

SOME EFFECTS OF NONGRADED ORGANIZATION ON THE  
ACHIEVEMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH OF PUPILS  
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

by

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years the literature of education has reflected a renewed interest in the problems of elementary-school organization, especially that of the first three years.

In the early days, education in this country was almost entirely individualized teaching. Each class was composed of individuals of different ages and attainments, so perhaps once a day each child recited his quota of memory work. By 1870, the schools had been graded and courses of study were prescribed. By 1873, the first graded textbooks, the McGuffey Readers, were published. The assumption that a curriculum prescribed in terms of subjects to be learned would be best for all children was later tested and it was discovered that individuals learn different quantities of subject matter at different rates. By 1926, homogeneous grouping was a widespread practice, but was declining by 1934.

During the years 1935-1950, interests of educators changed from ability grouping to concerns for well-rounded development of the child. In the 1950's, there was renewed interest in grouping methods and approaches to instruction, with enthusiastic attention directed toward the nongraded elementary school. So, by 1961, American education appeared to be experiencing another attempt to modify the traditional graded structure of our elementary schools, according to Robert F. Carbone (10).

Many educators and psychologists believe that the failure to deal adequately with individual differences has led to reading



problems, to academic retardation, to failure; and even to drop-outs, juvenile delinquency, and mental illness. Increasing concern with these problems and our failure to provide adequately for individual differences have led to critical study and analysis of the many plans for individualized instruction. One result, according to Donald M. Eldred and Maurie Hillson (12), has been a growing belief "that we must create a non-graded plan." Under such a plan, varying levels of instruction are set up to provide for the wide differences in children and their rates of learning.

John I. Goodlad and Robert H. Anderson stressed the fact that no administrative change would automatically improve teaching, but they impressively contended that the removal of grades is an almost necessary condition for the fullest development of individual capacities in the elementary school (17).

Because of an increased awareness of differences in and among individuals, a nationwide concern for teaching more in less time, and interest in meeting special problems with gifted and slow-learning students, Goodlad reported that many educators see nongraded organization as compatible with these concerns. "At least 500 schools have eliminated grade-labels, most frequently at primary levels" (15).

Basically, then, nongrading is a plan to implement continuous pupil progress through a series of achievement levels usually covering the first three years of elementary school (10).

### Statement of the Problem

It was the purpose of this study to review available literature to discover (1) if there were any reported significant differences in achievement and mental health between comparable groups of pupils who have attended graded and nongraded primary schools; and (2) if there are differences in the instructional practices of teachers in graded and nongraded primary schools.

### Justification of the Problem

Several studies have reported higher achievement and mental health scores for nongraded pupils. Professional literature contains many articles that reflect a growing interest in non-grading as a form of school organization, particularly of the first three years of the elementary school. Since nearly all of these writers made the assumption that nongrading was a possible answer to these academic and psychological problems, it seemed appropriate to seek additional evidence concerning the effect of nongrading on the achievement and mental health of pupils.

### Limits of the Study

Research on this problem included a review of all available literature regarding this topic. Particular study and consideration were given to reports concerning experimental research with graded and nongraded pupils in the primary grades, and with special attention focused on several nongraded primary schools now in operation.



## Method of Procedure

The method of carrying out this investigation of the effect of the nongraded primary plan was reading and library research. All available literature, books, periodicals, and encyclopedias in the main library of Kansas State University, the Manhattan City Library, and the Bluemont Elementary School Library were investigated. Several schools presently conducting the nongraded primary school were contacted for bulletins, reports, plans, courses of study, and evaluations. Personal correspondence was conducted with a few teachers in nongraded primary schools to obtain personal reactions and evaluations.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Educators, and many lay groups, have exhibited a growing interest in nongrading as a form of school organization. Professional literature has suggested that nongrading can remove the traditional "lock-step" of year-by-year advancement, can maximize the continuous progress of pupils, and can provide a means of overcoming defects in graded structure, particularly the problems associated with nonpromotion.

## General Aspects

Writers in this area have cited a considerable body of research evidence that suggests nonpromoted youngsters do not make subsequent gains in academic achievement, and often exhibit higher incidence of social and emotional maladjustments when

compared with youngsters who are regularly promoted (11). These writers say that nongrading is a possible answer.

Except for large city systems, the graded elementary school with self-contained classrooms, mixed in ability, and for the most part homogeneous in age, has been, until fairly recently, the most prevalent pattern of elementary school organization. It came into being over 100 years ago, and along with it came the concept of grade standards (38).

Defects in the concept of grade standards soon became obvious. Fast learners could complete the work of the grade in much less than a year's time, while slow learners needed more than a year. Retarding slow learners had such deleterious effects upon their ability to learn that many school systems practiced "social" promotion (38).

Then came the philosophy that within limits the curriculum should be adjusted to children, not children to the curriculum. In many graded schools, grouping within the class on the basis of ability is practiced, especially in the primary grades and particularly for reading, where there may be three or four groups.

Groups formed on the basis of general ability stubbornly remain heterogeneous. One of the assumed benefits of ability grouping was the notion that children grouped by ability would learn with greater effectiveness. Research proved this assumption to be wobbly. On the contrary, ability grouping often led to impaired learning. When teachers assumed they could give all children within a group the same assignment, they lowered their



concern for the individual, in favor of mass instruction, so teaching and learning suffered (41).

Individual differences in children, and the need for individualized instruction are among the most serious problems that face the classroom teacher. Children vary in their rate of physical, mental, and emotional growth, and in their rate of learning. Some children spurt and grow rapidly at times. Still others develop slowly most of the time. Illness and malnutrition or social and personality problems often retard growth and learning (12).

Goodlad and Anderson demonstrated that the success of non-grading will depend, to a large extent, on how intelligently and imaginatively children are grouped for the different kinds of learning (17).

Mixed ability grouping works best when the philosophy of the entire school favors adjusting the program to the child, and when most of the pupils are able to achieve sufficient competency in reading by the end of grade three. According to Goodlad and Anderson (17),

The variability in a pupil in different subject abilities rather than uniformity is the norm, and this variability is likely to be greater within single pupils in both the top and lower groups than within the middle or average group.

Stendler said, "Consequently, teachers who proceed as though their class of gifted or retarded pupils were homogeneous are fooling themselves and cheating their pupils" (38).

In accepting a group of children and planning how to subgroup them, Dr. Fred Wilhelms stated that it is well to maintain

two attitudes: First, learn to expect a tremendous range of differences among the children; second, dedicate your grouping to the well-being of the individual (43). He advocated ability grouping especially in reading and arithmetic, for such grouping "frees the ablest to proceed as only they can, while it offers the less able precisely the help they need" (43). When forming such ability groups, content and methods must be adapted to the needs of each group. He continued, "Ability grouping is futile if the several groups then go on with basically the same content, with no differences except small changes in pace or amount covered" (43).

Some educators believe that the so-called graded system has made it difficult to provide a learning situation in which each child is intrinsically motivated to work to his full capacity and is faced with problem-solving situations at his level of accomplishment (12). Because of this feeling much thought has been directed toward an ideal plan in which each child would receive individualized instruction. If this ideal could not be achieved, at least our schools could be organized so that small groups of children are taught at a level appropriate to their ability, desire, intent, and learning skill (12).

Sarah Hammond stated: "It is important in evaluating plans for grouping that the objective sought be kept in mind" (21). Then she quoted Harold Shane as saying, "The philosophy and ability of the able teacher are undoubtedly more important than any grouping plan, however ingenious it may be, with respect to creating good environment for teaching and learning" (21).



The ungraded school plan proposes to group children on the basis of age, abilities, and other related factors, and to let them move ahead at their own speed. Such flexibility enables a youngster not only to work with his own class and teachers, but to work with another class and another teacher - in arithmetic, for example, where there may be a better match for his ability (7).

In discussing "The Effect of Promotion Policy on Academic Achievement," Kowitz and Armstrong stated that a sound administrative policy should insure that each pupil will achieve within his range of ability. The pupil should not be held to some artificial standard set for all pupils in the district (25). The effects of failure, of nonpromotion, and of negative interpersonal relationships between teacher and pupil have been a matter of concern for some time. Many attempts have been made to eliminate or reduce these unfortunate aspects, but the basic system of school organization has remained. In many instances it contributes its share to personality maladjustment, mental illness, juvenile delinquency, crime, and a host of similar problems (12).

Henry J. Otto felt that on the basis of research, non-promotion policies were at least partly outmoded, and stated that such policies might even serve to lower academic standards (29). A policy of "achieve or fail" seems to cause more changes among pupils who are being promoted than among pupils who are being retained. Retention segregated the failure group, but did little to help them achieve. Academic achievement apparently responds to school policy (25).



Another recent writer, Alexander Frazier, stated that we need to consolidate our conception of what education involves, and free ourselves from the restrictions of thinking chiefly in terms of rate, quantity, and small groups of children who are "the different." He stated, "The enlightened educator no longer thinks of learning primarily in terms of rate." Three liberating ideas are necessary to revitalize our vocabulary:

First, Learning is multidimensional.

Second, Learning is limitless.

Third, Learning is personal.

We have a program composed of pre-selected information and skills arranged sequentially in graded steps through which the learner is to be guided. All learners are expected to learn in the same way and to learn the same amount, with the chief difference being in the amount of time. He asked, "Why, then, have practices relinquished over the years returned to haunt us?" In the ungraded primary, levels are set up to correspond to sequentially arranged materials, usually textbooks in a reading series, through which abler learners move more rapidly and the less able more slowly (13).

It has been reported that experts agree: Homogeneous grouping has no special value for American schools. Teachers should feel free to create special groups within a class for short periods of time; and the essence of good teaching is to help pupils to help themselves (41).

Frazier said,

Ironically, the ungraded school thus defined becomes a school of many levels, with a criterion of progress which combines quantity and rate to carry the old conception of the curriculum to a new point of impoverishment.

He felt that the boundaries of the narrowed program close in even more tightly on all learners. He said that one of the most promising recent developments has seemed to be the idea of playing down the graded concept in grouping elementary-school children by establishing the ungraded primary. He continued,

Some ungraded primary programs in operation have a proliferation of levels defined by closely graded teaching materials. Can we succeed in rescuing the idea of ungraded schooling from some of its advocates?  
(13)

John Goodlad informed us that nongraded schools are, in part, an attempt to provide organizationally for individual differences. Perhaps teachers in nongraded schools "grade" their classroom activities, and so end up with the same old rigidity under new labels. He commented, "A new pattern may be ingenious, but new patterns of themselves do not guarantee the improvement of instructional practices" (14).

To quote Alexander Frazier again, "The human crisis is always a crisis of understanding: what we genuinely understand we can do." He said that we need a new understanding that will enable us to develop a much better program for everybody, and to eradicate outmoded conceptions of learning, teaching, and curriculum development. We need to discriminate between concepts that are outmoded and concepts that are forward-looking (13).



## Reports of Specific Investigations

Programs of instruction that have abolished the graded organization and that go far toward the ideal of individualized instruction have increased at a phenomenal rate during the past few years, according to Donald Eldred and Maurie Hillson (12). The terms nongraded or ungraded school, or levels program are used in connection with these plans.

In 1959, The Nongraded Elementary School, a book describing these programs, was published by John I. Goodlad and Robert H. Anderson. This book has become a landmark in this area of the reorganization of the elementary school, and has been followed by many articles describing the nongraded school and its advantages.

Goodlad and Anderson have presented the most comprehensive discussion of nongrading to date. The authors pointed out the incompatibility between Procrustean standards of Greek mythology and present insights into child development. They analyze the questionable effectiveness of nonpromotion in reducing the discrepancy between grade standards and the realities of pupil attainment in conventional elementary schools. How the lock-step of graded structure developed is described, and the emergence of a new vision of effective school structure is analyzed.

Schools operated without grades are described, with emphasis upon curriculum considerations. Certain modern theories of curriculum development and their relationship to nongraded structure, with emphasis on the individual classroom, are examined and



discussed. Home-school reporting is presented, and followed by a discussion of the relationship between realistic school standards and sound mental health. Suggestions are offered for initiating and administering nongraded plans. A detailed summary presents evidence that substantiates the worth of the nongraded school, ending with a word of encouragement and advice to those considering the nongraded plan.

When children enter first grade, parents and teachers view the development of reading skill as a phenomenon that will occur soon after the children cross the school's magic threshold. These expectations and many later ones frequently turn to disillusionment and disappointment. Failure by many children to meet certain expectations of certain grade levels may mean frustration for their teachers, disappointment for their parents, and a loss of self-respect for the children themselves. Our graded structure and parent-teacher-pupil expectations are long established and represent a certain antique respectability. "Our central problem then, emerges out of the conflict between long-established graded structure on one hand and increasing awareness of variation in children's abilities and attainments on the other" (17).

Through the presentation of various statistics the authors supported these major generalizations:

1. Children entering the first grade differ in mental age by approximately four full years.
2. The achievement range begins to approximate the range in intellectual readiness to learn soon after first-grade

children are exposed to reasonably normal school instruction.

3. Individual children's achievement patterns differ markedly from learning area to learning area (17).

Two other major generalizations are suggested by supporting data: First, the initial spread among pupils in intellectual readiness to learn (as determined by the M.A. factor) grows still greater as children advance through their second year of school. Second, the spread in achievement in the various subject areas also grows greater, closely approximating the spread in mental age (17).

Here are some observations of the preceding authors, based on given data: Chronological age tells little about other variables in a given class group and is a worthless base for the application of grade standards. I.Q. is likewise a poor basis for estimating achievement. An overall achievement score is more accurate than I.Q. or M.A. as a basis for securing scholastic homogeneity. The learning of certain fundamental academic skills is regarded by many as a central function of elementary education.

The same authors promoted the case for the ungraded elementary school on academic grounds, believing that the abolition of grade barriers frees each child, whatever his ability, to move forward in his learnings as rapidly and as smoothly as possible; also, that such structure is in harmony with his social and emotional well-being (17).

Even youngsters of unusually high ability often do less than mediocre school work, perhaps because of sensitivity to environmental pressures to learn. Investigation revealed that whether



or not a child is regularly promoted depends more upon where he goes to school than upon his ability, present achievement, or how hard he works. The four major categories of arguments favoring promotion or nonpromotion are: pupil achievement, pupil attitudes toward school and schooling, pupil social-personal adjustments, and the teacher's view of the school's function. Research evidence comparing nonpromoted pupils with promoted pupils in these first three areas is overwhelmingly in favor of promotion. Promoted slow-learning children achieve at higher levels, are involved less often in aggressive acts toward school and schooling, get along better with their peers, and appear to have more wholesome feelings of personal worth. Upper-grade achievement levels are higher in schools that have low nonpromotion rates (17).

Our schools were not always graded. The dame schools of the seventeenth century, and the district schools of the eighteenth century were without grade classification. These institutions must have been dreary and boring, yet the instruction was highly individualized. When the Quincy Grammar School opened in 1848, its organization set the basic pattern which has scarcely changed. Certain accomplishments were deemed appropriate for specific levels; the emphasis was on subject matter and skills, and grade "norms" were, in fact, introduced. Then came the monitorial system with its ordering and regimentation (26).

Soon after the graded structure appeared, some educators questioned its rigidity, and called for flexible school



organization to support unique abilities and meet personal and social needs.

Many plans, such as the Winnetka and Dalton Plans, used an individual approach to modify the ill effects of grades and to help pupils of varying abilities move ahead unhampered by uniform grade expectations. Four sweeping movements of widespread influence have invaded the twentieth-century philosophy and psychology. First was Dewey's method of systematic inquiry and reflection, with concern for children's health, personality, and social adjustment. Second, attention given to human development as a result of intensive study of children, revealed that children differ not only physically, emotionally, and socially, but also intellectually. Third, child-development research was paralleled by research into the effects of many school practices, such as promotion and retention. Fourth, if instruction is the purpose, content should be reorganized for the development of inductive and deductive thinking, not by pre-packaged bodies of content to be digested by the student (17).

With the preceding and even much more background in their book, Goodlad and Anderson stated that the nongraded school is a system of organization designed to implement a theory of continuous pupil progress. A typical nongraded school is one which is operated in connection with a kindergarten program. Admission is on the same basis as for graded schools. Transfer students require more careful examination of the child's preparation and grouping possibilities. Progress in reading is one of the major factors in making decisions about grouping. Grouping according

to reading achievement reduces the range of abilities for language-arts instruction.

Many schools assign children to class groups on a relatively random or chance basis, within age classifications comparable with those of graded schools. Others group children on the basis of more carefully delimited age classifications within a group, as those over six years six months in one class, and those under in another class. Another approach is to group on a rough social-unity basis those children whose interests, personalities, and backgrounds are well-balanced with respect to each other.

As a general rule, class grouping based primarily upon reading achievement suffers from two limitations: (a) it reflects a continuing tendency toward "grade-mindedness" in teachers and administrators at the less dangerous level of reading progress alone; and (b) it tempts parents to think in terms of "fast-average-slow," and to resent having their children in the slower groups. However, it is less difficult for teachers to work with such groups, for there are fewer sub-groups to deal with in the reading program.

Another practice is the teacher-cycling plan, keeping the teacher with the same group for more than one year. Still another is the "multigraded," "multi-age" class groups of Torrance, California. Early reports indicated the children achieved more academically, made better personal and social adjustments and other gains, and that parents and teachers strongly supported the plan.



There is no established pattern in the grouping of children in nongraded schools. Once grade-mindedness has been shattered and teachers begin to deal with children within a more flexible frame of reference, many possible solutions to age-old problems may come to mind.

Goodlad and Anderson (17) reported on the Milwaukee plan, the oldest, largest, and best known nongraded organization. The Primary School starts in the first semester above kindergarten, where the child is labeled P1. Each teacher's classroom is labeled "Primary School - Miss Brown." Second semester is P2; third semester P3, and so on until the child is ready for fourth grade, which is generally after the sixth, or P6 semester. Very bright and mature children may be ready to enter fourth grade after P5, or fifth semester. Slower learners have their program stretched out so that they may go through a P7, seventh semester, or P8, eighth semester classification before entering fourth grade. The question of social and learning groups is studied by the principal and teaching staff in planning conferences at the close of each semester in order to make desirable changes in group assignments. An attempt is made to organize groups so that a child is not more than one year older or one year younger than his classmates. A special record on reading progress and social development is kept for each child. Notations regarding the date of completion of each level of reading and his progress in other areas are entered. Whenever a child's progress is considered equal to his capability, his work is indicated as satisfactory.



Conferences with parents are arranged as necessary for orientation and discussion.

When a pupil is transferred, the child's classification and grade placement are given, and a record of progress and data accompanies the child.

Celia Stendler reported that Milwaukee inaugurated a primary unit in 1942, "but it was not until post-Sputnik that the plan achieved much acceptance by educators" (38). She explained the unit as an attempt to facilitate through organization, a plan for continuous growth during the child's beginning school years. It was designed to eliminate retardation in the primary grades by organizing the first three years of elementary school according to reading levels. Each of these years is given a name: beginning primary; intermediate primary; and advanced primary. Certain reading levels are assigned to each classroom in each year of the primary. When a pupil leaves kindergarten, he is given a reading readiness test and a group intelligence test. On the basis of his scores, plus the teacher's recommendation, he is assigned to one of the levels of the beginning primary. A superior pupil may be assigned to a classroom covering four levels of reading (readiness, pre-primer, primer, first reader). An average pupil might be assigned to either of the next two lower levels while the slow learner goes to the lowest level where progress in reading probably will not go beyond the pre-primer stage. Within each classroom, the teacher groups for instruction according to the levels assigned to him. At the close of the year, all pupils

progress to another classroom, most as a group. A few justify placement in a higher group (38).

Efforts to evaluate the ungraded primary school have been plagued with the same weakness affecting other areas of educational research - namely, that research has been limited to answering one question at a time, rather than to examining the impact of the plan upon all aspects of child development. (38)

Goodlad and Anderson reported the following advantages of the nongraded plan: (1) the greater sensitivity of teachers to the needs and interests of children as they work with them over longer periods of time; (2) happier and more interested children because the fear of annual or semi-annual nonpromotion is eliminated; (3) the competition of children with their own records rather than with each other; and (4) more interested parents (17).

A question often asked is whether or not teachers like it. Celia Stendler stated that they do, especially because teachers dislike retarding pupils. She feels there is less damage to the self-concept of the slow learner, since the parents, pupils, and teachers have three years rather than one to accept the fact that the pupil will take four years to do the work normally accomplished in three years. However, it appears that more information is needed with respect to effects of the plan upon self-concept and motivational systems, since some parents and children do not gracefully accept placement in a slow-moving section (38).

Marion Nesbitt, in her book, A Public School of Tomorrow, gave a most picturesque and delightful description of the Matthew F. Maury School of Richmond, Virginia. Included in the



philosophy of the school is the belief: that the child, even though immature is truly a person and is to be treated accordingly; that real and effective learning is inseparable from living; that the child learns what he really lives and then, using this learning, rises to the next higher level of living; and that the school must be a place for living of the finest quality that pupils, teachers, parents, and community can contrive. Their main goal is to develop individuals for the highest type of personal and social living possible, and to provide a satisfying way to help them solve their problems. The quality of the life of the school is dependent upon cooperative planning for solution of these problems and with respect for each individual concerned. When this book about Maury School was written, it consisted of kindergarten through fourth, with emphasis on a cooperative process of planning and living together. She said of the boys and girls, "We cannot chart their course, but we shall hope to equip them with wings for their flight" (28). Professor William Heard Kirkpatrick of Columbia University stated that probably the most crucial explanation of the success of the Maury School has been the penetrating educational insight which has guided those in control (28).

Omar C. Mitchell, Principal of Twin Lakes Elementary School, Tampa, Florida, has experimented with grouping by classes as well as within each class. He reported that it is not too difficult to select students with pronounced problems or the class of fast learners, but the in-between groups are hardest to select.



Intelligence quotient and achievement test scores are considered, but opinions of students' former teachers are the greatest factors of determination. He feels it is equally important to select the right teachers for "poorly selected teachers in a grouping program will wreck the system before it is started." He found grouping to be a powerful device that makes for easier teaching and for better learning (27).

Richard C. Anderson described a new plan of elementary-school organization in East Brunswick, New Jersey. One phase is referred to as the Achievement Grouping and Teacher Specialization Plan, while the other major feature of the plan is nongraded, homogeneous grouping (1). He said that disenchantment with the conventional elementary school organization is growing. He stated that "when homogeneous grouping is accompanied by differentiation of materials and methods, research suggests that superior achievement is likely to result." He gave a report of a research study by Sister M. Bernardo Bockrath, comparing the reading achievement of fourth graders in St. Louis archdiocesan schools who had been in nongraded primary classes, with the reading achievement of fourth graders who had been in conventional graded primary classes. He stated that she found a highly significant advantage favoring the nongraded group. There were more overachievers and fewer underachievers in the nongraded group. He said that the results must be discounted since the graded group attended primary school between 1950 and 1953, while the nongraded group attended primary school between 1953 and 1956 (1).

In their "1958 Progress Report," Goodlad and Anderson (18) stated that although nongraded elementary schools have been the focus of tremendous interest in recent years, information about them has been scattered and incomplete. The survey listed the following items as most frequently contributing to the successful development of nongraded programs in 34 communities:

1. Strong interest and desire on the part of the teachers.
2. Careful study by the staff of other plans in existence, plus local research.
3. Effectiveness of PTA and other publication channels.
4. Staff concern about pupil retentions and related pupil-adjustment problems.
5. Parent conferences and meetings.
6. Special interest shown by teachers, supervisors, school administrators.
7. Continuous emphasis on parent education.

Eldon E. Gran, who coordinates instruction, K-12, in the Douglas School System, South Dakota, at the Ellsworth Air Force Base, said that a completely ungraded elementary school is the type of elementary organization which can facilitate meeting children's instructional needs. This plan extends through Level 1 (preprimer) to Level 19, with the intermediate beginning with Level 8. This type of organization is called the Levels Program, with the philosophy that each pupil may advance from one level to another as rapidly as mastery permits, or as slowly as needs dictate.



Each fall, teachers give informal teacher-made inventories and use standardized test results to determine how far each pupil has progressed with mastery; then the building principal, the curriculum coordinator, and the teachers meet to decide how best to regroup pupils. Regrouping is done entirely on the basis of achievement, and each pupil advances to another step only when he has mastered the preceding ones. A bright pupil who may be behind because of previous illness or poor educational experiences, or too frequent changes of schools, is placed at his achievement level, but may advance as fast as he is able. A slow learner, or one who has trouble with one subject, may take the necessary time required for mastery.

Individual file cards indicate each subject level completed with mastery. This makes pupil placement easy the following fall. New pupils are tested, observed, and interviewed to determine their actual achievement levels (19).

A distinct advantage of this system is that there are several levels - or goals - for the pupils, rather than the usual one for each year. This brings each goal within closer range. This plan also eliminates the repetition created by failure of a grade, since each pupil is given credit for what he has actually attained, and continues his educational experiences from that point. A gifted pupil advances vertically at his natural speed with enrichment materials. The slow learner shows genuine and enthusiastic progress, for the fear of further failure is removed and his self-respect and self-confidence are restored (19).

Saint Xavier College in Chicago introduced the nongraded plan at Christ the King School in 1956 as a means of providing for the individual learner (35). Under the plan, subject matter was still graded according to difficulty, but the child could progress as rapidly as his ability allows. The fast learner might complete the three-year primary in two years. The slower learner might, if necessary, take four years.

Five summer workshops were held to develop patterns in curriculum and organization, with an emerging plan for the non-graded organization at Christ the King School. Teachers from these workshops were appointed on the faculty. New teachers were prepared in an in-service program; handbooks for reference were provided; and each new teacher worked under the guidance of a senior teacher, who was a member of the workshop group.

Team teaching was introduced a few years after the introduction of the nongraded plan. Each team was made up of four members: a teacher-leader, an associate teacher, an intern teacher, and a teacher aide. The competence of the teacher-leader safeguards the education of the children, while the team relieves the principal and the consultant of unduly heavy responsibilities in supervision. Before the plan was introduced, parents were invited to a meeting at which the new plan was explained. Parent-teacher conferences were held three times a year to discuss written reports of the academic and the social growth of each pupil. Areas of the new curriculum were explained to parents in group meetings, then demonstrations and



discussions were given in smaller groups in classrooms. Bulletins with explanations and suggestions for family activities to reinforce learning were sent to parents. When a child transfers, detailed records indicating grade placement accompanied the pupil.

The planning of the program rests on the administrators, supported by the practical assistance of the teachers and the theoretical guidance of professional educators; but the success of the administrator depends on communication with, and consideration for, the faculty and the parents of the children.

Results of this study indicated that many slow learners who are allowed to progress at their own rate, particularly during the early years of school, accelerate during subsequent years, regaining time lost in the early stages. This pattern was evident in the experimental group. At the end of the second year the children who made up the lowest quartile in standardized reading-test scores were one month above the national norm for that test. Two years later the same group was six months above the norm (35).

The Public Schools of Appleton, Wisconsin, are making practice keep pace with knowledge of children by changing school organization to fit individual needs. Lois Smith described how individual differences are reported in their continuous progress plan. Children learn best in situations where they can experience success. She stated,

Among the basic needs of children is the need for a feeling of achievement and personal worth. When this fundamental need is satisfied, in an atmosphere devoid of the inhibiting fear of failure, learning is enhanced. (36)

There are certain common developmental tasks which children cannot accomplish successfully until a sufficient maturity has been reached. To expect accomplishment in these tasks is unrealistic and often harmful to the child. She stated that in spite of our knowledge of the interrelation of physical, mental, and emotional aspects of growth, children have been grouped in grades largely on the basis of academic achievement, thus overemphasizing one aspect of growth while minimizing the importance of others. By so doing we have impeded the intellectual development for which we were striving.

The Appleton Elementary Schools are organized in large blocks of time - kindergarten, primary, and intermediate. As a beginning, children are grouped in rooms according to chronological age. A child is moved to a younger or older age group when in the combined judgment of school and home, the child will have a better living-learning situation. Within a classroom, individual differences are not only recognized but are accepted, respected, and provided for. In order to insure that progress is continuous, with neither repetition nor omission, each child has in his cumulative folder a "skill card," with progress indicated in reading, spelling, and arithmetic. Children are grouped according to proficiency in the skill subjects, while in science and social studies the problem approach is used. Multiple texts



of varying degrees of difficulty are provided. Evaluating techniques are standardized tests, daily performance, cumulative records of progress indicating a general pattern of growth, and teacher judgment. Results of achievement tests are considered in relation to ability as measured by intelligence tests plus teacher judgment. A comprehensive progress report through conferences and written descriptive reports is given to the parents.

From their experience with the continuous progress plan, Lois Smith feels it is safe to conclude that, "when we use research and study to discover how children grow and learn and then try to fit our school program to what we know, we come closer to our goal of having all children living and learning up to the limits of their potentialities" (36).

Richard C. Anderson compared ten fourth-grade classes with three nongraded groups at the beginning of their fourth school year in Appleton, Wisconsin. The results showed the median composite achievement test score for the graded group to be 4.57; for the nongraded group, 4.83. He said it is not unreasonable to expect that nongraded, homogeneous grouping would have a desirable effect on the social and emotional adjustment of some children. The slow child would seem to have a better chance to develop a sense of personal adequacy, while the fast child should seldom feel rejected by his immediate classmates because he is a "brain" (1).

After Robert F. Carbone considered suggestions and data offered by many authors advocating the nongraded plan, he decided

to seek more evidence on the effect of the nongraded structure on achievement and mental health (10). He established three hypotheses for investigation: (1) There are no significant differences in the achievement of comparable groups of pupils who have attended graded and nongraded primary schools; (2) There are no significant differences in the mental health of comparable groups of pupils who have attended graded and nongraded primary schools; and (3) There are no identifiable differences in the instructional practices of teachers in graded and nongraded primary schools.

From the lists of nongraded schools by Goodlad and Anderson (17), he categorized and selected two school systems in which the fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade pupils had attended the nongraded primary. Two graded school systems similar in population, socio-economic structure, and geographic location were chosen for comparison. All comparisons of achievement and mental health were based on a total sample of 122 pupils from each of the two categories. Intelligence was held constant in all comparisons.

In all areas of achievement, and in total achievement, graded pupils scored significantly higher than nongraded. It was possible to reject the hypothesis of no significant differences on the basis of these findings. The results of the comparisons made of the five selected mental-health factors indicated that in four out of five there was no significant difference in the adjustment of these graded and nongraded pupils. The four factors were: freedom from emotional instability, freedom from feelings of inadequacy, freedom from nervous manifestations, and



personal relationships. In the fifth factor, social participation, the graded pupils scored significantly higher. Thus, the hypothesis of no significant differences was accepted for the first four factors and was rejected for social participation.

On the Semantic Differential test, pupils were given word pairs to describe their teachers. Nongraded pupils tended to describe their primary-school teachers as bright, smooth, sweet, relaxed, quiet, big, interesting, soft, and good. Graded pupils described their primary teachers as little, loud, boring, hard, dull, rough, sour, stiff, and bad.

Questionnaires to determine whether teachers in nongraded schools were using instructional practices that differed from those used by graded-school teachers pointed toward areas of similarity. Because there were differences as well as similarities, the hypothesis of no differences was accepted only tentatively. Carbone stated the following implication of these findings.

First, it is not realistic to expect improved academic achievement and personal adjustment in pupils merely on the basis of a change in organization structure.

Second, the attainment of high pupil achievement and good mental health is not a unique result of non-grading.

Third, changes in organizational structure alone are not enough, but must be accompanied by appropriate adaptations in the instructional practices of the teachers. (11)

Anderson and Goodlad (3), in their "Self-Appraisal in Non-graded Schools," reported on a 1960 survey of 89 communities in

which there were reported to be about 550 nongraded schools. They did not give it as a quantitative report, but as a commentary on the respondent's subjective assessments of the present strengths and weaknesses of the nongraded school.

As a check on the significance of differences in achievement, respondents were asked: Are you confident that the control group was actually different from the nongraded group with respect to the ways that the teachers used in dealing with children? Responses indicated that the overwhelming majority of schools depend on typical standardized tests to measure pupil learning. A few used tests accompanying reading series; a few used such devices as reading progress cards, records of books read, logs for individual children, and samples of work, to estimate the rate and the adequacy of growth. Some indicated that nongraded classes led to more testing and more diagnosis of test results. Whenever control groups had been used, they were usually in other graded schools in the same district. Some districts compared the rate and nature of achievement gains with those made in previous years by graded classes, and used data from control groups of neighboring districts. The majority made no comparison with control groups.

Some commented that there were fewer discipline problems, and that by removing the fear of failure there was definite improvement of the mental health of the pupils. One community reported 25 per cent higher achievement in the nongraded schools. There was no pressure to achieve beyond the child's ability, no



repeating of materials, but improvement in the way the children were dealt with, and an increase of teaching materials. Another school reported that the enthusiasm for the newly developed philosophy and knowledge of new skills and techniques spread from the teachers of the experimental group to teachers of the control group. This, in turn, subconsciously resorted to the use of the same teaching methods.

Few schools had objective data on the social, emotional, and personal adjustment of children in nongraded classes. Available data definitely favored the nongraded groups. Impressions reported on pupil adjustment were overwhelmingly positive. Several respondents reported that in graded as well as in nongraded classes, pupil adjustment is related to the caliber of the teachers. Quite a number reported that slow children profited emotionally by the removal of the stigma of nonpromotion. Several commented on the academic advantages to brighter children as well as to slower children. In the nongraded classes, the brighter children were "no longer bored because of a lack of challenging work." Many reported a reduction in disciplinary problems, less vandalism, and fewer absences and truancy. Several referred to the more responsible and more mature behavior of pupils in nongraded classes.

Two per cent required the extra year to complete the levels of the nongraded school, which was considerably less than those retained by the graded system. Some children who appeared to need an extra year when they were six, proceeded much faster at

seven. This kind of flexibility is nearly impossible in a graded system. In some neighborhoods scarcely any require four years; in others, 15 to 20 per cent. In low socio-economic neighborhoods about 20 per cent took a fourth year. In another report more pupils took an extra year, but there were practically no failures or retentions in intermediate grades. Parents' attitude toward an extra year was better in the nongraded school than in the graded school (3).

Goodlad and Anderson reported on a survey conducted to determine first, what research and self-evaluation activities were underway in the schools; and second, information on reasons for introducing a nongraded plan, on changes effected in any part of the school program as part of the process of bringing the nongraded plan into existence, on changes in program that followed introduction of the nongraded plan, on current modifications in school practices related to nongrading, and on long-term plans for the future. A separate questionnaire sought to inquire more deeply into practices of reporting to parents. The report is largely one of the impressions and perceptions of supervisory and administrative school personnel indicating possible trends (16).

Forty-five per cent of the respondents revealed the reasons for beginning a nongraded plan was for improved attention to the individual and to individual differences. About 35 per cent could be interpreted as reactions against the lock-step of grading or for greater flexibility in pupil placement and grouping. About 12 per cent implied the possibility of effecting curriculum change through reorganization of the school.



About half of the replies indicated that an attempt was made to organize the skill areas of the curriculum into levels. Half of these efforts were in the field of reading and often in the primary grades. Responses indicated that the main effort had been directed to stating specifically what was to be learned at each step in the existing progression, that the levels become a means for differentiating the rate of progress of a child. The levels often used were for interclass grouping, and as a basis for homogeneous grouping in reading within a single class.

About 20 per cent reported that textbooks had been redistributed to fit more nearly the needs of small groups of pupils. Only 4 per cent reported an increase in supplementary books, materials, and resources.

In regard to grouping, the following was reported: the use of reading levels as a basis for homogeneous grouping, the creation of a nongraded "open room" for orienting all new pupils before placement in a class group, the use of a wider range of criteria for considering pupil placement, and the acceleration or deceleration of pupils at the upper and lower ends of the achievement continuum.

Under "evaluation and reporting to parents," respondents told of increased emphasis on the preparation of cumulative records, re-study of test instruments, use of faculty study conferences, child development, renewed interest in communicating with parents, more frequent evaluation of entire class groups, modification of report cards, and conferences among teachers on pupil

placement. Nearly 50 per cent replied that parent-teacher conferences had been substituted for or added to the usual "report card." An additional 25 per cent indicated a modification of the existing report card. The balance reported either no change or minor modification in terminology.

Responses on plans for the future often referred to the need for improved understanding among teachers and parents of rationale for the program, orienting new teachers to the plan, using supplementary materials for children at the upper and the lower ends of the ability continuum, for refining reporting practices, and developing evaluation techniques to appraise a wider range of goals.

As a consequence of their studies and observations, Goodlad and Anderson posed the hypothesis

that a substantial proportion of the elementary schools that claim to be nongraded have given little or no attention to the vertical aspects of school organizations. Changes effected to date tend to be modifications more of the horizontal than of vertical structures. Many so-called nongraded schools are nongraded in name only. Levels, if used at all, should be part of the diagnostic proficiency of the teacher and should not be used as arbitrary hurdles comparable to the grade hurdles, which the levels presumably replace. Nongrading forces attention to arbitrariness in the placement of content, to the need for a wide range of instructional materials, and to limitations in testing programs. (16)

A study in Milwaukee by Richard C. Anderson compared 99 pupils in four nongraded schools with 123 pupils in four graded schools. Test data on reading and personality adjustment slightly favored the nongraded group, even though this group was slightly younger and scored slightly lower in mental maturity (1).



The latest published article by Goodlad enumerated facts and values that guide in devising school structure; indicated why the conventional graded structure is inadequate in supporting these values and in accounting for present-day knowledge and insights (15).

He listed his criteria for judging the adequacy of school structure:

First, does the structure encourage continuous progress for each child? Second, what alternatives exist for placing children who do not appear to be profiting as they should in their present educational environment? Third, does the structure encourage a reasonable balance of success and failure?

Twentieth-century education at all levels must take into account at least two major kinds of realities: First, knowledge is expanding at an explosive rate; Second, human beings are profoundly different from one another. There are biochemical differences, physiological differences, and academic differences in each individual.

He said there are two major proposals now before us on the educational scene to support the above values and realities. The first proposes a longitudinal curriculum organized around basic concepts, principles, and methods of inquiry in the various fields of knowledge. The second proposes elimination of the stratified, lock-step grade system and the substitution of a non-graded plan.

When the graded school was established, children apparently were regarded as fundamentally alike, major differences lying in areas of determination, application, hard work, and so on. Once

the graded structure was established, it became necessary to fit the child to the structure. In the nongraded school, grade demarcations are swept away, with an attempt to eliminate grade-mindedness in the thinking of the teachers. Nongrading seeks to recognize and deliberately plan for the range of pupil realities actually present in a given class, accepting the fact that there are children working at levels below grade designation, varying widely from subject to subject. Activities must be provided for those at the top end of the scale. It is essential that there be a thoroughgoing redistribution of materials, with materials selected for a range of accomplishments. A child does not skip, neither does he fail. Most children are a year or two "ahead" in some field or other; many are a year or two "behind" in something. The nongraded plan forces recognition of these realities. It is an organizational scheme, but above all, Goodlad said it is an expression of philosophy of education. He continued:

Within the nongraded scheme one may readily visualize a longitudinal type of curriculum organized around basic concepts, skills and methods of inquiry. One identifies children where they are on these continua, making no effort to classify them according to an arbitrary, unrealistic grade standard. Children progress continuously along these continua with an appropriate balance of realistic success and failure. There is differentiated instruction for learners who obviously differ in ability to learn. (15)

Mr. B. Frank Brown, principal of the Melbourne, Florida High School near Cape Canaveral, had this to say, "In the space age, students who can speed ahead should speed ahead. One way of making this possible is to extend the non-graded plan, which is gaining favor at the primary level, into high school." He



feels that the intelligence quotient, which has been a primary measure for so long, is of little or no value in the nongraded school, and that the first step in recovering from decades of intellectual disaster is to reclassify youngsters for learning on the basis of their achievement. This can be done by clustering students intellectually on the basis of their performance on nationally standardized achievement tests. He predicted that,

Trends today suggest that the school of the future will be composed of the non-graded primary curriculum, the non-graded intermediate curriculum, the non-graded junior high curriculum, the non-graded senior high curriculum, and the non-graded college curriculum. (9)

#### Direct Reports of Selected Schools

Kansas City, Missouri. Louise Zimmer described the work of her committee for studying primary unit plans of organization, in preparation for the establishment of nongraded primary schools in Kansas City, Missouri. The committee, formed November 19, 1959, sent 43 individual requests for pertinent information and materials from school systems using some form of a primary unit plan. The 33 respondents indicated a common philosophy, i.e., all growth patterns in children vary greatly. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the school to help each child develop in a continuous manner at his own optimum rate. The most common names for some form of a primary unit plan are: Ungraded Primary, Continuous Primary, Continuous Growth Program, Teacher Cycling, Unit Plan, Primary Unit, Primary Cycle, and Nongraded Primary.

The primary unit is an administrative tool with its main concern to organize flexible groups that will help promote a philosophy of continuous growth. In place of traditional grade levels, the child progresses continuously at his own rate through reading levels. The plan does not alter effective teaching techniques (23).

Florence C. Kelly presented the plan of the ungraded primary program used in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to the Instructional Council during 1958-1959. The committee studied the various nongraded programs during 1959-1960, and recommended its adoption on an experimental basis in four elementary schools. Gladstone, Hartman, North Rock Creek, and Wheatley Schools were chosen as pilot schools. Control schools were established, and a research design for the experiment was developed by Dr. Clyde Baer. The year 1960-1961 was one of orientation both for the faculties and the parents of the pilot schools through bulletins, large-group meetings, and conferences. Committees met regularly and produced predictive evaluation sheets for each kindergarten child, check sheets for each level, and recommended the use of the Harrison-Stroud Reading Readiness Test with kindergarten children in both the pilot and the control groups. The committee recommended forming flexible performance groupings of children who would progress through a reading curriculum of ten levels of work (23).

The organization of the nongraded primary was implemented with the children classified as first graders in 1961-1962 in these buildings:



<u>School</u>	<u>Number students</u>	<u>Number teachers</u>
Gladstone	59	2
Hartman	82	3
North Rock Creek	217	6
Wheatley	154	5

On March 1, 1962, an informal appraisal of the reading status of the pilot and control schools was attempted by recording the title of the book each child was reading, and translating this information into reading levels. At that time there was no evidence that children in either the control or pilot schools were reading better than the other. There were indications that the problems of pacing were being resolved better by the pilot than the control group. In the control group 2.5 per cent of the children were classified as pre-readers-level 1. No children in the pilot group were so listed. In the pilot group 8.5 per cent of the children were listed as reading material above grade level - level 6. Being confined to grade level, no child in the control schools read at this level.

This appraisal is not a real test of the reading skills of the two groups, and did not take into consideration at what place in a book a child was reading. The appraisal was interesting, but not to be considered as valid research. More time will be needed before definitive results can be shown by test procedures. The informal remarks of teachers make them hopeful that the plan will stimulate the fast learner and reduce the pressure on the less able child, thus encouraging each to reach his maximum growth through daily school experiences (23).

Park Forest, Illinois. The Ungraded Primary School was instituted at Park Forest, Illinois, with the opening of a new school in a new community in 1949. Theirs is a policy of continuous growth and progress. Within the primary unit (grades 1, 2, and 3), the usual concept of promotion and nonpromotion are abandoned and the teachers take the children as far as they can in their growth in the two, three, or four years the children are in the unit.

The basic educational philosophy underlying their Ungraded Primary School is that "a child's learning program should be continuous, especially in the years when early and continued success is so important and so basic" (30). Failure and promotion are replaced by a philosophy of progress and growth. Retardation is not a remedy for nonlearning. The props needed and expected by these learners are time, freedom from tensions and pressures, space and materials for educational stretching, and the complete understanding of the adults about them.

After one year in kindergarten, children's class assignments are based upon reading readiness and progress, with division into slow, typical, and advanced reading groups. Each teacher usually divides her group into three reading groups representing these three reading levels. When a child progresses so well that he no longer fits into the most advanced reading group in his class, the teacher confers with the principal, and a study is made. Reading is a dominant factor in these discussions, but the social, emotional, and general academic effects are carefully analyzed.



Usually the transfer would be made to a "middle" group, to prevent another transfer in case the child reaches a "plateau" period. He could then be changed to a lower group in the same room. If he continues to spurt ahead, he could be moved to the top group in the same room. A parent-principal conference precedes the change. The same procedure, in reverse, is followed for children who lag behind.

Parent-teacher conferences with a checklist type of report are held. The report records the child's academic achievement in relation to his own ability, and evaluates him in terms of what has been achieved by other children of his age group in this community. Progress in special areas is noted under "comments." At the end of the year each child received a printed "promotion letter" stating he has completed one year in primary and is reassigned to primary school. If a fourth year in primary school seems necessary, a supplementary statement to that effect may be included. When pupils move, a transfer letter accompanies them, and the complete cumulative folder may be mailed to the next school.

"The first and immediate result of the Ungraded Primary Program in Park Forest, Illinois, is the flexibility it gives to the placement of children" (30). "This plan is definitely advantageous for the child who makes slower or faster progress."

They feel that their plan encourages teachers to work together for children as they have never done before, to accept children as they are, and to place them where they can work

easily without pressures. The report emphasized that they like their program.

Every day, every week, every year we see what it is doing for the child individually and as a member of a group. Our program gives each child time to build readiness for all learning. Tensions that are caused by lack of time to do things and pressures that demand that he must do them are eliminated. (30)

Their goal is security of the individual and of the group. This is also the objective of the home, the school, and the community. Therefore, they feel they have slowly and surely gone ahead with their successes and problems.

Goodlad and Anderson pointed out that critics of this plan note with some justification that there is the danger of clinging to grade-mindedness in the modified form of reading-mindedness (17). However, the avoidance of this pitfall is a very strong aim of the Park Forest staff. Much of the evaluation of this plan has been subjective, but data gathered in 1955 in the sixth year of the program offered very real encouragement for the view that children apparently were benefiting from the ungraded organization pattern (30).

Parsons, Kansas. The Parsons nongraded plan, called "The Kindergarten Primary Cycle" was implemented on a city-wide basis, beginning with the 1962-1963 school year. The guide book for the kindergarten primary grades was prepared by a committee of primary teachers and elementary principals after making a careful and thorough study of nongraded elementary school organizations found in use by various school systems throughout the United States. Out of 15 plans considered, four were chosen for further



consideration: St. Louis, Missouri; Flint, Michigan; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Washoe County, Nevada.

The guide is not intended as a method of teaching, but as an administrative tool designed to encourage and promote instruction which places greater emphasis on the individual growth and development patterns of children. The goals established for various levels should be considered as desirable minimum requirements, not maximums of attainment. The outstanding characteristic of this program is that it permits a child to work at his own instructional level and to progress accordingly without the stigma of failure (31).

The "Parsons Philosophy" accepts the responsibility of providing group and individual educative experiences that:

1. Recognize individual differences for the retarded, the gifted, and those in need of remedial help.
2. Assist each student in developing to the best of his ability the basic skills of learning.
3. Provide every student, regardless of ability, an opportunity to develop a healthy body and mind, an appreciation for the aesthetic, assume the responsibility and obligation of making decisions, prepare for accepting citizenship responsibility.
4. Provide guidance and counseling services to aid each student.
5. Provide opportunity for college bound students to get academic preparation and background.
6. Provide opportunities for training for a marketable skill.
7. Provide adult education for community.
8. Incorporate a program of public relations.

9. Encourage professional and personal growth of staff.
10. Encourage a cooperative spirit between staff, students, parents, and the community.
11. Provide instructional material, facilities, and staff needed for maintaining a quality school system. (31)

The Primary Cycle is a period of three to five years, including kindergarten, consisting of multi-levels of instruction rather than grades kindergarten, one, two, and three. Pupils move through the Primary Cycle by achievement levels in the Language Arts and Arithmetic. When it seems to be for the best interest of the child, assignment is made to another level. Upon completion of the Primary Cycle, children will either be assigned to the intermediate program or to special education.

At the beginning of each year, three instructional levels are assigned to each teacher. Periodic reports, both written and oral, are made to parents. The organization operates in the following manner:

1. Placement is determined by teacher observation, standardized testing, and past school records.
2. Assignment to a new level is made when a change is in the best interest of the child's growth and development pattern.
3. Assignment of transfer pupils to levels is based on standardized scholastic aptitude and achievement tests.
4. Each building staff works as a professional team.
5. Record is kept of each child's level of accomplishment by the end of the year.



6. Teachers may be assigned to specific levels.

7. Assignment is based primarily upon achievement in reading, but subgrouping will be done in arithmetic, spelling, and writing.

Pupil assignment is divided into two groups:

1. Kindergarten classification - KI and KII.
2. Levels classification - Levels I through IX of the language arts and arithmetic program.

Pupil progress is reported by parent-teacher conferences and written reports. Definite philosophy, purposes, techniques, and suggestions for reporting are clearly presented. Methods of recording of pupil progress and testing are explained and exemplified. The goals and instructional materials for each subject in each level are presented. Some general suggestions are outlined for Social Studies, Science, Health and Safety, The Fine Arts, and Physical Education. Samples of many forms for conferences or records are given, followed by samples of resource units and materials, then other miscellaneous techniques, aids, and lists are included.

Margaret Newbanks, chairman of the staff committee promoting the nongraded plan, said

We are very happy with our program, and for me it is an answer to many years of planning and dreaming. This is the answer to one of the recommendations which I made when I worked on my Master's Degree. The chief advantage which we have found is that it provides for individual teaching, placing greater emphasis on the individual growth and development patterns of our children. The child is working at his own level commensurate with his maturity, and there is no repeating nor skipping of any of his skills or levels.

She stated that one point which they are watching rather closely is the movement of children within the cycle. Teachers must be willing to move a child who is achieving, to another level or teacher. This is sometimes difficult for them to do. Teachers must also be willing to accept children sent to them, sometimes from a higher level. She thinks the children are adjusting to their program much better than under the old graded system, because they are working at their own levels of achievement and do not feel the tensions or frustrations which they would normally feel in the graded situation. Before moving a child to another room, he works and plays with the other children and visits the room several times. The teachers work as a team, becoming acquainted with the work of all the levels and with the children in the program. The children are familiar with the teachers, and are willing to change rooms if necessary. Children in lower levels, though slightly older, feel no stigma because they can be leaders and achievers within their group.

St. Louis, Missouri. The St. Louis Public Schools have followed an experimental "levels" program since 1953. The pupils' educational classification was by levels, although for clerical purposes they were classified by grades (34).

The philosophy is stated as a belief that education is the lifelong process by which the individual grows or develops as the result of all his experiences; that education is a basic means whereby a given social order strives to perpetuate, improve, and transmit its cultural heritage or way of life; and that the



obligation of American education is the development of citizens who will function effectively and constructively in a democracy.

The plan is called the Kindergarten and Ungraded Primary School. Their major purpose of establishing an ungraded primary school was so that pupils might begin a formal program when ready for it, and might complete it when the skills were mastered. A graded school is practicable only if all pupils can acquire the same number of basic learning skills in the same period of time, or if those who do not master the skills are required to repeat the experiences, and those who master the more advanced skills are accelerated. This is the essential difference between a "level" and a "grade." A "grade" is a group of skills to be mastered in a specified period of time; a "level" is a given number of basic skills.

The St. Louis plan groups pupils according to reading achievement within the framework of self-contained classrooms, with one teacher responsible for all the child's instruction. The reading progress is based on competence in nine different and more progressively difficult skill levels. Tests are administered for each level, and pupils who excel are moved along the levels in accordance with their achievement, rather than a "time exposure" test as would be the case in most graded systems.

The younger kindergarten pupils are classified as K-1's, and the older ones as K-2's. If K-2 pupils have advanced mental ages, are socially more mature, and have greater facility in oral language, they will be advanced to A-2 group after a half year in

the Kindergarten. When some pupils show conclusively that they are not ready for a formal learning program, they are given an extension of readiness activities in group A-1. These levels follow those mentioned above (34):

Level B-1 (pre-primer reading books).

Level B-2 (primer reading books).

Level C (first readers).

Level D-1 (second readers, level 1).

Level D-2 (second readers, level 2).

Level E-1 (third readers, level 1).

Level E-2 (third readers, level 2).

Some pupils may complete the competence sequence in two years; others may take four. The time factor is determined, not on the basis of spending two years in one grade (as under the traditional graded system), but on the basis of time required for any one of the nine different levels, without having to repeat all the grade work in arithmetic and other subjects. If accelerated, the pupil continues to receive his developmental arithmetic, science, and other subjects with his own age group, although his reading group may be quite above normal for the grade (20).

Mental ages of Kindergarten children are determined by use of the California Short-Form Test of Mental Maturity. A K-1 pupil is one whose C.A. is between 5-0 and 5-6 inclusive when entering Kindergarten. A K-2 pupil is one whose C.A. is above 5-6 when he enters Kindergarten. Further details are given for



particular requirements at each level. A Primary Classification Record Sheet is shown, giving definite skills to be learned at each level, and to be completed as a record for each child. Detailed outlines and guides are presented for each level of the Language Arts Program, and for each of the following areas: Arithmetic, Social Studies, Science, Health, Art, Music, and Writing (34).

The report card indicates and explains the level at which the child is working. An explanatory booklet for the levels program is provided for parents.

Reading clinics are available for children whose problems are unique, and provide also a laboratory training center for teachers in the best methods of teaching reading (20).

The superintendent of St. Louis Public Schools, Mr. Philip J. Hickey, feels that as a result of their school organization there has been a sharper focus of attention by teachers on the teaching of those fundamental language arts skills which are the basis of successful learning from books. A more realistic adjustment of teaching and of materials, to the individual pupil has also been evident. There has been a continuous improvement, as measured by standardized tests, and by pupils who enter the middle grades (34).

Ethel Strainchamps, writing in the Saturday Review, complimented Superintendent Hickey in the following manner:

It is Dr. Hickey's belief that innovations already under way when integration of the schools took place contributed to the smoothness with which the transition

was made. Much of the groundwork for grouping of the students by ability, in preparation for the present system of ungraded primaries and three-track high schools, had already been completed. Dr. Hickey feels that the general understanding that all pupils - white and Negro - were to be segregated according to their academic performance minimized the feeling that racial discrimination was being continued under another name. (39)

Wichita, Kansas. The Arkansas Avenue School of Wichita, Kansas, organized the Primary Unit Plan in 1949. The purpose and philosophy was to provide opportunities for each child to develop at his own rate during the first years of his school life. Grade levels were eliminated and a flexible plan of grouping was set up which would enable each child to be placed where he would be stimulated to make his best contributions to the group. The child would not be permitted to attempt work beyond his ability and understanding, thus avoiding frustration and assuring a feeling of success and security.

Beginning children were grouped chronologically for orientation from four to six weeks while teachers gathered information on the attitudes, habits, background, and experience of the children.

Results of Reading Readiness and Intelligence Tests, and knowledge gained from a study of the group were used in placing each child in a group where he could do capacity work, be socially secure, and feel that his efforts would bring success. This flexible grouping would make changes possible for desired continual growth of the child--physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally.



Provision was made for a child who slowed up and needed to work at a lower level. For a child who advanced more rapidly, an enriched program was recommended. Twelve group levels were numbered 11 through 22, beginning with Reading Readiness through Third Reader Enrichment.

By indicating on a specially designed report card the level at which the child was working at the end of each nine-week period, the parent was informed as to the child's progress. Since the child had three years in which to complete the block of work, he need not experience failure, but was promoted from one level to another as rapidly as he completed the requirements of each level. At the end of three years the teacher and the principal evaluated the work of the child who had had difficulty. If, because of illness, lack of maturity--emotional and educational--the child was believed to be capable of doing better work than had been exhibited, he was assigned to a special room between third and fourth grade levels, where he was asked not to repeat, but to complete the work required in the primary unit plan. Enrichment at any one of the three levels was employed rather than double promotion.

At present, this Wichita school organization is primarily traditional in pattern, with grade lines in existence and each teacher being assigned a heterogeneous group. The only semblance of the Primary Unit Plan at the present time is the reading levels which are organized from first grade through sixth grade, with the thinking in terms of children's reading levels more often than in grade levels (42).

## PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chief among the major problems in the administration of the nongraded school are the orientation of the teachers and communication with the parents. Success depends primarily on the understanding and cooperation of the teaching staff. Successful operation is impossible without the intelligent cooperation of the parents (35).

One of the major jobs of the administrator who hopes to introduce the nongraded organization is to guide teachers and parents to a conviction of the value of the program (35).

Anderson and Goodlad stated that one major difficulty of controlled research in this area is that clear-cut models of gradedness and nongradedness are not yet available (3).

Robert F. Carbone sought to find differences between the two types of school organization. He revealed, in effect, that the curriculum and practices of instruction in the nongraded schools in his study were imperfectly related to the theoretical ideal of nongraded practice. Many teachers in the nominally nongraded schools were continuing to use "graded" practices and to pursue "graded" goals. The reverse is quite likely true of many teachers in graded classes (10).

The research problem is complicated by the limitations of traditional achievement tests geared to the curriculum and to instructional practices of graded schools. It seems, therefore, that there is a great need for assessment procedures and



instruments wholly compatible with the philosophy of nongraded schools (3).

Problems or difficulties encountered in developing a non-graded program, according to Goodlad and Anderson in their "Progress Report of 1958," centered around these:

Grade-level-expectation habits of teachers.

Reluctance of 'traditional' teachers to try something different.

General problems of providing understanding to parents.

Problems of retraining or orienting new staff members to the plan.

Grade-level-expectation habits of parents.

Problems of designing an appropriate report card or reporting procedure. (18)

A major hurdle may be the professional resistance, since the traditional teacher, long wedded to given sets of textbooks, may consider the plan an invasion of her field and a breach of professional ethics (7).

To help nongrading realize its potential faculties, it must determine the skills, the knowledge, and the understandings that are to be attained at each of the many levels through which pupils progress, and must identify or create instructional materials adapted to a more individual program. The whole area of evaluation must be given much more attention, recommended Richard Anderson (1).

Much concern is evidenced for the individual child and individual differences, but there is a lack of initial concern for curriculum and instructional reorganization. There is a need for

better descriptions of desirable progressions in the development of concepts, skills, and values if we are to move from comparative to more absolute estimates of pupil progress (16).

Gran (19) specified three general problems: (1) The development of instruments and techniques with which to discover accurately where a pupil is; (2) The lack of flexibility of learning materials - particularly textbooks; and (3) Coordination with the junior high school.

Many parents endorse the methods of grouping children according to the needs and capacities of each, but hold back when the moment of truth about their own child has to be faced (8).

The Milwaukee plan stressed the importance of a gradual approach to initiating the program, beginning with the kindergarten group and adding another group each year through grade three.

The Park Forest, Illinois outline emphasized certain basic problems:

1. Take all the time necessary (at least a full year) to study the plan, first administratively, then with teachers, and finally with parents.
2. Recognize that no such thing as a homogeneous group exists. All that can be done is to narrow the range of individual differences in certain areas.
3. Principals and teachers need to know as much as they can as early as they can about their children.
4. By the beginning of the second year of Primary School, decisions on the less mature and the accelerated student need to be made for grouping.
5. Community and parent education through meetings and parent-teacher conferences is important to the success of the plan.



6. Of very real concern is the quality of teaching insight and motivation that teachers bring to learning for the less mature students. (30)

Cecelia Roan Blackstock made a study of schools listed by Goodlad and Anderson as being ungraded or nongraded. She found that the ungraded program has been successfully inaugurated in many schools, that there is no evidence that school size, organization, or community complexity has any bearing on its success, and that initiation of the idea may come from any level within the school staff, or even from the community. Informing and convincing parents and Boards of Education of the merits of the ungraded plan is an important step. She stated that there was lessened emotional blocking and frustration in pupils, more flexibility in pupil grouping, more relief of teacher tension and frustrations, and increased academic achievements. Some of her implications were:

If the findings of this study are true, then it follows that educators who would make use of present-day insights into individual differences, curriculum, and theories of personality, should study the merits of the ungraded plan of organization and commit themselves to a revision of the primary program. (6)

A prominent suggestion as recorded by Goodland and Anderson's report in 1958, was "Move slowly; evaluate every move." Introducing a nongraded plan one level at a time over several years was recommended as better than introducing it at all levels simultaneously (18).

Albert Brinkman (7) felt that it would be better to omit the terms "ungraded" or "nongraded," and instead use "primary" for kindergarten through third grade. He predicted, "The pattern for

the future should be of a form without a hard and rigid academic lock step that disregards what has been discovered about how children learn and grow."

Goodlad and Anderson (18) sounded this warning,

To move into a nongraded plan without simultaneously or subsequently giving attention to fundamental questions of school function, curriculum design, teaching, and evaluation is to court chaos or, at best, to create a school that is nongraded in name only.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

There seems to be general agreement that when we use research and study to discover how children grow and learn, and then attempt to fit the school program to what we know, we come closer to the goal of having all children living and learning up to the limits of their individual potentialities. The proponents of the nongraded system emphasized as part of their philosophy, the need and attempt to provide comprehensive programs of group and individual educative experiences that recognize individual differences and provide for continuous individual progress.

In the graded structure, the nine-month goals were set up, and the child was to be fitted to this structure. In the nongraded school, grade demarcations are swept away, and are replaced by levels with specific concepts, skills, and methods of inquiry to be learned at each level.

Goodlad and Anderson (17) offered the opinion that since so many children either get off to a slow start or a fast one, or have plateau periods and spurts along the way, or other obstacles



to normal school progress, the nongraded plan with its various levels, instead of year-end promotions or failures, can more adequately cope with these special problems of the individual students.

According to Percival Symonds, children strive to succeed to a very great extent because of a need for recognition and approval (40). When children are retained in the same grade, they frequently come to dislike the teacher, and may become critical, prejudiced, intolerant, withdrawn, passive, and skeptical of their own ability to succeed. In a nongraded school, children do not repeat an entire grade, but are regrouped with others at about their level of achievement (12).

Helen Heffernan (22) informed us, "Nonpromotion is devastating to the personality of children because it deadens initiative, paralyzes the will to achieve, destroys the sense of security and acceptance in the family circle, and promotes truancy and delinquency."

The following observation came from Paul Woodring (44),

Ungraded plans provide for variable rates of progress without introducing the concept of failure, which can have a traumatic effect on a small child. This is one of several programs that does not separate the child from brighter children for social activities or for all periods of the school days, but allows for his limitations.

The bright child has the opportunity of achieving and progressing in keeping with his ability, and thus gains a greater sense of worth than if held back with those of lesser ability. Respondents to John Goodlad's survey were enthusiastic in

attributing to nongrading a reduction in tensions for the slow learners, a lessening in boredom for the academically talented, and improved classroom behavior for all. He concluded that most persons associated with nongraded schools are happier for having them (15).

To quote Laura Zirbes (45), "Most of our widely used practices in teaching are time-worn stereotyped processes which have never been submitted to appraisal in use."

Nongrading created an urgency that could not be administratively denied, just as it created a demand for several series of textbooks, more reference books, and materials designed for enrichment and advancement of gifted learners. Nongrading appears to have served as the stimulus for a transition from report cards to parent-teacher conferences; for the organization of parent groups to study child development and modern educational programs; and for total faculty study of school improvement needs. The implication, therefore, from activity reports from schools is that nongrading is a powerful stimulant of change (15).

Harold G. Shane (33) warned us,

In the process of continuing change in elementary education, let us hope that individual human development continues to be deemed of prime importance and that the nature and quality of programs motivate boys and girls to continue their education throughout their lives.

The American people have viewed the problem of mental health with increasing concern over recent decades. Several communities using flexible promotion practices have reported that children



who started slowly, and were originally thought to be slow learners, seemed to "catch fire" after a year or two and made unexpectedly rapid progress thereafter (17).

Richard C. Anderson (1) contended that there is a severe lack of experimental evidence on the relative effects of non-graded, heterogeneous grouping on children's mental health. He thinks that the net effect of nongraded, homogeneous grouping on social and emotional adjustment is desirable.

Goodlad and Anderson (17) felt that the nongraded school offers more genuine incentives to learning in an atmosphere in which individual mental health is more certain to be fostered.

The nongraded schools, according to Eldred and Hillson (12), have many more opportunities for demonstrating the needed kind of warm interest by providing for individualized instruction and furnishing the emotional nourishment for mental health.

Robert F. Carbone (11), in his appraisal of the nongraded school, commented that several studies have reported higher achievement and mental health scores for nongraded pupils, but many of these studies lacked the rigorous experimental controls that would permit valid conclusions.

When Florence C. Kelley (24) reviewed ten years of an ungraded primary program in Milwaukee, she noted that it was psychologically desirable, it enhanced individualized teaching, and it facilitated good curricular practices.

"Parents have welcomed a plan which readily adjusts to the strength or weakness of children's previous experiences,"

reported Eldon Gran from the Douglas School System in South Dakota. Parents seemed relieved to realize that their children need not keep up with or wait for neighbors' children, but were glad that children would not be dragged along socially from grade to grade (19).

Anderson and Goodlad (3) stated that returns from questionnaire data indicated favorable feelings on the part of 83 to 96 per cent of the parents. Parents of academically talented children commented "enthusiastic." Parents of below-average children appreciated the reduction of unreasonable pressure. Most parents were grateful for the "smooth situation" and "this kind of setting" for their child.

Irving Balow presented evidence to substantiate the belief that reading growth, in all its aspects, varies with each child, and that reading ability is made up of many skills such as word analysis, context clues, comprehension, and so on. The assumption that greater gains in achievement will necessarily result from homogeneous grouping was rejected. Procedures more sophisticated than achievement testing are required to secure a reasonably homogeneous class. Once homogeneity is secured, to justify the grouping, a program must be devised that will result in greater reading growth (5). Such a continuous progress or multi-level plan is not so very revolutionary, but does provide an opportunity for the conscientious elementary teacher to do freely what she has always tried to do to further the educational opportunities of her group (19).



The ungraded school gives opportunity to have several teachers, so there is always the possibility that one teacher may succeed in finding the key to learning for a particular child where others have failed. More opportunities for success and recognition are offered in the nongraded school (12).

Florence Kelly (24), after the first six years in the Primary School in Milwaukee, had this to report, "We have less retardation at the end of six semesters . . . children come through with better social and academic balance than under the traditional plan of 'fail and repeat.'"

Anderson and Goodlad (3) believe that nongrading, as a philosophy, is probably congenial to the beliefs and the practices of most teachers, though surrounded by the machinery of graded structure. Since reading skill is such a determining factor in either system, and teachers attempt to individualize instruction, the following by Russell G. Stauffer (37) seems appropriate:

Love for reading is not taught, it is created.  
 Love for reading is not required, but inspired;  
 not demanded, but exemplified;  
 not exacted, but quickened;  
 not solicited, but activated.

Helen Robinson (advisory committee) (32), in reporting on the representative conference of educators, called together by Dr. Conant from all areas of the United States, offered a number of conclusions. Since children entering school differ markedly in experience, language, ability to see and hear well, and interest in reading, the school program should challenge the abilities of all pupils - superior, average, and slow - and should provide

a bountiful supply of suitable books and materials, and must provide a favorable environment for encouraging the ability to learn.

Robert F. Carbone (11) concluded:

When instruction becomes more individualized, specific objectives are clear, appropriate materials are in hand, and improved evaluation practices are available, it may then be realistic to expect the nongraded organizational plan to produce the benefits of achievement and adjustment presently sought by many educators.

Dr. Merle R. Bolton (30), with some years of experience in administering the Ungraded Primary at Park Forest, Illinois, admitted it is not a cure-all for all the problems related to learning and grouping, but it does offer a better opportunity for each child to have a continuous learning program more nearly fitted to his own development pattern. He stated:

The early years of exploration, absorption and enrichment form the foundation period upon which children build their futures. They cannot be sacrificed for an artificial scheme of grade standards, marks, and lack of understanding on the part of teachers, supervisors, and parents.

In conclusion, Thomas D. Bailey (4) offered this bit of wisdom, "In education, as in everything else, we cannot do today's job with yesterday's tools and be in business tomorrow."



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SOME EFFECTS OF NONGRADED ORGANIZATION ON THE  
ACHIEVEMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH OF PUPILS  
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

by

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The effect of the nongraded primary school on achievement and mental health of pupils has been the focus of tremendous and increasing interest in recent years. It was the purpose of this study to review available literature to discover (1) if there were any reported significant differences in achievement and mental health between comparable groups of pupils who have attended graded and nongraded primary schools; and (2) if there are differences in the instructional practices in graded and nongraded primary schools.

Research included a review of available books, periodicals, encyclopedias, bulletins, reports, school plans, courses of study, and some teacher evaluations. Several schools presently conducting the nongraded or ungraded primary school were contacted for bulletins and reports.

The step-by-step graded ladder found in elementary schools today was copied from European schools years ago. In its effort to be efficient, the graded school has set up a series of fences graduated in height. Youngsters are expected to hurdle one of these fences by the end of each school year. The reason why Johnnie can't read is probably a matter of readiness or maturity, or ineffective teaching. Many slow starters blossom out by the middle of the second year, so repeating first grade could label a youngster a failure at the beginning of his school career.

The nongraded primary seeks to erase some of these well-established, artificial obstacles placed in the path of individual progress without impoverishing standards. It provides a



large block of time in which the child will progress by levels of learning in a consistent, orderly, and systematic manner with no time limit for the completion of any one level. The achievement levels usually cover the work of the first three years of the elementary school, but may include kindergarten. Here is the essential difference between a "level" and a "grade": A level is a given number of basic skills or learning tools to be mastered before proceeding to the next level; a "grade" is a group of skills to be mastered in a specific period of time.

There is no established pattern in the grouping of children in the nongraded schools, but all grade labels are removed. Admission is on the same basis as for graded schools, with grouping according to reading achievement, age, ability, and other related factors.

The oldest, largest, and best known nongraded organization is the Milwaukee Primary Unit, inaugurated in 1942. The Ungraded Primary School at Park Forest, Illinois was instituted with the opening of a new school in a new community in 1949. The non-graded Primary for Kansas City, Missouri was started in 1961 on an experimental basis in four elementary schools. The Parsons plan, termed the Kindergarten Primary Cycle, was implemented on a city-wide basis for the 1962-1963 school year.

Educators stated that there was inadequate objective evidence and controlled research on the educational outcomes in non-graded classrooms in contrast to the graded classes.

Anderson and Goodlad, the chief proponents of the nongraded plan, reported on 89 communities in which there were about 550 nongraded schools in 1960. Outstanding characteristics of these nongraded programs in contrast to the graded plan were: They permitted a child to work at his own instructional level and to progress accordingly without the stigma of failure; they stimulated the fast learner and reduced the pressure on the less able child; they developed more overachievers and fewer underachievers; and they provided for individualized teaching and improved curricular practice.

The majority of writers favored the nongraded plan because it provided a continuous learning program for each individual without the stigma of failure; made provision for the gifted, the retarded, those needing remedial help, and the average; reduced tensions, lessened boredom, and improved classroom behavior; promoted higher academic achievement and improved mental health; produced higher teacher morale, interest, and enthusiasm, with a higher qualitative and quantitative difference in curriculum development; and resulted in greater parent understanding and respect.

The chief problems reported were administration and orientation of teachers and parents, with success depending upon understanding and cooperation. Proponents of the nongraded or ungraded primary offered this warning, "Move slowly. Evaluate every move."



