

*"Imperatives" and "electives"
are related
in an experimental plan.*

Glen Heathers

The Dual Progress Plan

RESPONSIBLE educators continuously seek new ways to improve the quality of our schools. In the elementary school, many efforts in recent years have been intended to strengthen the self-contained classroom. The proponents of that plan believe it provides the essential framework for educating the "whole child"—one general elementary teacher who teaches almost all areas of the grade-level curriculum to one grade-level class, mainly in one general-purpose classroom.

"Strengthening" the self-contained classroom has meant modifying each of its basic features in the direction of specialization. Specialist consultants or specialist teachers have been employed to help, or to replace, the general elementary teacher in physical education, music, arts and crafts, remedial reading and speech, library, and foreign language. Special purpose rooms have been provided for several curricular areas. Special groups of students have been formed, most often to meet the needs of gifted students and slow learners. Special curricular offerings have been introduced to "enrich" the basic grade-level course of study.

The self-contained classroom, as employed today, is a patchwork. A good question is whether another plan could provide better for developing the young child's intellectual potentialities and his personality, and could offer a more satisfying professional role to the elementary teacher. One educator who thinks so is George D. Stoddard, Chancellor of New York University. He has challenged the self-contained classroom concept by offering the semi-departmentalized "dual progress plan." Currently, under grants from the Ford Foundation, this plan is being demonstrated and tested in grades 3-6 of the elementary schools, and in grades 7 and 8 of the junior high schools, at Long Beach and Ossining in New York. The Experimental Teaching Center at New York University is helping the school systems implement the plan, and is responsible for evaluating it.

In the dual progress plan, all teachers are full-time specialists in one of six curricular areas—language arts-social studies, mathematics, science, physical edu-

Glen Heathers is Director, Experimental Teaching Center, School of Education, New York University, New York City.

cation, arts and crafts, and music. This feature of the plan is intended to insure that every student, every year, receives instruction in each of these six curricular areas from a teacher who knows the area well, likes to teach it, and knows how to teach it to young children.

Very few general elementary teachers can meet these requirements. This fact has been recognized by many school systems that now employ elementary specialist teachers of physical education, music, arts and crafts, and remedial reading and speech. The dual progress plan assumes that special competencies are also necessary for teaching the "basic" curricular areas—language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. Obviously, elementary specialist teachers must not be narrow subject-matter specialists; they must understand young children, and know how to teach them, as well as know their special subjects.

The dual progress plan bears its name because, within it, students progress in language arts, social studies, and physical education according to the usual grade system, while they progress in science, mathematics, and the arts on a non-grade-level basis. In the plan, a student spends one half of the school day (morning or afternoon) in an ability-grouped class of his grade mates, studying language arts—social studies with a "core" specialist teacher, and physical education with a specialist in that area. During the other half day, he attends different cross-graded, ability-grouped classes in mathematics, science, arts and crafts, and music under different specialist teachers.

The theoretical justification for "dual progress" is the distinction between "cultural imperatives" (language arts and social studies), which everyone in our society is expected to master well enough to have a basis for effective social living,

and "cultural electives" (science, mathematics, and the arts) in which level of achievement is expected to depend greatly on the individual's abilities and interests. Grade-level placement, the grade-level course of study, and grade-to-grade promotion are considered appropriate for the former but not for the latter. Instead, nongraded grouping and advancement are employed to permit the gifted student in mathematics, science, or one of the arts to advance without grade-level restrictions as fast and as far as his abilities permit, while freeing the slow learner from the unnecessary requirement that he "keep up to grade level." In the plan, slow and average learners spend as much time studying the cultural electives as do gifted students; it is the rate of progress that differs.

Individualized Learning

A feature of the dual progress plan is that it provides for all students, the slow, the average, and the gifted, the sort of individualized learning programs that many school systems offer to gifted students only.

The present study allows five years (1958-63) for placing the plan in operation and measuring its effects. All this time is needed, since it takes years for a school to install a semi-departmentalized plan. Most time-consuming is the re-education of teachers whose training and experience were as general elementary teachers. Despite an intensive in-service program during the first two years of the study, the teachers still have much to learn before they become expert and confident as specialist teachers of their chosen curricular areas.

The research evaluation of the dual progress plan employs a pre-test—post-

test design, rather than one providing a simultaneous comparison of experimental (dual progress plan) and control (self-contained classroom) treatments. The design being employed is appropriate for a preliminary test of the plan. A controlled study might be undertaken later. Such a study, to provide adequate controls, would require a large number of school systems under each of the two plans—at least as many as were included in the Eight-Year Study.

What do the data obtained during the first two years of the study indicate about the strengths and weaknesses of the dual progress plan? Students' achievements, as measured by standardized tests, showed no definite gains or losses under the plan, except that the ablest students appeared to benefit from nongraded advancement in mathematics and science. Data from a personality inventory given to all students in the plan revealed no effects of the plan on the frequency of emotional and social problems that children report. An intensive observational study of children's adjustment in the plan is under way. This study should resolve some of the conflicting opinions of principals and teachers as to whether the dual progress plan has increased or decreased the frequency of children's emotional and conduct problems.

A considerable majority of students in each of grades 3-6, of all ability levels, reported that they liked the dual progress plan. They enjoyed changing classes and having different specialist teachers. Some students complained about the lack of a private desk, about carrying books from class to class, and about conflicting requirements made by different teachers.

The great majority of parents who replied to a questionnaire about the effects

of the plan on their children favored the dual progress plan. They felt their children were enjoying school more and learning more than they did before the plan was introduced. These findings should be interpreted with caution since only about one-third of the questionnaires mailed to parents were returned.

Teachers in the plan, thus far, are nearly equally divided into those who prefer to teach in the plan, and those who would prefer to teach in the self-contained classroom. A greater number of teachers favored the plan at the end of the second year of the study than at the end of the first year. A considerable majority of the teachers expressed themselves as in favor of specialist teaching, ability grouping, and nongraded grouping and advancement.

Teachers' objections to the plan centered about problems of getting to know the children well, difficulties in teaching low-ability groups, and concerns about whether emotional and conduct problems could be dealt with effectively within the plan. Also, a good many teachers, particularly during the first year of the study, found the transition from the work of general elementary teacher to that of specialist teacher very demanding of their time and energy.

The results reported here should be viewed simply as preliminary indications obtained during the first two years of a five-year study.

The Long Beach and Ossining school systems are performing a notable service to American education by participating in the test of the dual progress plan. It is proper that educators are following the study with interest and forming opinions about the dual progress plan, while reserving their final judgment of the plan until the present study has been completed.

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