

A SURVEY OF SLOW LEARNERS IN
THE BARNES, KANSAS, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES	111
INTRODUCTION	1
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	2
PURPOSES OF SURVEY	3
BACKGROUND OF SURVEY	4
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	10
METHODS AND PROCEDURES	23
DEFINITION OF TERMS	25
AN ANALYSIS OF THE BARNES PROBLEM	27
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	41
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	45
REFERENCES	46

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. Teacher-load and Total Enrollment in the Barnes Elementary School (1955-1965)	28
II. Percentages Degree and Non-degree Teachers in Kansas, 1947-48 through 1964-65	30
III. Children of Principals, Teachers, and Board Members Enrolled in the Barnes Elementary School September 15, 1964	32
IV. Grade Distribution of Retarded Pupils by Sex Found in the Barnes Elementary School	33
V. Attendance Record of Barnes' Slow Learning Pupils Based on Days in Attendance in the Years when Retardation Occurred	35
VI. Marital Status of Parents of Slow Learners Found in the Barnes Elementary School	37
VII. Number of Schools Attended by Slow Learners Identified in the Barnes Elementary School	38
VIII. Intelligence Quotient of the Twenty Slow Learners Identified in the Barnes Elementary School	39

INTRODUCTION

Abraham Lincoln once remarked that the Lord must have loved the common people because he made so many of them. The same might well be said for the slow learners in our schools. It is a good thing, too, that the Lord loves them, for they are not always the object of their fellow men's affection. They are, of course, no more entitled to affection than their more fortunately endowed brothers and sisters. But too often they fail to elicit a favorable opinion solely because they are unable to meet unreasonable expectations in school.

Over-age boys and girls have been found in many American public school classrooms. They could usually be found in the back of the room where generation after generation of slow learning pupils have found their places. In some instances such slow learning pupils have been the victims of mental retardation; in some cases they were exceptional children; and in still others, they were normal children who had been deterred in their educational career by any number of things such as poor curricula, lack of current teaching training to keep pace with the new methods of modern education, bad home conditions, divorced parents, and absence from school.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

When approximately 15 per cent of the Barnes Elementary School enrollment had experienced grade failure or had been passed on condition, the problem was to discover whether a need for a special education room existed in the Barnes School. Kansas law sets the minimum class size at eight and the maximum at fifteen. If Barnes failed to qualify for the minimum of eight students, then students needing special education from other schools in the county perhaps could be transported to Barnes.

A survey of slow learners in the Barnes Elementary School was made: (1) to identify the slow learners; (2) to find the causes why they are slow learners; and (3) to find out what could be done about correcting the causes and helping those already classified as slow learners.

This survey of slow learners included those so classified during the years from 1960 to 1965.

PURPOSES OF SURVEY

1. To find ways of strengthening community-school relations by attacking a school problem directly affecting the community, parents, school board and teachers.

2. To discover whether a need for a special education room existed, and if so, whether a suitable classroom location could be established.

3. To ascertain the true causes for the slow learning in the Barnes Elementary School and pass on the information to the school board, parents, teachers and community.

4. To find some means for alleviating existing conditions which have brought about the slow learning and to stimulate the parents and community to do something about it.

5. To learn more about school and community problems which result from the feeling of parents who have slow learners or a child passed on condition.

6. To start classroom teachers thinking about child welfare and progress by studying the real causes of slow learning.

7. To motivate teachers with sixty to seventy college hours to take summer college training or Saturday classes to learn newer methods and current changes in elementary education, such as modern mathematics, newer methods of teaching reading and phonics and the use of S.R.A. reading laboratory methods.

BACKGROUND OF SURVEY

Barnes is one of eleven small towns in Washington County with a friendly and cooperative population of approximately 250 people. Of the eleven public elementary schools and the five parochial schools, Barnes was tied with Haddam in the 1964 enrollment for the third largest public school in the county.

Mixed farming and cattle raising was the main economic interest in the community. The operation of the Barnes School System was also one of the biggest businesses in the community. Over \$108,000 was budgeted by the grade and high school for the 1964-65 school year. During the four-year survey at annual board meetings, the grade school board usually voted to adopt the annual budget for the high school on the first Thursday night in June and the following night the high school board usually voted in the annual budget for the grade school. The principals, sometimes, would have to second a motion to adopt the budget, because no one else was there. Many parents complained of high taxes but never attended an annual meeting to see if they were getting their educational dollar's worth.

Our mushrooming school populations call for new schools, better facilities, and more good teachers at higher salaries. School costs have risen steadily to meet both the quantity and quality dimensions of education today. School budgets have reached the critical level in many districts; bond issues for new schools have become financially burdensome. Parents raise questions to which they demand good answers. "Am I

getting my educational dollar's worth?" "Is my child getting the right education for what lies ahead?" The schools are confronted by the public asking for information about the aims and practices of those educating their children.¹

This survey of slow learners was conducted with close cooperation with the County Welfare Department personnel who work for the welfare of children. Barnes had three welfare families move into town a year after the survey started. Five of the children might be classed as slow learners. Two have already left town and one more sixteen year old boy in the seventh grade entered a trade school.

The general feeling of a very few in town and school was to treat the families rudely so that perhaps they would move on to another town. Time after time the county sheriff was called to town for protection of rights and property of the welfare families.

If the Barnes School closed its classroom doors to these children as one teacher seemed to do many times by failing to accept those on welfare, the school would seem only to be defeating President Johnson's educational plan of getting people off county welfare through education.

President Lyndon B. Johnson, in his educational message to the 89th Congress in January, 1965, said:

¹Milton V. Pullen, "Interpreting the School Program to Parents," The Instructor, February, 1965, pp. 24-25.

I propose that we declare a national goal of full educational opportunity. Every child must be encouraged to get as much education as he has the ability to take. We want this not only for his sake, but for the nation's sake. Nothing matters more to the future of our country; not our military preparedness--for armed might is worthless if we lack the brain power to build a world of peace; not our productive economy--for we cannot sustain growth without trained manpower; not our democratic system of government--for freedom is fragile if citizens are ignorant.¹

Every child whose parents were on county welfare had one strike against him before he came into the classroom. As soon as school started in September, the child was branded as a slow learner by one teacher, even before he was tested or given any help.

During this survey, the first family took their children out of school in April, 1962. The parents had been to the county law officials to complain of marks left on their children. The children were transferred to a school in a nearby town. According to the principal there, the children have done very well for the last three years.

The next year, 1963, another mother and her two children on county welfare, left the school after going to the law officers because of the same complaint.

A year later in 1964, a few days after school started, two more families, one on welfare, went to the county attorney and county sheriff with complaints of black and blue marks,

¹President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Full Educational Opportunity," The Kansas Teacher, (February, 1965), p. 19.

pinch marks, and fingernail marks left on their children by the teacher. This time the sheriff and county attorney visited the school and talked with the principal about the marks they had seen on the children.

To avoid any legal action by the county, the school and law officials and every parent concerned hoped that the teacher, being about retirement age, would soon resign, even though a board member often said she would have a teaching job as long as he was on the board. Three months later in November, her letter of resignation was given to the board and accepted effective at the end of the school term.

The number one purpose of the Kansas plan of teacher certification in the certificate handbook is developed as follows: 1. "Assure within reasonable limits that children will be under the direction of competent, understanding teachers who have a comprehensive knowledge of children and youth."

Featherstone, in his attitude toward the slow learner said:

First of all, the teacher must be able to take a positive rather than a negative attitude toward the slow learner. Instead of tolerating him as a necessary nuisance--as a cross to be borne--the teacher must be able to accept him for what he is and believe that he has a right to the best and most conscientious guidance and instruction that can be devised.¹

¹William Bland Featherstone, Teaching The Slow Learner (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951), p. 114.

Time after time, the board was informed by the principal about conditions as they existed in this room. One board member usually made most of the decisions and was generally in disagreement with what the principal thought was good for the school, education and pupils.

Without any knowledge of this survey being conducted and almost finished, the board hired a special education teacher with the intention of starting a special class for slow learners.

The principal and teachers had not been consulted and had no knowledge of a new teacher being hired until ten o'clock one Tuesday morning, when two board members and the new teacher knocked on the classroom door. One board member said that this is our new teacher who has a Master's Degree in special education. You teachers will tell her who the slow learners are and Friday we will go talk to their parents. Monday morning, classes for slow learners would start and be held one-half day in the adjacent art building and the rest of the day in the vocational agriculture shop as no other classroom was available in the main school building.

The new teacher was as shocked as the other teachers were that the special class for slow learners had not been discussed or planned with the parents or teachers.

Because of ill feeling from the parents, most of the classroom teachers would not commit themselves and say who the slow learners were. One teacher had two pupils branded

as slow learners and ready to start class on Monday.

For two months after that, the special education teacher trained in testing began to identify the slow learners by giving every pupil in school the Otis group intelligence quotient test and a follow-up with the Kuhlmann Finch intelligence quotient test. The results would help to determine who might need special educational help.

To better inform the board, the principal gave the board members a guide by the State Department of Public Instruction for setting up a special education class for the mentally retarded in Kansas.

To distinguish between professional and lay roles in determining and implementing educational policy, Mary B. Lane, professor of education, San Francisco State College, stated:

Teaching, like all professions, is based on a body of specialized knowledge that is not a part of the common heritage. In too many communities, however, educational issues are being decided by the perceptions of a few as to what the community wants. To expect the community to know what is appropriate for the curriculum of a five-year-old or nine-year-old is the same as relying upon grandma's home remedy when a child becomes ill. In some cases what the community wants is as deadly psychologically as polluted water is physically.¹

¹Mary B. Lane, "Community-School Relations," N.E.A. Journal, September, 1962, p. 51.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ordinarily, "slow learningness" or "slow learner" refers to the capacity of an individual to learn intellectual things-- the kind of capacity that is measured by verbal intelligence tests. There is no fixed standard of level of ability below which a pupil must be called a slow learner, but in common practice pupils with an intelligence quotient below ninety-one and above seventy-four are so labeled. This is purely a pragmatic definition, based upon the fact that most pupils with an intelligence quotient of ninety and above manage to succeed fairly well with the intellectual tasks of the prevailing school curriculum, and are therefore labeled average or bright, while very few pupils with an intelligence quotient below seventy-five ever achieve much success in the ordinary curriculum. These latter pupils are usually referred to as the mentally handicapped and are often placed in special classes.¹

It is more difficult to recognize the slow learner than to recognize the gifted child. While the gifted child attracts us because he accomplishes rather special things, the slow learner may also be identified through observations of all the things he doesn't do that we expect of him. At first glance he appears just like the other children in his group,

¹W. B. Featherstone, Teaching the Slow Learner, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951, p. 1.

and he often gets tagged "lazy" or "poorly motivated."¹

Many persons think they know a slow learner when they see one, that the signs are unmistakable. So thought the teachers of Edison, Newton, and a good many other geniuses. Their error should serve both as a warning against offhand judgments of other people's capacity to learn, and as a stimulus to find out what sort of persons slow learners are and how to identify them. Psychologists have pointed out many times that people cannot be sorted into neat groups labeled slow learner, average, fast learner, and the like, with any great degree of precision. People differ in degree, not in kind; they are all variants of one type. Each individual possesses more or less all the characteristics possessed by the whole human race. Beauty, honesty, intelligence, resourcefulness, and perseverance are not the exclusive property of one group, nor are ugliness, dishonesty, and stupidity the exclusive property of another. There is a little goodness in the worst of them, a little badness in the best of them.²

Although some writers state that slow learners are essentially normal in their emotional, social, physical, and motor development, others point out many differences. The

¹Willard Abraham, The Slow Learner, New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1964, p. 18.

²Featherstone, loc. cit.

following are some that are most frequently cited, in comparison with children considered intellectually normal:

1. Short attention and interest span.
2. Limited imagination and limited creative thinking.
3. Slow reaction time.
4. Academic retardation, especially in reading.
5. Absence or easy loss of self-confidence.
6. Low power of retention and memory.
7. Inability to do abstract thinking.
8. Laziness, but perhaps due to ill health or emotional maladjustment rather than a constitutional factor.¹

Three factors are of special importance at the outset in considering how to identify slow learners: (1) the identification process should begin early; (2) no single index or device is sufficient; and (3) the process should continue over a relatively long period of time. Even in recent years a number of misconceptions and misunderstandings have persisted among parents, teachers, and others in their discussions of slow learners. These misconceptions should be corrected before going into causes, characteristics, and identification techniques related to these children. For example, many people still believe that an intelligence quotient is immobile, unchangeable, and set for all time. They do not recognize the influences of a rich or barren environment as

¹Abraham, loc. cit.

contributing toward raising an intelligence capacity or lowering to a new intelligence floor.¹

The most satisfactory and reliable method of identifying the slow learner in the school is, of course, to give every pupil an individual intelligence test.² This is, however, a time-consuming procedure and one not always possible. It is always advisable to give two different tests or alternate forms of the same test before reaching any conclusion about a pupil's capacity. If the scores of two tests are reasonably consistent, say within about five points of each other, the average may be taken as the pupil's probable intelligence quotient.

Even when the tests are given by competent persons, there is still room for error in the results, and for misinterpretation or for failure to ascertain all the factors that contribute to a pupil's welfare in school.³

Milton V. Pullen thinks intelligence quotient tests results should be kept where they belong, with other data. They are just one more general guideline for teachers. Any classification or grouping of pupils should include consideration of all the information in the cumulative folder. The intelligence quotient score should not override other data. It is

¹Ibid., pp. 5-6.

²Featherstone, op. cit., p. 21.

³Loc. cit.

not that comprehensive in what it measures. Other data are needed to complete the picture. We have used intelligence quotient scores long enough to know that they are advisory but not absolute, definitive but not decisive.¹

Featherstone summarized several methods for identifying slow learners as follows:

1. Examining the age-grade-progress record of the school and locating those pupils who are overage by more than a year and the same time retarded in progress by more than a year.
2. Examining the past school achievement record of all such pupils for consistently mediocre attainments.
3. Administering two group intelligence tests or alternative forms of one test to all pupils if possible, but at least to all those listed as a result of 1 and 2 above.
4. Giving individual tests to all pupils if possible, but at least to those for whom the facts elicited by means of the procedures outlined above appear inconsistent or inconclusive.

The most widely used identification techniques and materials are individual intelligence tests, group intelligence tests, personality tests and achievement tests to measure subject matter accomplishment. Of all the results from identification techniques, personality would be the hardest to judge. One's personality, of course, is an extremely complex matter and is incapable of being described adequately in such simple terms as good, fair, poor, and

¹Milton V. Pullen, "Use and Misuse of I.Q. Scores," The Instructor, January, 1965, p. 29.

the like.¹

When children are poor readers, it is difficult to measure their mental abilities. Many group intelligence quotient tests, particularly those used in middle grades, assume that the child can read printed questions; if he cannot, he inevitably comes out with a low intelligence quotient. A retarded reader in sixth grade who scored an intelligence quotient of 68 on a group test scored 97, or well within the average range, when tested individually.

Distinguishing between retarded readers and slow learners requires the use of intelligence quotient tests that do not involve reading. Even then some retarded readers fail to show their full potential. When in doubt, it is wiser to consider the child to be a retarded reader rather than to assume he cannot do better.

Most elementary school classrooms contain at least one retarded reader; many have several. These are children within or above the average range in general intelligence who are reading a year or more below the norms for their ages and grades. Since failure in reading makes success in other curricular areas difficult or impossible, a determined effort to eradicate reading retardation not only benefits individual children, but also tends to upgrade the achievement of the school as a whole.

¹ Featherstone, *loc. cit.*

Of the many ways in which the school can contribute to the development of a reading difficulty, however, probably the most frequent is failure to recognize a child's problem in its early stages and to provide help before it becomes serious.¹

In some respects slow learners have been found to be comparable to other children. Even though pupils were found to be weaker in matters of health, they were found to be comparable to the average or bright pupils in their powers of adjustment. Evidence has not been found which would indicate that a teacher is justified in assuming a pupil is weak in all things merely because he cannot read as fluently as others in his class. Such defects as hearing, malnutrition, defective tonsils or vision have been found to be among the root causes for a pupil's being retained in the same grade for another year and "branded" as a slow learner.² Poor health has been found to be responsible for laziness and inattention. Even though there might not have been anything wrong with a pupil's intellectual powers, he should not have been expected to compete with his associates in school if his health was poor.

A slow learner's desire for a particular kind of work or

¹Albert J. Harris, "The Retarded Reader," The Instructor, March, 1965, p. 85.

²Loc. cit.

job can be destroyed through repeated failure. One of the chief aims of life has been found to be success. A student's withdrawal from high school before graduation has been traced to failure of a grade, particularly in the elementary school.¹

The slow learner has faced the same problems that confront the rest of humanity; therefore, he should not be deprived of educational opportunities that are afforded the more fortunate. The slow learner's basic needs have been found to be the same as those of other children. Basic needs of all children are food, clothing, shelter, and a balance of activity and rest. His feelings of belongingness and love are no different from those of other children. He needs the opportunity for increasing self-direction as he grows older. He, too, needs to understand and accept himself for what he is. Of particular importance to the slow learner is the same balance between success and failure that all other children need.²

A common knowledge is that a large percentage of slow learning pupils come from the socially and economically less fortunate families of the community. In such a situation, the parent may not see acquiring skills, and ultimately a job, as worthwhile goals. It follows, then, that the child may see little or no need for education as a requisite for

¹Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²Featherstone, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

his next logical step--working for a living. Children from these homes often reflect the bitterness their parents experience. Their attitudes toward school, toward adults, toward eventual employment opportunities tend to be hostile or fatalistic. Aggressive behavior, self-rejection, withdrawal, and other symptoms are noted.¹

Elementary teachers have the means to meet the needs of children coming from homes of unemployed adults. They must select curricula which help boys and girls build desirable attitudes. They can show that people depend upon one another and that our strengths as individuals and as a nation come from the contributions of many persons.²

All slow learners do not by any means come from such family and neighborhood environments. The teacher alone may be powerless to prevent or correct such conditions, but he must be aware of their existence. They have a good deal to do with the quality of his pupils' behavior at school. The ill, the underclad, the malnourished, the hungry boy or girl is able to put but little effort or enthusiasm into school activities, or to get much from them. The boy or girl who comes to school fresh from a family row or brawl, or beset by continual fear of his father or mother, or who suffers

¹N. Neubert Jaffa, "The Child from the Family on Welfare," The Instructor, (January, 1965), p. 29.

²Loc. cit.

continuously a feeling of rejection, persecution, or unworthiness, is a poor state of mind for wholehearted, positive cooperation with his classmates or with his teachers.¹

The American philosophy of education, based on educating every child to his capacity, cannot afford to make exceptions. The loss of potential manpower, the high dropout rate from our schools, the cost of unemployment, delinquency, and crime, the threat to sound family relationships and to individuals within families--all are direct or indirect consequences which can be traced, at least partly, to the fact that education has largely ignored the needs of an important segment of our society; the children often referred to as "slow learners."²

Because slow learners will become a significant part of our future citizenry with important jobs of an occupational, family, and social nature to perform, this ignoring of needs must be noted, studied, and discussed. Efforts must be made also to offer practical solutions. These children do not constitute minor problems--not when one observes the thousands of classrooms they attend, the conferences of teachers and administrators almost perpetually faced with the problem, the parents for whom it is a source of concern, and communities

¹N. Neubert Jaffa, "The Frequently Absent Child," *The Instructor*, February, 1965, p. 25.

²Abraham, *loc. cit.*

bearing the cost of educating them and paying a larger price later if the education provided is inadequate.

No exceptions can be made, no group ignored, no child overlooked--and no country in its period of greatest prosperity and stature can afford to do less than recognize these beliefs as they apply specifically to each child, no matter where he lives, what his father does, what his family thinks about the educational process, or what his future holds for him vocationally.¹

President Lyndon B. Johnson in his education message to Congress of The United States on January 12, 1965, stressed the importance of educating every student to his capacity by saying:

One-quarter of all Americans are in the nation's classrooms. High school attendance has grown 18 fold since the turn of the century--six times as fast as the population. College enrollment has advanced eighty fold. Americans today support a fourth of the world's institutions of higher learning and a third of its professors and college students.

In the life of the individual, education is always an unfinished task. In the life of this nation, the advancement of education is a continuing challenge.

There is a darker side to education in America. One student out of every three now in the fifth grade will drop out before finishing high school if the present rate continues. Almost a million young people will continue to quit school each year if our schools fail to stimulate their desire to learn. Over 100,000 of our brightest high school graduates each year will not go to college and many others will leave college if the opportunity for higher education is not expanded.

¹Ibid., p. 15.

The cost of this neglect runs high both for the youth and the nation. Unemployment of young people with an eighth grade education or less is four times the national average. Jobs filled by high school graduates rose by 40 per cent in the last ten years. Jobs for those with less schooling decreased by nearly 10 per cent.

We can measure the cost in even starker terms. We now spend about \$450 a year per child in our public schools. But we spend \$1,800 a year to keep a delinquent youth in a detention home, \$2,500 a year for a family on relief, \$3,500 a year for a criminal in a state prison.¹

At one time not so long ago, a man who was physically capable of working could usually find a job. Today, however, this is not so. Recent data show that in the United States more than 300,000 people looking for jobs had less than a fifth grade education; almost 1,500,000 had less than an eighth grade education.²

The close correlation between unemployment and educational attainment can be seen in the monthly reports on the labor force. Secretary of Labor, W. Willard Wirtz, had this to say of the unskilled worker.

In March, 1962 for instance, the unemployment rate was 9.2 per cent for people with less than a grade school education, but only 4 per cent for those with some college.

Earnings of workers are also relative to their educational attainments. A recent study by the Bureau of the Census reveals that additional schooling is

¹President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Full Educational Opportunity," The Kansas Teacher, (February, 1965), p. 19.

²W. Willard Wirtz, "Education, Answer to Unemployment," The Family Digest, September, 1964, pp. 20-21.

clearly associated with a very substantial increase in lifetime income. Over a lifetime, the difference between the total earnings of men with one to three years of high school and those of high school graduates is better than \$46,000. The difference in lifetime earnings between a high school graduate and a college graduate is close to \$180,000. Urban males with four years or more of college education had annual incomes of \$6,780 in 1958, as compared with the income of \$2,504 for urban men with less than eight years of schooling.

The future in the United States for the unskilled is dim. Some 26 million young people will pour into the U. S. labor market during this decade, and all of them will represent the mass product of the American school system. Only if the link between education and employment is strongly forged will the outlook for these youngsters be a bright one.¹

Featherstone summarized this review of literature by saying:

In school, at home, no matter where, one must never forget that the slow learner is no less a "person" no less an individual, than any other human being. His talents may be few, his promise slight, but he is none the less a member of mankind, cast in the same mold and made of the same clay. He claims equal right with others in the regard of his fellow men, and to guidance and instruction designed to stimulate his growth to the fullest stature his powers permit. He, too, must be helped to stand on his own feet and face the world, self-reliant and unafraid. "With malice towards none, with charity for all" must be the teacher's watchword. Any other point of view denies the faith that has made America great.²

¹ Loc. cit.

² W. B. Featherstone, Teaching the Slow Learner, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951, p. 118.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The methods and procedures used in this survey were:

1. Enrollment records were used to identify individuals who had been retained one year or more.
2. County welfare records were checked to get information about transfer children whose parents were on welfare.
3. School registers were reviewed to check attendance records, grades failed by each pupil involved, and the number of teachers and teacher load for a ten-year period.
4. Individual school cumulative records were used to learn:
 - (a) Number of schools attended by the slow learner.
 - (b) Home status of slow learner.
 - (c) In what grades failure occurred.
 - (d) Employment of parents.
 - (e) Marital status of parents.
 - (f) What grades were most frequently repeated by slow learners.
 - (g) Number of days the slow learner was absent from school in the year failure occurred.
 - (h) Sex of slow learners.
5. Literature was reviewed relative to:
 - (a) Helping the slow learner.
 - (b) Mentally retarded children in Kansas.
 - (c) Teaching the slow learner.
 - (d) Early school leavers.

- (e) School dropouts.
- (f) Pupil progress in the elementary school.
- (g) Basic fears of a child entering school.
- (h) Curriculum adjustments for slow learners.
- (i) Contemporary thinking about the slow learner.
- (j) Identifying the slow learner.
- (k) Helping the child from a family on county welfare.

6. A special education teacher, trained in testing, gave the pupils in grade school the Otis group intelligence test and a follow-up with the Kuhlmann Finch group intelligence test. The average of the two tests was compiled. The scores of intelligence quotient obtained only verified the results already compiled the first three years of the survey.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

As a guide to the reader and for further clarification the following definitions of terms were used in this report:

"Classroom Teacher" - A teacher, excluding the principal, teaching academic subjects in grades one through eight. This excludes art, music, and physical fitness.

"Educationally Retarded" - A child retarded not because of mental ability but because of school conditions.

"Elementary School" - Grades one through eight, inclusive.

"Exceptional Child" - A child feeble-minded, gifted, blind, epileptic, or mentally disabled.

"Failed Pupil" - A pupil who has been retained in a given grade for more than one term.

"High School" - Grades nine through twelve, inclusive.

"Mentally Retarded" - The child, who, because of poor intellectual endowment, has been unable to cope with the standard requirements of regular grades.

"Normal" - The child who has been able to achieve in school at a level equal to that of a majority of his age-grade group.

"Over-age" - A child over 16 years of age. Sixteen is the age in Kansas after which a pupil may be legally withdrawn from school if he has not been graduated from the eighth grade.

"Passed on Condition" - The child who is doing below average work, but is promoted to the next grade because he

had been retained one or more times before. It may mean he was promoted because of age, or the teacher didn't have the parents' consent to retain the child in the same grade another year.

"School System" - A grade and high school together in the same building, where all students use the same physical equipment such as lunchroom, gymnasium and playground.

"Slow Learner" - A slow learner as used in this report is a noun indicating a student who has experienced failure in grade progress.

"Slow Learning" - As used in this report, refers to the capacity of the individual to learn intellectual things--the kind of capacity that is measured by a verbal intelligence test.

"Transfer" - Transfer means that the youth had changed from one school to another.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE BARNES PROBLEM

The cause for slow learners should first be attributed to the educational program. Once a survey has been made of the educational program and, if it has been found not to be wholly responsible, then research should be begun elsewhere.

After enrolling the pupils in the Barnes Elementary School for the 1960-1961 school term and checking the cumulative record of each student, the investigator found that school registers bore this pathetic remark "Passed on Condition."

Community-school relationship seemed rather weak as parents showed distaste for certain teachers, and pupils openly confessed their dislike for school. The situation demanded attention.

In many instances the one person most capable of dealing with these problems has been found to be the administrator or principal hired to be in charge of the school. For this reason, special care should be exercised in placing a capable person in charge. The next most important person to solve community problems is the school board member, who is capable and willing to work cooperatively with the principal for the best interest of the students, school and community.

An analysis of the Barnes problem showed that each teacher taught two grades in a classroom. There were four classrooms with four teachers for the eight grades.

The data in Table I points to the fact that each room

had a fairly equal number of students over the ten-year period. The low average number of students was 21.6 for the first and second grade and the high average number was 22.9 for the third and fourth grade.

TABLE I
TEACHER-LOAD AND TOTAL ENROLLMENT IN THE
BARNES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(1955-1965)

Year	Room 1 & 2	Room 3 & 4	Room 5 & 6	Room 7 & 8	Total enrollment
1955-1956	17	21	24	25	87
1956-1957	16	26	19	21	82
1957-1958	16	15	20	22	73
1958-1959	18	14	26	15	73
1959-1960	23	18	17	26	84
1960-1961	26	21	19	29	95
1961-1962	25	33	20	20	98
1962-1963	23	27	24	21	95
1963-1964	26	26	30	19	101
1964-1965	26	28	26	24	104
Average	21.6	22.9	22.5	22.2	89.2

John H. Vigneron, chairman of the accreditation committee from the Kansas State Department of Public Instruction, in his 1964 annual accreditation report of the Barnes Elementary School, made the following statement. "Enrollment in class-

rooms having combination grades exceeds recommended maximum in several rooms. Maximum enrollment in such rooms should be twenty or below." Would this indicate there might be a slight correlation between teacher-load and retardation? Table I also revealed that the last two year's total enrollment of 101 and 104 broke all available records for the history of the school. In the last two years, Barnes was tied with Haddam as having the third largest enrollment of the 13 public schools in the county. Of the five parochial schools in the county, only one had a larger enrollment than Barnes. In the last school year, 1964-65, the upper four grades had three classroom teachers and were partially departmentalized.

Table II shows a drop in Kansas non-degree teachers from 49 per cent in 1947 to 7.4 per cent in 1965; Barnes Elementary School stayed at 100 per cent non-degree classroom teachers. According to every school record available, Barnes has never had a degree classroom teacher in the history of the school. Could this be a big factor in contributing to slow learners?

A Bachelor's Degree of 130 college hours or a Master's Degree of 160 does not necessarily make a teacher good. As an incentive to train and improve the quality of teachers, the State Legislature and Kansas State Department of Education grant financial state aid to schools on the number of college hours a teacher has, and teachers' certificates are upgraded

by more college hours. Even a teacher receiving a Master's Degree today, to renew his certificate, must continue to improve his education by getting six additional hours of college every five years.

TABLE II
PERCENTAGES DEGREE AND NON-DEGREE TEACHERS IN KANSAS,
1947-48 THROUGH 1964-65

Year	Per cent	
	Degree	Non-Degree
1947-48	51	49
1949-50	56	44
1951-52	63	37
1953-54	67	33
1955-56	70	30
1957-58	74	26
1959-60	77	22
1961-62	86	14
1963-64	90.5	09.5
1964-65	92.6	07.4

Why would parents want to send their children to school teachers who had no current college training in modern education for fourteen years or to teachers with sixty to sixty-seven college hours, which is the very minimum to stay in the teaching profession?

How many parents would take their child to a medical doctor who had the very minimum college training and had not kept up with the modern medical changes? Teaching, which trains the human delicate mind, is the most precious and most dangerous duty entrusted by mankind to men. When medical doctors make mistakes, they bury them. Teachers' mistakes grow up to become parents and voters of tomorrow.

President Johnson, in addressing the 89th Congress of the United States on January 12, 1965, stressed the importance of teacher training for modern times.

We must demand that our schools increase not only the quantity but the quality of America's education. For we recognize that nuclear age problems cannot be solved with horse-and-buggy learning. The three R's of our school system must be supported by the three T's--teachers who are superior, techniques of instruction that are modern, and thinking about education which places it first in all our plans and hopes.¹

Table III reveals that the elementary classroom teachers had no children enrolled. The reason for this was that no classroom teacher lived in the district but commuted from nearby towns where schools hired only degree new teachers except in case of emergency. Only one classroom teacher had a child of grade school age.

Table III also shows that approximately one-fifth or 18 per cent of the Barnes Elementary School enrollment belonged to the school system's faculty or board members. Since low

¹President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Full Educational Opportunity." The Kansas Teacher, (February, 1965), pp. 19-20.

intelligence quotient was one of the criterion measures of slow learners, none of the eighteen children was classed as a slow learner as they ranged in intelligence quotient from 106 to 125. With this large per cent of school enrollment belonging to educational personnel, why were not degree elementary teachers demanded?

TABLE III

CHILDREN OF PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND BOARD MEMBERS
ENROLLED IN THE BARNES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SEPTEMBER 15, 1964

School system faculty and board members	Number of children enrolled	Approximate per cent of enrollment
Grade School Principal	3	3
High School Principal	2	2
Classroom Teachers	0	0
High School Teachers	5	5
Grade School Board	6	6
High School Board	2	2
Totals	18	18

Table IV reveals that the most troublesome grades where failure took place were the first, fifth, and third in that sequence. Studies by Dillon found the grades most repeated were the first, third, and fourth. The largest number of failures took place in the first grade. The reason for this

is that probably most children are not ready to read until the chronological age of six years and six months. The school law may be changed to require a pupil to have attained his sixth birthday before entering school. The law now states that any child may start to school in the fall if he will be six years of age by January 1st. A bill has been passed in the 1965 Kansas Legislature that will change the legal school entrance age of a child from six before January 1st to six before September 1st by 1969.

TABLE IV

GRADE DISTRIBUTION OF RETARDED PUPILS BY SEX
FOUND IN THE BARNES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Grade failed	No. of male students	No. of female students	Total
1	4	3	7
2	1	2	3
3	3	1	4
4	1	0	1
5	5	0	5
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
Total	<u>14</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>

Table IV also points to the fact that there were no retardations of slow learners in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. No reason could be found for this.

Over twice as many boys as girls were found to be slow learners as shown in Table IV. This was in harmony with the findings of Dillon. Probably the most significant reason was the greater degree of immaturity usually found in boys when compared to girls.

Table V reveals that 90 per cent of the pupils were absent twenty days or less and only 10 per cent were absent over twenty days during the term. No reason was given as the cause of absence for the two pupils who were absent for any length of time. Absence was the reason for retardation as given by the teachers of those pupils, but according to the literature reviewed, it should not have been. Elsbree had this to say about his study.

Absence from school over long periods of time is frequently cited as the unanswerable argument for repetition. This observation should be made before attaching great weight to this contention. Even in the traditional classrooms of three decades ago, investigators discovered that pupils who missed up to twenty-five days during a school year made up for the lost time and maintained their grade in 60 per cent of the cases studied. Some observers believe that pupils can make up as much as 50 per cent of work missed.¹

¹Willard S. Elsbree, Pupil Progress in the Elementary

TABLE V

ATTENDANCE RECORD OF BARNES' SLOW LEARNING PUPILS
 BASED ON DAYS IN ATTENDANCE IN THE YEARS
 WHEN RETARDATION OCCURRED

Days in attendance	Number of pupils	Per cent
150-155	2	10
156-160	0	0
161-165	2	10
166-170	5	25
171-175	9	45
176-180	2	10
	<u>20</u>	<u>100</u>

During the survey, parents came to the principal saying their child in the lower grades was afraid or didn't want to come to school today. Maybe the child had been mistreated or had witnessed unfair punishment or had heard bitter argument between the teacher and some other parent. The parents said they were afraid to complain to the teacher for fear the teacher would deal out more punishment to their child.

N. Neubert Jaffa had this to say about the disadvantaged child.

A happy smiling teacher and bright, cheerful classroom which they have helped plan and set up will draw children to school. By example, and through her teaching, the teacher can help each pupil (no matter how limited her ability may be in some areas of school work)

to develop an acceptable concept of self--a self that does not need to stay away from school.¹

In the last two years, three of five boys, in one lower grade, have been or are on an ulcer diet. Could worry and emotional stress be a cause for slow learners?

Children have many fears of school before they start without being afraid of the teacher. Many times pre-school children are told by adults, "You just wait until you get in school. The teacher will do this or that to you." A few years ago, one little boy after starting to school was always afraid the teacher would cut off his ears, because some older person had told him so.

Donald B. Rinsley, a medical doctor from the Menninger Foundation School of Psychiatry, listed seven basic fears a child brings to the classroom.

The basic fear of all children is the fear that the adult (parent) will abandon them--more literally, that the adult will leave them to perish from emotional starvation or, worse and happily more rarely, actual nutritional starvation. We have found that this basic fear expresses itself in numerous ways, and I should like to list and describe some of them as they become evident within the milieu of the school. The first fear is fear of himself. Another one is fear of lack of external control. A third fear the child brings to the adult teacher is what we might call fear of retaliation. In many instances the child is well aware when he misbehaves or misresponds to his environment; when he does, he often fears retaliation or, in cruder terms, punishment by the strong, powerful adult teacher. Many emotionally sick children, alas, see their teachers as little else than punishers, just as they have come to

¹ N. Neubert Jaffa, "The Frequently Absent Child," The Instructor, (February, 1965), p. 25.

look upon parents whose harshness, cruelty, insensitivity, or indifference lead to endless rounds of disruptive or near-disruptive emotional combat in the home. Children who suffer from an unhealthy fear of retaliation almost always see themselves as "bad". A fourth fear which the child projects onto his teacher is the fear that the adult will "let me be bad." Children are wise beyond their years, hence soon lose respect for the teacher who will let them "get away with" things they know they should not do. A fifth fear is the fear of growing up. A sixth fear comprises the child's fear of his own dependency and helplessness. The last fear notable among adolescents is the fear of lack of understanding by the adult.¹

According to Table VI, broken homes were not found to be the cause for a majority of the slow learners in the Barnes Elementary School. Marital status of parents was just about the same as the national average according to the United States Bureau of the Census which found that 80 per cent of children fourteen through seventeen years of age live with both parents.

TABLE VI

MARITAL STATUS OF PARENTS OF SLOW-LEARNERS FOUND IN THE BARNES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Lives with both parents	Lives with one parent	Lives with others
16	2	2

¹Donald B. Rinsley, M.D., Menninger Foundation School of Psychiatry, "The Basic Fears a Child Brings To The Classroom," The Kansas Teacher, (March, 1962), pp. 22-23.

According to Table VII, eleven of the students in the survey or 55 per cent of the slow learners in this survey had never attended any school other than the Barnes Elementary School. Could transfer of schools be a slight cause for 45 per cent of the slow learners in this survey? Of the nine students shown in the table below, who attended more than one school, six have transferred out of the Barnes School or have gone to a trade school. One is still in high school.

TABLE VII
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY SLOW LEARNERS
IDENTIFIED IN THE BARNES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

One school	Two schools	Three schools	Four schools	Five or more schools
11	4	4	0	1

According to Featherstone, there is no fixed level of ability below which a pupil must be called a slow learner. Usually the range is from an intelligence quotient of 74 to 91.

Table VIII shows the intelligence quotient results from the average of the Otis group intelligence test and the Kuhlmann Finch intelligence test, when given by a special testing teacher. Only three or 15 per cent of Barnes's slow learners with an intelligence quotient below 80 were found to be eligible to be classified as maybe needing special

education. One slow learner was taken to the Kansas Neurological Center at Topeka where special tests were given and she was found to be mentally retarded.

TABLE VIII
INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT OF THE TWENTY SLOW LEARNERS
IDENTIFIED IN THE BARNES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Above 109	100-109	90-99	80-89	Below 80
1	4	6	6	3

Table VIII shows that eleven or 55 per cent of the slow learners had intelligence quotients of 90 or above. Because the average school program is adapted to students of average intelligence, it would be reasonable to assume that the 55 per cent had the general intelligence to succeed in the school's program.

Table VIII also shows that six slow learners or 30 per cent had an intelligence quotient of 80 to 89. These six would not be classed as needing special education, but each student in this group would be a student whose mental ability is high enough to justify keeping him in the regular classroom but low enough to give him considerable difficulty in keeping up with the average of the class.

If the school educational program is not wholly responsible for slow learners, then a survey should be made else-

where. Could the time used every week by teachers and pupils in every room doing custodian service, as dusting the room, cleaning venetian blinds, window sills, tops of desks, and dumping pencil sharpeners, contribute to slow learners?

Could the time consumed by teachers and pupils have been used for something more educational to prevent slow learners? An old proverb says, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Burr and others (among them William Coffield, Dean of the School of Education at Kansas State University) had this to say:

The school custodian contributes to better teaching and learning because teachers teach more skillfully and pupils learn more readily when they are comfortable, happy, and satisfied with their environment.¹

¹James B. Burr, William Coffield, Theodore J. Jenson, and Ross L. Neagley, Elementary School Administration, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., p. 256.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey was based upon factual material secured from the literature in the field and upon actual conditions found in the Barnes Elementary School. Statistics for the tables found in this survey were compiled from the school records of the schools where various students attended. The following conclusions were made from this survey.

Since eight pupils were needed as the minimum number in qualifying for special education assistance from the State Department of Education in Kansas and Barnes had only three who might need special education, then Barnes could not include a special education room in its program.

Grade failures were too frequent in the Barnes Elementary School since over 15 per cent had experienced failure. The grades most frequently repeated in the Barnes Elementary School were the first, fifth, and third in that sequence. In Dillon's survey, it was found that the grades most frequently repeated in the elementary school were the first, third, and fourth.

Absence from school was not an acceptable cause for grade failure since only two of the twenty involved had missed more than twenty days in the year that failure took place. Elsbree found that investigators discovered that pupils who missed up to twenty-five days had maintained their regular grade average.

Teacher load may have been a cause for retardation as the average number of students over the last ten-year period was above the recommended maximum for a two grade combination room. According to the Kansas State Department of Public Instruction, the maximum is twenty and Barnes exceeded that number.

This survey found that Kansas showed a yearly decline in the number of non-degree teachers from 49 per cent in 1948 to 7.4 per cent in 1965, while the Barnes Elementary School stayed at 100 per cent non-degree classroom teachers. According to all school records, Barnes Elementary School has never had a degree classroom teacher. Could lack of current college training be a factor contributing to slow learners?

Transfer was not found to be a major factor in pupil failure because over half of the pupils had not attended any school other than the Barnes Elementary School. Only one-fourth had attended more than two schools. Dillon found in a study that approximately two-thirds of school leavers had three or more transfers.

Marital status of parents of slow learners was not found to be a major cause for grade failure since 80 per cent of the children in this survey lived with both parents. This was the same as the national average according to the United States Bureau of the Census.

The following recommendations are offered to help the slow learner and to alleviate the conditions which may have

caused the slow learning:

Because of the ill effects which accompany grade failure, a conference should be held with the child's parents at the beginning of the second semester and evidence of a child's failing work presented. The principal should be notified when a child's grade failure is apparent.

School board policies should be in writing so teachers and principal know what is expected of them. Faculty and board members should formulate a policy on pupil grade failure. One provision should be that no pupil would be retained more than one time.

No new teacher should be hired who doesn't have a degree and all teachers now in the system should annually work toward a degree by attending summer school.

Teacher load should be lightened by dividing the rooms into eight units and employing more classroom teachers to allow more time for individualized instruction to prevent slow learners.

To help parents learn more about their child in school and to interpret the school program to the parents, parent-teacher conferences were started in the fall of 1963. These conferences should be continued and held once in the fall and once in the spring.

Since a majority of the children are not ready to read until the chronological age of six years and six months, the school law should be changed to require a pupil to have

attained his sixth birthday before entering school. A bill has been passed by the Kansas State Legislature to make the change.

Since an improvement in reading ability is nearly always accompanied by a dramatic rise in intelligence quotient level, a better phonetic system to accompany reading should be introduced to carry through grades one to six. More reading equipment should be secured to build reading skills.

The best qualified person in the school district should be chosen as a board member candidate for the new unified school district to pilot the ship of education for Barnes.

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A SURVEY OF SLOW LEARNERS IN
THE BARNES, KANSAS, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

LAWRENCE VERL WURTZ

B. S., Kansas State University, 1956

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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The purpose of this survey was to determine whether a need for a special education room existed in the Barnes Grade School since approximately 15 per cent of the 104 students in grades one through eight had experienced grade failure or had been passed on condition. Kansas law sets the minimum class size at eight pupils and the maximum at fifteen pupils for a special class room.

Other objectives for this survey were: (1) to identify the slow learners, (2) to find causes why they are slow learners, and (3) to find what can be done to correct the causes and to help those already classified as slow learners. This survey of slow learners was limited to include those so classified during the years 1960 to 1965.

To identify the slow learners, individual school cumulative records, school enrollment records and county welfare records of five slow learners whose parents were on welfare, were checked. As the average intelligence quotient helps to identify the slow learner, a special education teacher, trained in testing, gave every pupil in grade one through eight the Otis group intelligence test and the Kuhlmann Finch intelligence test. According to Featherstone, there is no fixed level of intelligence quotient below which a pupil must be called a slow learner. Usually the range is from seventy-four to ninety-one.

Results of the survey showed that the average enrollment in Barnes of all classrooms exceeded the State Department of

Education's recommended maximum of twenty students. The low average for Barnes was 21.6 students for the first and second grade and the high average number of students was 22.9 for the third and fourth grade.

The number of non-degree teachers in Kansas declined from 49 per cent in 1948 to 7.4 per cent in 1965. Barnes Elementary School stayed at 100 per cent non-degree classroom teachers. According to all school records, Barnes Grade School has never had a degree classroom teacher.

The most frequently repeated grades in Barnes were the first, fifth, and third in that sequence, while Dillon's study found grades first, third, and fourth in that order. There were no grade failures in grades sixth, seventh, and eighth.

Absence from school was not an acceptable cause for grade failure since only two of the twenty slow learners missed only twenty days in the year failure took place.

Transfer of schools may have been a cause for nine or 45 per cent of the slow learners. Eleven or 55 per cent had never attended any other school than Barnes.

Marital status of parents of slow learners was not found to be a major cause for grade failure since 80 per cent of the children in this survey lived with both parents.

Over twice as many boys as girls were found to be slow learners. The fourteen to six ratio would probably indicate a greater degree of immaturity usually found in boys when

compared to girls.

The intelligence quotient of eleven or 55 per cent of the slow learners was ninety or above. Since the average school program is adapted to students of average intelligence, the 55 per cent had the general intelligence to succeed in the school's program. Six slow learners or 30 per cent had an intelligence quotient of eighty to eighty-nine. These six are students whose mental ability is high enough to justify keeping them in the regular classroom but low enough to give them considerable difficulty in keeping up with the average of the class. Only three or 15 per cent had an intelligence quotient below eighty. One slow learner was taken to the Kansas Neurological Center in Topeka where she was found to be mentally retarded.

Since eight pupils were needed as the minimum number in qualifying for special education assistance from the State Department of Education and Barnes had only three who might need special training, then Barnes could not include a special education room in its program.