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# THE DEVELOPMENTAL READING PROGRAM COMPLEMENTS A NONGRADED SCHOOL ORGANIZATION IN PRODUCING BETTER READERS

by Mary Lou Lieberth

With increasing realization that academic training is but one phase in the total development of the child, there has been a shift in the direction of greater adjustment of the curriculum to individual differences. This trend of adapting the school to the child instead of adjusting the child to the school has affected grade-progress and age-grade data during the past 30 years. This trend in grouping and promotion practices has led to experimentation with ungraded primary schools and new approaches in adapting instruction to individual differences (Otto & Estes, 1960).

"A nongraded school is a school which denies the limitations of grade structure and is organized so that the individual student may develop his academic and creative talents as rapidly or as slowly as his abilities permit (Beggs & Buffie, 1967, p.21)." Inherent in the philosophy of the nongraded school is the notion of not knowing what tomorrow's learning experiences are to be until today's progress has been assessed (Thomas, 1968).

Paul Witty defines the devel-

opmental reading program as one that

"will recognize the value of continuous, systematic instruction, utilization of interests, fulfillment of developmental needs, and the activation of reading experience with other types of worthwhile activity. The chief aim of this program will be to help pupils become skillful, self-reliant, and independent readers who will continue to enrich their understandings and satisfactions through life by reading. At all stages, reading as a thinking process will be cultivated (Krippner, 1965, p.60)."

Both the developmental reading program and the nongraded schools are similar in many ways, such as: 1) providing for differentiated individualized instruction, which emphasizes, a) the recognition of developmental needs and tasks of the learner as being important; b) the provision for levels of upward progression in a program of continuous progress; c) the production of higher academic achievement and better reading habits and attitudes in the learner; and 2) providing for

group structures, which emphasize, a) the use of small flexible groups and individualized procedures; and b) the provision of meaningful, varied group experiences for learning and social interaction. The difference between the two concepts of the developmental reading program and the nongraded school organization is in dimension. The developmental reading program is an integral part of the nongraded school organization. It is the purpose of this paper to show that the developmental reading program complements a nongraded school organization in producing better readers.

The developmental reading program complements a nongraded school organization through differentiated individual instruction which provides for better readers. All the criteria of effective school organization require highly differentiated instruction (Sartain, 1968).

Reading and the entire process of growth and development are interdependent (Smith & Dechant, 1961). According to Havighurst (1953):

"A developmental task is a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks (p.2)."

The concept of "developmental task" is important to educators, for 1) it helps in the discovery and stating of purposes of education in the school so that

education can help the individual achieve certain of his developmental tasks, and 2) it helps in timing educational efforts in order to recognize when the self is ready to achieve a certain task, when the teachable moment has come (Havighurst, 1953). Developmental tasks arise from a combination of physical, cultural and personality factors acting together. Witty, Freeland, & Grotberg (1966) state, that in a developmental reading program "any book which encourages a pupil to satisfy the developmental tasks of a given age may make a major contribution to his growth (p.72)." Symonds' (1955) formulation of basic needs based on the hierarchical goal structure of Maslow range from the basic physiological needs of: 1) objects and persons to satisfy inner physiological needs and 2) safety to the psychological needs of: 3) acceptance; 4) approval, prestige, status; 5) self-esteem, self-respect, self-satisfaction; 6) mastery, success, achievement; and 7) independence. Psychologists and teachers stress the importance of using reading to help pupils satisfy personal and social needs. Reading has come to be recognized increasingly as an aid in developing self-insight as well as a means of promoting security and adjustment (Witty, Freeland & Grotberg, 1966).

Goodlad (1954) suggests that in a nongraded school organization,

"1) teachers should understand the developmental tasks faced by children; 2) teachers should assist the children in the satisfactory accomplishment of these

tasks; 3) teachers should use a wide range of instructional materials suited to the growth and developmental needs of all children represented; and 4) teachers should use a reporting system designed to reveal individual pupil growth and development (p.326)."

Sister Francis de Sales Joyce (1967) agrees with Goodlad in that,

"A nongraded school is one in which teachers attempt to individualize instruction by arranging the educational program in such a way that the successive school experiences of each unique boy and girl will be essentially pertinent to his needs and interests at that moment in his development (p.59)."

Both the developmental reading program and the nongraded school organization provide levels of upward progression in a program of continuous progress. Jones (1948) found that children taught on their individual levels regardless of grade placement make a greater amount of growth than comparable pupils taught as a group in which only minor provisions were made for individual differences. Individualized instruction underlies plans to provide instruction nearer the child's current level of achievement (Anastasiow, 1968). The teacher is expected to provide teaching which will enable each child to make progress (Durrell, 1956); and therefore becomes a discussion leader, diagnostician of needs and a planner all at the same time (Wilt, 1967).

In the developmental reading program the teaching of reading

is regarded as a process in which the maximum development of every boy and girl is sought according to his unique nature and needs. It is a continuous progress that recognizes the significance of the sequential development of skills and attitudes. Individual needs are evaluated and provision is continuously made for their fulfillment. The developmental reading program implies an effective relationship of reading to other experiences in the individual's total life pattern (Witty, Freeland & Grotberg, 1966).

The goal of the nongraded school organization is continuous progress for each child at his own unique rate (Joyce, 1967). According to Goodlad & Anderson (1963) the nongraded school is

"designed to implement a theory of continuous progress; since the differences cannot be substantially modified, school structures must facilitate the continuous educational progress of each pupil. Some pupils, therefore will require a longer period of time than others for achieving certain learnings and attaining certain developmental levels (p. 52)."

In regard to a nongraded plan, Hillson (1967) suggested a nongraded level system in which a basal book is used on even-numbered levels and a co-basal book is used on odd-numbered levels. Representative "back-up" books drawn from various other reading series of the same level of difficulty may be included at each level. By moving through a series of small steps, each level being bolstered by a lateral move-

ment to the odd level, a child progresses upward.

Examples of the advantage of the continual progress program in the nongraded school follow: 1) the Milwaukee, Wisconsin school system in which it is possible for the gifted student to finish the primary level in less than three years without skipping any material, while at the other extreme the slow learner may take more than three years but in no case will repeat previous learnings. This plan is particularly valuable for the "slow bloomer" who makes relatively little progress during the first or second year in school, but when he finally "catches on" can move ahead more rapidly at his own best pace (Wagner, 1959); 2) the Gloucester, Massachusetts primary reading program in which the child must be physically, socially and emotionally well-adjusted, but can be reading below his grade level (Carle, 1946); 3) the Park Forest, Chicago ungraded primary school in which continuous progress is important, and failure and promotion are abandoned for a philosophy of growth and progress (Thimblin, 1954); and in 4) one public elementary school in Burlington, Vermont which demonstrates the value of continuous progress, for the gifted are not allowed to underachieve nor are the slow learners frustrated by repeated failure (Skapski, 1960).

Both the developmental reading program and the nongraded school organization produce higher academic achievement and better reading habits and attitudes in the learner. Some research

studies which support this fact include: (Skapski, 1960; Jones, Moore & VanDevender, 1967; Hillson, Jones, Moore, & VanDevender, 1964; Carle, 1946; Ingram, 1960; Hart, 1959; and many others).

The developmental reading program complements a nongraded school organization through group structures which produce better readers. They both provide small, flexible groups and individualized procedures. In grouping for teaching reading, flexibility is probably the major condition (Wilt, 1967). New and expanded skills should be taught as the need for them occurs. Variety, expediency, common needs and interests provide reasons for establishing or disbanding groups as the needs of children are being met. A flexible group is formed to satisfy a particular need and then is dissolved when the need has been satisfied. The child may advance from one group to another and may belong to more than one group at a time (Smith & Dechant, 1961). An example of flexible grouping in reading instruction may use some large groups, some pupils working in pairs and some pupils as teachers (Durrell, 1956). Children tend to make academic gains when they are aware of their own needs and abilities in small groups (Jones, 1948).

Today there is considerable controversy concerning the use of group or individual methods of reading instruction. Results of research from both seem to warrant the use of both group and individual procedures, as well as flexible grouping plans. While

the organized, systematic introduction of new skills and vocabulary can be provided in developmental power groups, there are occasions for setting up small reading groups in which neither age nor ability level are the major determiners but rather "who can profit from the experience (Sartain, 1968)." Pupils are also grouped for reading according to interests of topics. An assortment of reading material of different kinds of varied levels of difficulty is essential (Witty, Freeland, & Grotberg, 1966).

The ungraded reading program involves constant evaluation, flexibility in grouping, and teamwork among teachers. The grouping of the children and the narrowing of the ranges within the groupings will allow the teacher to maximize his teaching impact based on the principles of child growth and development from which the teacher derives his methodology. Hillson (1967) made a survey of 107 nongraded programs to ascertain the best criteria for grouping. He found desire, motivation, obstacles to learning, maturity, physical well-being, and social adjustment all related to success in reading and therefore necessarily considered in grouping. Nongrading makes independent study a prime feature. When classes are divided into small groups, teachers usually provide independent assignments for pupils to complete while groups other than their own are being taught. Independent study enables students to attain habits of self-direction. Independent activities should be balanced by directed study in

which children are introduced to different kinds of reading material and receive needed guidance (Sartain, 1968).

Both the developmental reading program and the nongraded school organization provide meaningful, varied group experiences for learning and social interaction. According to Smith & Dechant (1961) grouping in reading should: 1) foster desirable social relationships and attitudes, 2) help to provide for individual reading needs of each child, 3) promote facility and independence in reading and study, 4) help to provide each child with satisfactory reading material, and 5) reduce the need for remedial instruction. A child should be placed with a group that will serve his best interests and enable him to measure up to his maximum potentialities (Thimblin, 1954). In grouping children, McKim (1961) suggests: 1) Instruction must be paced to the developmental pattern of the individual; 2) Instruction must focus upon strengths and weaknesses of individuals; 3) Instructional time with the teacher must focus on developing many types of skills; 4) Increased independence in reading must be capitalized upon; and 5) Teacher leadership should be such that children grow in understanding their own reading skills. Without carefully planned curriculum variations, ability sectioning can be at best, ineffective, at worst, harmful.

"It may become dangerous when it leads teachers to underestimate the learning capacities of pupils at lower ability levels.

It can also be damaging when it is inflexible and does not provide channels for moving children from lower to higher ability groups and back again (Goldberg, Passow & Justman, 1966, p.168)."

Children need an environment rich in real and meaningful experiences. They need to work and live with pupils who can help bring out their innate capacities. They must be exposed to activities with pupils who have different interests. Unless children have a chance to enjoy many types of experiences, it is very difficult to know their real capacity (Crescimbeni, 1967). There exists a significant relationship between peer prestige status and reading achievement status (Porterfield & Schlichting, 1961). No child wants to be continually reminded that he cannot read.

Therefore he should be placed in a situation where varied, meaningful experiences will help to achieve successfully at his own level. We must abandon grades, competitive practices, and motivation-to-outdo for incentive if we are to except quality in our human relationships (Beauchamp, 1955). Teachers should teach the value of the learning situation.

The developmental reading program complements a nongraded school organization in producing better readers. The developmental reading program can easily function as an integral part of the nongraded school organization. In adjusting the school to the child, he can be met at his level, proceed at his own rate of speed, and experience success in the learning situation.

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