

*Keeping children with age-mates  
can assist development.*

Anne Christensen

## Age-Graded Elementary School

THE organization and grouping of children in an elementary school should be in keeping with what is known about children growing up in the world today. Physical and social development, best determined by chronological age, should be the primary bases for grouping children. Both are obvious criteria of status in childhood groups.

Keeping children with their own age group makes for sound emotional, mental, physical and social growth and adjustment. Children learn from one another. They extend to each other basic belongingness that promotes growth and learning. Age-graded organization is geared to the idea of regular normal living for each child in a group representing the whole range of achievement, background and ability for a given age. Such organization includes a complete cross-section of the population with each child developing at his own rate. On the other hand, when homogeneous grouping is used, children sometimes feel a stigma in being assigned to a slow group.

It is undesirable to have children develop a general sense of slowness or of brightness when the slowness or brightness actually measured represents only a narrow range of testing. Parents usually resent having their children in a slow group and teachers, as a rule, are reluctant or unwilling to accept an assignment with a slow group.

There is a marked difference between individual children in any given age group, even those grouped homogeneously. Teachers must, therefore, place more emphasis on accepting every child as unique and valuable, regardless of his intelligence quotient. Thus, individual differences are viewed not as a necessary evil, but as a source of strength and richness as they are in the community and in the nation. Schools should tend to unite the people, not separate them along class or ability lines.

A skillful, well-informed teacher does not expect to teach the same thing in the same manner to all the pupils in his room. He plans intelligently in terms of individual differences. He manages groupings that allow for individualiza-

---

Anne Christensen is Principal, Bancroft School, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.



COURTESY MILWAUKEE BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

*All the children in the school come singing as they gather around the piano.*

tion of instruction so that each child learns at his own pace and feels that he is a contributing member of the class.

### Ability Groups

Learning is best measured by the resultant behavior of children. It is sequential and meaningful and involves problem solving techniques, democratic procedures, and the acquisition of information. Knowledge, understanding and wisdom gradually become more available to the child. The teacher knows each child well when he confers regularly with parents concerning their mutual guidance. Limited class enrollment is an advantage, since adequate space is necessary to facilitate individual and group activities. Grouping within the classroom is flexible in terms of purposes, problems and needs.

Reading and arithmetic are grouped

along ability lines. As a rule children are grouped differently in each of these subjects. The index for subject grouping is the child's previous achievement record, his potential, and teacher judgment. Tests used properly, as an aid to teaching and as *one* additional basis of judgment, have great value. However, when undue emphasis is placed on the test results and when these test results become crucial to the hopes and aspirations of pupils and parents, it is only a step to a position in which testing will actually determine the curriculum.

Keliher states, "The present form of measurement concerns itself with a few of the many traits that are concerned in learning, and measures these skills out of their context of use."<sup>1</sup> Learning,

<sup>1</sup> Alice V. Keliher. *A Critical Study of Homogeneous Grouping*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1931. p. 69.

then, is the integration of experience, while testing measures are only a partial phase of learning.

### **Interest Groups**

Grouping can be exciting for everyone in the age-graded plan. Part of the day children might gather into groups on the basis of one interest or another. Perhaps a few ten-year-olds would like to prepare and tell a story on the felt-board for groups of younger children during book week, or two twelve-year-old boys might be interested in building an Atlas missile model to use in a report.

A special need of children is the basis for another grouping. Thus, five or six eleven-year-olds who are having difficulty with long division might work together with the teacher. As soon as this particular skill is understood and learned the group is dissolved. There may be unlimited variations of such groups.

### **Unit Groups**

Units in social studies, health and science afford opportunities for experiences in large and small groups. The unit approach makes an appeal to many different interests and utilizes to the maximum a great variety of abilities. Here the talented teacher provides a wealth of reading materials to ensure a wide range of difficulty, content appeal, and points of view. He supplies tools, equipment, visual aids and resources of all kinds and helps children develop research skills so they can work independently. He spends brief periods in helping groups or individuals to set up their work, encourages some to gather data, draw conclusions and apply their learnings to new situations, challenges others to do more difficult work. He

observes all the interplay in these groups to gain an understanding of each child's behavior, his feelings, his attitudes and his learnings. These are signs that show where the child is and indicates how the teacher will plan for him within the whole group.

### **Friendship Groups**

Children wish for and need friends. They have a great need to be included, respected and liked. In general, when this need is unfulfilled, learning will be impeded. The understanding teacher will group so that the chance of increasing the spread of friendship is extended. When children depend on one another for success in school, it is wise to keep them together. Seldom will it be necessary to separate them. Even adults apparently tend to work better and accomplish more when they associate with friends.

### **Classroom Groups**

The class as a whole assists in the overall planning, discusses common problems and events, sets up goals and practices social amenities preferably at the beginning of the day. The teacher, especially one who works with the same children from two to four years, really knows them and plans experiences emphasizing unity, continuity, wholeness and relatedness. Evaluation is a vital ongoing part of learning so children share in evaluating their accomplishments.

### **School-wide Groups**

Many activities and experiences provided for the entire school or mixed-age groups help develop a feeling of oneness

*(Continued on page 121)*

joy. Soon they may discover that many children or young people do not usually share their academic interests gladly. They tend then to become disillusioned with teaching, resentful of the pupils who reject their subjects as "uninteresting" and "a waste of time," appreciative only of those boys and girls who have the background and the academic maturity to cherish the subject fields which the teachers also enjoy.

But all this changes if the neophyte learns that teaching is responsiveness to students, that it is concerned primarily with the development of persons and not just the sharing of enthusiasms. It is then that the teacher sees subject matter as a resource for children's growing. He uses from the disciplines that he has loved whatever content will most adequately serve the group concerned. He selects at the same time other materials that will nourish the mind and heart of special individuals in the class. He sees clearly the reasons for caring for differences among the students in his English

class by having resources of varying quality and purpose, by including poetry of humor, adventure and nonsense as well as poetry of introspection and philosophy. He discovers through his study of the social, psychological and philosophical foundations of education and through his study of curriculum building and teaching method that teaching is more than a matter of altruism, or social service, or even helping others.

Teaching is concerned as is no other profession with growing, developing human nature in whatever form it is manifest: male or female, young or old, rich or poor, white or colored, religious or nonreligious, bright or dull, mature or immature. As Robert Bush says at the close of his study, "The fundamental domain of the individual teacher (is) the teaching-learning relationship with boys and girls."<sup>6</sup>

—PRUDENCE BOSTWICK, *Professor of Education, San Fernando Valley State College, Northridge, California.*

<sup>6</sup> Robert Bush, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

### Age-Graded

(Continued from page 78)

and encourage sound attitudes. Children love to sing. At Bancroft School singing time is a gay time. Often the piano is rolled out in the corridor and the strains of "Sing Together, Merrily Sing" are played. All the children in the school come singing as they gather around the piano. Patriotic, popular, folk and partner songs are favorites. One observes and hears five-year-olds singing a melody while perhaps the ten-year-olds produce a lovely descant. Children are unaware that they are singing three-part music as they sing rounds. Sometimes the resonator bells or autoharp furnish the accompaniment. The song, "Sing Together, Merrily Sing," echoes through

the building as the children go singing back to their classrooms. The following offer additional opportunities for school-wide grouping: assemblies, children's committees or student councils, library, safety, lunch room, audio-visual, playground, television programs and festivals.

Under the impact of public criticism, the school sometimes feels an urgent need to change. Nevertheless, educators must not be panicked into indefensible patterns of organization and procedure. The solid gains of the past must not be tossed aside, but should be revised, expanded and altered to fit new situations. As testing becomes more inclusive and research more applicable better plans for grouping undoubtedly will emerge.

Copyright © 1960 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.