give some evidence of success in reading. It is recognized that a comparison of this type is at best only an indication of

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progress, since teachers pursue such different practices in regard to the amount of formal reading required of their pupils.)

Mean scores of the two groups at the end of grade three were compared statistically by means of the "t" test. Differences which favored the experimental group were found to be significant at the one percent level in reading comprehension, reading vocabulary, and books read in first grade. There was a difference significant at the five percent level in arithmetic reasoning and no difference was apparent in arithmetic computation.

Interviews with teachers brought out information which led to four generalizations:

1. An extra year of maturation for some children makes the school situation much more pleasant for them.
2. When children have an additional year of readiness they make faster prog-

ress in reading and express more enjoyment in reading than do immature children in the first grade.

3. Children in the experimental group had a more wholesome concept of their own worth and seemed to be under less pressure.

4. Teachers need more skill in identifying immaturity in the kindergarten, need help in working with the parents of immature children and need more content in the kindergarten program for children who are spending a second year in readiness work.

Educators can see the need for studying many facets of programs of this type. There are implications which will interest the curriculum person, the specialist in child development, the teacher of methods, and the administrator.

An Extra Year To Grow

The second procedure being used to permit children to progress in school at a rate in keeping with their development involves a year of work between the traditional third and fourth grades. This procedure is currently in use in some of the schools in Hutchinson, Kansas.

Certain children whose rate of development has been such that they have fallen behind their third grade classmates are selected for enrollment in a special class. Such special classes usually contain fewer than 25 children and the teachers assigned to the classes have special preparation in the teaching of reading. Instruction in reading is largely carried out on an individual basis and remedial techniques are utilized when appropriate. Instruction in arithmetic involves a review of previous work and enrichment activities which will result in thorough understanding of all of the principles of our number system that

have been studied during the first three school years.

The curriculum in the social studies and science is arranged so that there will be no duplication of the usual third and fourth grade units of work. The language arts program is fitted into the social studies and science units. Other aspects of the curriculum are appropriate to the development level of the children involved.

Special attention is given to these children in the hope that this extra year of special instruction will enable these slowly developing pupils to acquire sufficient maturity and appropriate skills to permit them to participate in the regular curriculum during the remainder of their school careers. When the pupils finish the extra year they go directly into the regular fourth grade classrooms.

Sufficient data have not been gathered to permit conclusions to be made about this program. During the next few years it should be possible to make definite statements about the value of the program. Efforts will be made to do so.

The two programs described are not examples of tightly designed research projects. They represent attempts on the part of public school personnel to provide some children with extra time for maturation to occur without forcing them to repeat work previously encountered. The programs represent attempts to permit children to receive the benefits of an additional year at the elementary school level and at the same time to minimize the detrimental effects which previously accompanied many of our policies that based school promotion solely on academic achievement.

—ROBERT RIDGWAY, *director of elementary education, University of Kansas, Lawrence; also, member, ASCD Research Commission.*



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