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A Description and Analysis of a Nongraded Program in the Primary Grades in Moses Lake, Washington

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A DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF A NONGRADED PROGRAM
IN THE PRIMARY GRADES IN MOSES LAKE, WASHINGTON

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Melrhea Noble
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THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE
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Donald J. Murphy
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Classifying pupils into groups for effective teaching and learning is an ever present problem of education. The purpose of grouping is to secure an orderly progress through school for children who grow as individuals but must be taught in groups, to place each child in a school situation best suited to his total growth. Essentially, grouping is the organization of classes to facilitate learning. Educational authorities point out that in a democratic society each individual has a unique contribution to make. Because of this, each should develop his full potential.

That children are different has become an accepted fact. The nature and extent of these differences have been the subject of much systematic research. In order to provide for individual differences in children, instruction must be individualized. It is Bond's belief that:

The adjustment of instruction to individual needs is more than a method, it is an attitude--an attitude in which the teacher assumes that each child has the right to progress as rapidly as he is capable of doing, that each child can expect the school to provide for his rate of learning, be it slow or fast, and that each child can expect the school to study him as an individual and help him when he is in difficulty (2:60).

In order to make wider provision for individual

differences and thus improve instruction, the Moses Lake Schools initiated a different system for classifying pupils in the three primary grades of the Peninsula and Knolls Vista Elementary Schools. Beginning in September, 1959, pupils in grades one, two, and three were grouped according to reading achievement as determined by the results of the Gates Primary Reading Test. No change was made in the present system of grouping in the six other elementary schools in the district.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was to describe this system of classification and analyze the procedures with reference to the following educational practices: (1) provision for individual differences, (2) ability grouping, and (3) curriculum offerings.

Importance of the study. Today there is widespread concern to develop quality education. There is a correspondingly widespread experimentation in various types of grouping, classroom organization, methods of staff utilization, and curriculum organization. Any deviation from traditional curriculum policies is referred to as an "experiment." Actually, what is being done is more correctly described as "trying out" something.

Because of the extreme difficulty of setting up conditions necessary for scientifically sound experimentation in the average schools, much of the "trying out" is referred to as "action research." Many studies are being conducted in this area in an effort to determine whether or not any positive gains are being made. Whether or not these innovations are going to produce a better quality of education can be determined only if they are examined and analyzed. It is important that every program be subjected to critical appraisal.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Heterogeneous grouping. For the purposes of this study, heterogeneous grouping will refer to pupil classification by age-grade placement.

Homogeneous grouping. Homogeneous grouping will designate the practice of bringing together children of like mental ability. Theoretically, in a homogeneous group, every pupil in the group is equal to every other pupil in age, ability, industry, previous experience, and in all other factors which affect learning. Grouping children homogeneously on the basis of a single criterion does not produce a group as homogeneous as one selected by other criteria. Children may be alike in one dimension and very

unlike in many others. We have not necessarily created a homogeneous group when we have identified and segregated groups of gifted and mentally retarded children. It is evident, then, that the term, homogeneous grouping, is a relative one.

Ability grouping. Ability grouping, a refinement of homogeneous grouping, is the separation of children in a given grade into groups according to their ability to attain in a single subject. Since reading occupies such a prominent position in the curriculum of the primary grades and since mastery of the reading skills is so important to future success in school, ability to attain in reading was the criterion used for classification under the new system.

Nongraded program. The term nongraded program will refer to classification of pupils by removing grade levels from at least two grade levels and allowing children to proceed at their own rate. In Chapter IV, reports of various research will refer to the "ungraded primary" and the "primary cycle." Since the basic organization described is essentially the same, the three terms will be used interchangeably.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NONGRADED SCHOOL

The nongraded school is a significant change in school organization. Designed to implement continuous pupil progress, it might be defined as a school plan in which a child achieves or learns at a rate in keeping with his capabilities. It recognizes the sequential development of skills and the importance of success or mastery at each stage. Individual standards are related to the potential of each pupil. In order to understand the implications of the nongraded school objectives, it might be helpful to review briefly what preceded it and how it came to be.

Children in the public schools in the United States have always been taught in groups, but the schools have not always been graded. Both the Dame schools of the seventeenth century and the "district" schools of the eighteenth century were without grade classification. In 1848 the Quincy Grammar School was established, and although it was not the first graded-type school, it set a pattern of organization that has persisted until the present day. Materials were presented to children in a quantity considered appropriate for a year's work. Each grade had a prescribed body of subject matter to master, and a child was to master it

before he could proceed to the next grade.

This type of school organization grew out of five major educational developments in the early part of the nineteenth century: (1) the movement toward public, state-supported education; (2) the practical success and low cost of the monitorial system; (3) the demand for trained teachers from a growing number of "normal" schools; and (5) the appearance of graded textbooks in all areas of instruction. This type of school organization grew because it seemed to be the best means of providing equal educational opportunities at that particular time.

By 1860, nearly all schools were graded and school organization had moved from no system to all system. Graded textbooks, graded classes, graded content, and graded teachers gave rigidity and regimentation to the organization. The evils of such a program soon became apparent, and it was not long before critical educators began to deplore the lock-step pattern of the graded structure. Many plans were introduced in an attempt to recognize and provide for individual differences. Most of them, such as the Dalton Plan, the Winnetka Plan, the St. Louis Plan, the Pueblo Plan, and many others sought to modify the arbitrariness of grade standards rather than to eliminate grades, but most of the innovations lasted only as long as their sponsors.

Just as the graded-school was a product of its time,

growing as it did from social pressures of the early nineteenth century, so also is the nongraded school a product of our time. The philosophical and psychological thought of the early twentieth century provided an environment for the growth away from the rigidity and lock-step approach of the graded school. Four main influences brought about a critical examination of the graded system: (1) the beginning of measurement and research into child development; (2) research on non-promotion; (3) change in educational learning theories with less emphasis on memorization and more on the development of critical thinking; and (4) Dewey's emphasis on social adjustment, with social problems as subject matter and problem solving as the method.

Research into child development and individual differences has produced a more widespread effect on curriculum than any other comparable development. According to Otto (15:388), "Individual differences are a fact and differentiated education is an inescapable corollary to the acceptance of individual differences." Goodlad summarizes his findings on the realities of pupil variation as follows:

1. Children enter the first grade with a range of from three to four years in their readiness to profit from a "graded minimum essentials" concept of schooling.
2. This initial spread in abilities increases over the years so that it is approximately double this amount by the time children approach the end of the elementary school.

3. The achievement range among pupils begins to approximate the range in intellectual readiness to learn soon after first-grade children are exposed to reasonably normal school instruction.
4. Differing abilities, interests, and opportunities among children cause the range in certain specific attainments to surpass the range in general achievement.
5. Individual children's achievement patterns differ markedly from learning area to learning area.
6. By the time children reach the intermediate elementary grades the range in most intellectual readiness to learn and in most areas of achievement is as great as or greater than, the number designating the grade level (12:27-28).

This wide range of differences among students of the same chronological age and the differences in understanding and achievement from subject to subject for a single student do not lend themselves to easy compression into the lock-step of grade levels. In order to free the individual to proceed at his own rate, grade barriers were removed and the non-graded school came into existence. It is founded on the principle of individual differences. The removal of grade barriers was considered a necessary condition for full development of individual capacities.

While there is some difference of opinion about the exact definition of a nongraded school, the following characteristics have been identified as fundamental:

1. A philosophy consistent with the findings of research relative to the continuous growth of children, and to individual differences.

2. Placement of children in classes with those who are their social, emotional, physical, and intellectual peers.
3. Ability grouping for instruction within each class.
4. Flexibility of grouping, permitting children to move from one group to another whenever change in placement seems advisable.
5. Concept of periodic promotion replaced by one of continuous growth, uninterrupted by artificial promotion dates. Change in placement may take place at any time of the year.
6. Individual standards commensurate with individual abilities, needs, and interests rather than arbitrary grade standards.
7. An extensive measurement and evaluation program providing information relative to pupil capacity and achievement toward the standards set for one of his ability.
8. Extensive records of the continuous growth of children in each area of the curriculum.
9. Possibly a change from the traditional grade names to some other nomenclature for the identification of each class of children.

10. Ideally, the teacher remains with a class of children for more than one year.

Advocates of the nongraded program list the following organizational advantages:

1. It provides an unbroken learning continuum through which pupils progress.
2. It encourages continuous individual pupil progress.
3. It encourages flexibility of pupil grouping.

A survey of schools using some form of a nongraded program during the 1957-58 school year found several hundred schools operating in from forty to fifty communities (8:222). In 1960 approximately 550 nongraded schools were operating in eighty nine communities (11:262). These figures suggest that the movement toward the nongraded pattern of school organization is on the upswing.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF THE MOSES LAKE PROGRAM

I. ORIGIN AND OBJECTIVES

The nongraded primary program in the two elementary schools in Moses Lake was initiated in the fall of 1959, at which time it was referred to as a Grouping Plan for Reading Improvement. The term "nongraded" was not used to describe the program until 1961.

The program originated from the desire expressed by teachers to find ways of becoming more effective in meeting the needs of children within the "self-contained" classroom, the type of organization prevailing in the district. Various types of grouping programs currently in use throughout the state were investigated and discussed at teachers' meetings, as well as in informal groups. Visitations were made by both teachers and administrators to other school districts. Although, in the final analysis, it was an administrative decision to initiate the new program, that decision was based largely on teacher recommendation. After consideration of many factors, it was decided that reading achievement should be the basis of grouping. The reading area was chosen over other criteria because of its prime importance

to the academic achievement of all children. Teachers thought they could meet better the instructional needs of the children in reading if there were not such a wide range of achievement within each room.

The following objectives for the nongraded program were developed out of the basic philosophy of the Moses Lake District, "to take the child where he is and guide him toward optimum growth":

1. To provide each child with the basic skills of reading.
2. To facilitate optimum social and emotional growth.
3. To develop leadership and the feeling of security in each child in the program.
4. To facilitate the techniques of good teaching in all areas of the curriculum.
5. To challenge each individual and enrich the academic program for each group.
6. To allow children to progress at a rate more in keeping with their general ability.
7. To instill in teachers the importance of identification of children and to gear the program to meet individual needs.
8. To carry out this program incorporating the desirable features of the existing reading program.
9. To provide materials compatible with the child's achievement level.

A comprehensive orientation program was conducted so that each participating teacher fully understood the philosophy and mechanics of the program. Regularly scheduled joint teachers' meetings of the staffs of the two schools provided opportunities to discuss common problems. A steering committee planned the agenda for these meetings.

A study group was formed by the participating teachers. This group met regularly with the following purposes in mind:

1. To exchange ideas, techniques, and materials.
2. To study pertinent problems, analyzing these problems in the light of what is best for children.
3. To discuss and recommend changes in procedures relative to the program.
4. To receive information from resource people.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL SCHEME

Prior to the initiation of the nongraded program, the pupils were grouped heterogeneously, with the resultant wide range of achievement within each room. In each classroom, the pupils were organized into three reading levels according to reading ability, with a separate series of basic reading texts reserved for each group as they progressed through the grades. The teacher might select a reader at or below the grade level for the group she was working with, but it was not consistent with district policy to use readers

above grade level with any group. Many supplemental readers were at her disposal for this purpose. Primarily, this program was of greatest benefit to the low or middle achieving group, although many teachers attempted to enrich the reading offering for the high achiever, mainly through the use of library resource materials.

Grouping levels. In the spring of 1959, tests were given to facilitate grouping of pupils for the fall term, when the new program went into operation. The Metropolitan Readiness Test was given to all kindergarten children in the two schools. The Gates Primary Reading Test was given to all pupils in the first, second, and third grades. In the fall when school began, children entering for the first time were given these same tests. Children who entered school after registration were not tested, but were put into the average room temporarily, then reassigned, if necessary, on the basis of teacher judgment. The three groups in each grade level were designated as top group, middle group, and low group, and within each of these groups the pupils were again divided into three reading levels. Instead of the original three reading levels per grade there were now nine. This refinement in grouping would make it possible to approach individualized instruction, since as Symonds says, "Instruction in groups can proceed

most effectively only when each group consists of individuals at the same stage of learning in the material being covered" (26:88).

In 1961, the transition was made to "nongraded." As a result of group study, a ten level program was initiated to further refine the grouping program. (See Figure 1). Levels were determined by the level of reader in which the child was reading at the time of the transition. Nomenclature of the program was, in fact, the only real change. The philosophy and procedure for the most part remained the same.

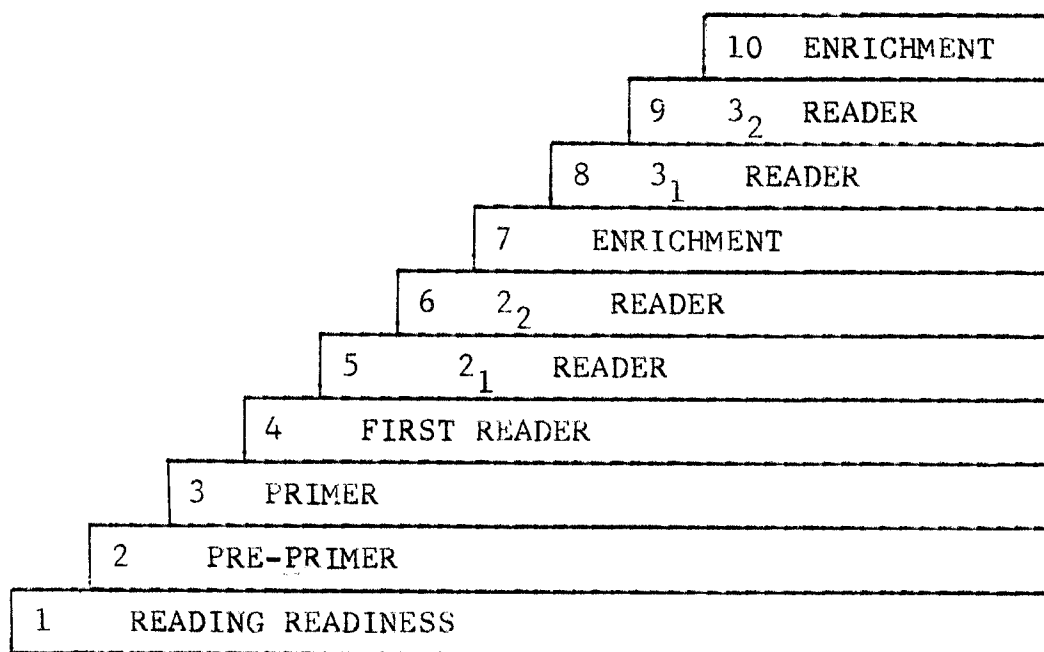


Figure 1. Ten reading levels of nongraded program.

Flexibility. Flexibility is an essential characteristic of the program in both teacher assignment and pupil placement. Teachers were given their first assignment in the fall of 1959 after an individual conference with the principal. In succeeding years, it was agreed that teachers would rotate from one group to another so that no teacher would always have the same level of ability.

A pupil may move from one group to another as his rate of progress changes. If a pupil falls behind or goes ahead of his group, he may be moved to the next higher or lower group, either within his room or between rooms at the same grade level. This movement is shown in the chart below.

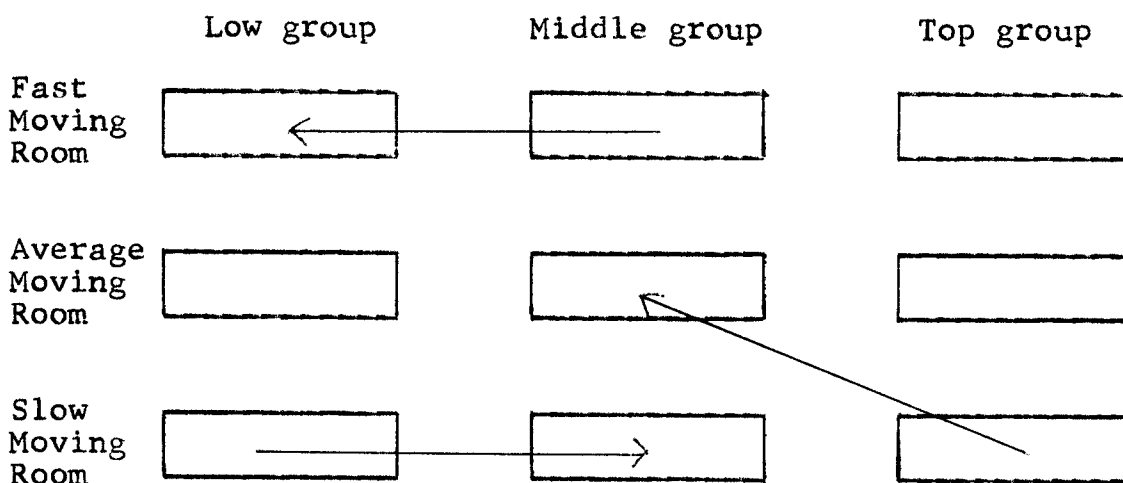


Figure 2. Movement of pupils from one group to another

When a change of rooms is being considered for a child, he goes as a visitor to the new room. If, after a conference between the teachers and the principal, the change seems to

be advantageous to the child, he is transferred to the new room and a letter is sent to his parents stating the reasons for change.

III. PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS

Public communication. No wide publicity was given to the program in its initial stages. Since it was introduced in a sincere effort to meet the needs of children rather than to "follow a trend," every effort was made to avoid any appearance of "band-wagon thinking and action." It is well known, however, that the success of any innovation depends in part on its acceptance by parents of the children involved. Therefore, an active program of instruction and information was pursued to let parents know the educational values of such a program. Parents were notified of pupil placement during the first Parent Teacher Conference. In addition to individual conferences with parents, the program was explained to PTA groups of each building, and parents were invited to attend informational meetings in each of the schools. There was evidence of considerable interest on the part of the parents, and no serious opposition was encountered. Bulletins were sent home, articles were submitted and printed in the local newspaper, and presentations were made to the school board, to area principals' groups, and at W.O.R.D. Conferences.

Method of reporting pupil progress. Reporting to parents in the nongraded program is a combination of parent-teacher conferences and report card, the same procedure used by all elementary schools throughout the district. The following chart shows the combinations for the four reporting periods:

Reporting Periods			
First nine weeks	Second nine weeks	Third nine weeks	Fourth nine weeks
report cards	report cards	report cards	report cards
conferences for everyone	supplement	conferences for new students and those with special problems	supplement
supplement		supplement	

Figure 3. Combinations for four reporting periods.

In addition to the regular report card, the nongraded schools sent home an extra "slip" intended as a supplement. In case of transfer to a conventional school, the grade placement is indicated on the supplement.

Retention procedures are no different in the non-graded program from those used in the other elementary schools in the district.

IV. CURRICULUM CHANGES

There were some changes in the curriculum. The same basic textbooks in reading were used, and generally the same program was followed. The following changes were noted:

1. In addition to wide horizontal enrichment in reading, vertical progress was provided for by permitting teachers to use readers above their designated level. For example, pupils in Enrichment level number seven would not be limited to readers designated as 2_2 , and those in Enrichment level number ten could proceed beyond readers labeled 3_2 . This change was a significant one and in keeping with the non-graded philosophy.
2. There was wide discussion and sharing of ideas and techniques for classroom presentation.
3. An arithmetic textbook was adopted for use in the primary grades. However, this was a system wide change, not peculiar to the nongraded program.
4. Horizontal enrichment was characteristic in the areas of social studies and science. According to teacher comment, "much, much more could be

done with the top group in these areas."

Rather than adding new units of study, those already established as part of the existing curriculum were explored more thoroughly.

On the whole, then, there were no widespread curriculum changes, but allowing use of materials previously reserved for a particular grade level was significant.

V. EVALUATION OF STUDENT PROGRESS

The evaluation of student progress is largely subjective. As a guide for the teacher in this type of evaluation, the study group prepared a Check List. This instrument lists the Vocabulary, Word Attack Skills, Comprehension, Work Habits, Language Skills, and Appreciations each child should develop before moving to the next level. A formal check list for each child, to be placed in his permanent record folder, is not kept because of the time-consuming clerical work involved. The teachers make use of such informal objective tests as those in current weekly publications. The services of the school psychologist for individual testing and standardized achievement tests for group testing are available for any teacher desiring to use them.

Objective tests are given in May of each year, when the Gates Primary Reading Test is administered to all the pupils in the program. The results of these tests, combined

with teacher opinion, are the bases for the assignment of pupils to a new level for the coming school year.

VI. EVALUATION OF THE TOTAL PROGRAM

The following evaluation of the program was given by the supervising principals to the Board of Education:

After two years in the program, the progress of students, acceptance of parents, and the general feeling of teachers has been very gratifying.

Many very favorable outcomes of this program cannot be tested on a standardized testing instrument at the primary level. It is difficult to assess progress objectively in the areas of leadership, social adjustment, and enrichment. However, on the basis of teacher opinion, much has been accomplished in these areas.

The teacher growth which has taken place has been felt by both teachers themselves and their supervising principals.

Plans are now being made for further study and refinement of the present program (1:12-13).

CHAPTER IV

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a lack of objective evaluation and experimental research on nongraded programs or variations of nongrading. Nongrading is supported largely by plausible sounding claims. Thus, according to Carbone: "the effectiveness of nongraded organization is yet to be empirically established" (4:83). A recent study by Carbone, probably the most definitive to date, established three hypotheses for investigation:

There are no significant differences in the achievement of comparable groups of pupils who have attended graded and nongraded primary schools.

There are no significant differences in the mental health of comparable groups of pupils who have attended graded and nongraded primary schools.

There are no identifiable differences in the instructional practices of teachers in graded and nongraded primary schools (4:85).

For comparison of comparable groups, Carbone drew a sample of 122 matched pairs from schools in four districts. Two of the districts used a nongraded type of primary organization; two of them had a traditionally graded structure. They were chosen because of similarities in population, socio-economic structure, and geographic location. Pupils in the sample were in the fourth, fifth, and sixth

grades, and all in the experimental group had been in the nongraded program for at least three years.

Individual test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were used for comparison of achievement, and five factors on The Mental Health Analysis of the California Test Bureau were used for the analysis of adjustment. Further information on pupil adjustment was obtained by using an experimental instrument known as the Semantic Differential. This instrument contains a list of twenty-five polar word pairs that a respondent may use in describing a person or concept. A questionnaire designed to provide evidence on instructional practices was developed and administered to all teachers in the primary classes in both graded and nongraded schools. Results indicated that in all areas of achievement, vocabulary, reading comprehension, language, work-study skills, arithmetic, and in total achievement, graded pupils scored significantly higher than nongraded pupils.

There was no evidence that pupils who had attended these nongraded primary schools achieved at a higher level during their fourth, fifth, or sixth years than pupils who had attended the graded schools. On the contrary, the differences were all in favor of the graded pupils. However, both graded and nongraded pupils were achieving above national norms in all measures of achievement.

In four of the mental health factors, there was no significant difference in the adjustment of the graded and nongraded pupils. These four factors were freedom from emotional instability, freedom from feelings of inadequacy, freedom from nervous manifestations, and personal relationships. However, in the fifth factor, social participation, graded pupils scored significantly higher than nongraded.

Information on the Semantic Differential indicated that nongraded pupils tended to describe their teachers with the more favorable word, selecting such words as bright, smooth, sweet, relaxed, big, quiet, interesting, soft, good. However, this instrument does not have an established validity.

Results from the questionnaire indicated that teachers in the nongraded schools operated in much the same way as in graded schools. They instructed groups of about the same size, used similar books and materials, evaluated pupils in similar ways, and were equally aware of pupil differences.

Carbone lists the implications of his findings as follows:

First, it is not realistic to expect improved academic achievement and personal adjustment in pupils merely on the basis of a change in organizational structure. Second, the attainment of high pupil achievement and good mental health is not a unique result of nongrading These goals can also be attained in an elementary school organized under the conventional graded system. . . .

A third extremely important implication is suggested lest readers see this evidence as an indictment of the whole concept of nongrading. It seems clear that if any new form of school organization is to produce the benefits that its advocates envision, it must be accompanied by appropriate adaptations in the instructional practices of teachers. Changes in organizational structure alone are not enough (4:87).

As if in answer to the report of the Carbone study, three months later, Goodlad reported a "Self-Appraisal in Nongraded Schools: A Survey of Findings and Perceptions." In explanation he says: "It is a commentary on the respondent's subjective assessments of the present strengths and weaknesses of the nongraded school" (11:261).

In reporting on pupil achievement, he says:

When any summary statement was made on differences between graded and nongraded classes, the statements indicated differences that favored the nongraded classes. Wherever statistical data permitted statements on the significance of the differences, a significant difference was rarely reported that was not in favor of the nongraded groups (11:263).

In the area of pupil adjustment, respondents reported that slow pupils profited emotionally by the removal of the stigma of non-promotion; brighter children were no longer bored because of a lack of challenging work. There was less vandalism and a reduction in absences and truancy. Several respondents referred to the more responsible and more mature behavior of pupils in nongraded classes.

Goodlad makes these generalizations on the impact of nongrading on teachers:

There is greater positive emotional involvement in teaching on the part of teachers who participate in the development of a nongraded plan. Teachers in nongraded classes engage in more planning and more co-operative study than they did in nongraded schools. Nongraded teachers appear to feel more relaxed about their work (11:265).

In the area of curriculum development, where Carbone (4:85) reported that teachers "operated about the same way," Goodlad reports that there has been notable increase in the amount and the effectiveness of staff activity in fundamental curriculum revision. Among the activities cited were development of a new curriculum in the social studies, more individualized teaching in arithmetic and reading, increased use of unit teaching, decreased use of single-text adoptions, intensive effort to make enrichment experiences more appropriate, increased attention to grouping practices, deeper concentration on fundamentals, and preparation of materials more suitable for slow and fast learners and for children of limited backgrounds (11:268).

A comparison of two nongraded classes with two graded classes was conducted in Bellevue, Washington, after the nongraded program had been in operation for a period of three years. The results show "greater achievement in reading" by the nongraded pupils even though they had slightly lower chronological age, mental age, and primary reading test scores. Subjective evidence revealed greater individualization of instruction and greater development of "powers of critical observation by the teachers." Although

"no measures of frustration" were administered, the study reports that pupil tensions were lowered and pupils and teachers obtained more satisfaction from their work (6:11).

Skapski reports from Burlington, Vermont, where the school has had an ungraded primary reading program while instruction in other subjects has been carried on under the traditional graded system. In comparing achievement in reading with achievement in arithmetic, she found reading achievement to be considerably higher. She also compared reading achievement in the ungraded primary school with two other comparable schools in the same district and found "the reading of the children in the school with the ungraded reading program was significantly higher than that of the children in the other two schools combined, at the one percent level of confidence" (17:43). She concluded:

The ungraded primary then, benefits all the children. Gifted children are not allowed to underachieve, nor are slow learners frustrated by repeated failure. All children progress steadily from level to level, each child at his own rate (17:45).

A similar study was designed to evaluate the "primary cycle" in a Flint, Michigan, school. Test scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, Elementary Battery, of 68 pupils who had been in the "primary cycle" for three full years were compared with scores of all third graders in the public schools of Flint. Results show that in all language arts and reading areas, pupils in the "primary cycle" scored

significantly higher than pupils in the traditional graded plan. Subjective evaluation by questionnaire showed that 99 per cent of the parents favored the plan because of better attitudes toward school and increased interest exhibited by their children. The teachers were enthusiastic; they liked the smaller range of abilities to deal with; they thought it removed pressure from both pupils and teachers (13:78).

Two surveys of nongraded schools reported reduced tensions in students, increased teacher awareness of student individuality, and, from the involvement of the community in the change process, increased understanding of the school.

Teachers in nongraded schools surveyed by Kennedy reported freedom from fear of encroaching on "material reserved for the next grade," and thus freedom to move bright children forward with more stimulating tasks (8:223). In Milwaukee, 99 students in four nongraded schools were compared with 123 students in four graded schools. Test data in reading and personality adjustment, the two major areas reported, slightly favored the nongraded group even though these students were a little younger and tested slightly lower in mental maturity (8:222).

In Appleton, Wisconsin, ten fourth grade groups were compared with three intermediate nongraded groups

at the beginning of their fourth year in school. The median overall achievement grade placement scores were 4.57 for the graded groups in contrast to 4.83 for the 3 nongraded groups (8:223).

The opinions and observations given below might be considered a body of criteria from which generalizations will be drawn to serve as guidelines for an analysis of the nongraded program in Moses Lake. Since we are concerned with three areas, provision for individual differences, curriculum offerings, and ability grouping, some current comments in those areas will be examined.

In Olsen's opinion:

The time has come to accept individual differences in children as a reality and to work with them. Resistance to easy modifiability is man's insurance of stability, and the possibility of change is his hope of the future. Individual differences among people are a precious asset. A constructive program to meet them promises large returns (14:43).

Wagner observes:

The philosophy underlying the continuous growth plan appears extremely sound. The curriculum is adjusted to the present achievement level of the pupil, and each new year, he begins at the level of his current progress (19:595).

The reality of individual differences has implications for both the teacher and pupil, according to Williams:

The teacher needs to know more about individuality so that the concrete evidences of it can be tolerated, dealt with, and more nearly understood. There is also the desirability of children at all levels becoming acquainted with their own and their schoolmates' differences (20:145).

Frazier suggests that we need to broaden our concept of individual differences; that in providing for individual differences we need to think beyond the rate of learning, the quantity, and selectivity, and consider learning to be multidimensional, limitless, and personal (7:263).

Otto believes that an organizational scheme does not necessarily provide for individual differences:

In some ways we go all out accepting and planning for individual differences; we introduce ability grouping schemes, ungraded primary schools Our hearts and knowledge are with individual differences, but our school practices harbor many inconsistencies. If we accept the principle of individual differences we must also accept the principle of differentiated education. Equality in education ought to mean equal opportunity, not identical content or attainment. Until we operate schools with full acceptance of the principle of differentiated education, we will continue to tinker with all kinds of mechanical devices, such as ungraded schools, grouping and marking schemes, and so on (15:388).

In the area of curriculum development, Davis writes:

The individualization of the curriculum for the variability in any group contributes more significantly to academic progress than the criterion used to comprise the group (5:212).

Sand views the relationship of nongrading to curriculum development thusly:

The nongraded school supports the principle of longitudinal development of children and search for organizing elements of the curriculum. The substance of the longitudinal view is a set of threads or organizing elements both of behavior and content running vertically through the curriculum around which learning activities can be organized. The nongraded school yields a structure worthy of further study to determine methods of providing continuous pupil progress along the organizing threads of the curriculum (16:231).

It is Frazier's opinion 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. However, some ungraded primary programs 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 (7:267).

Goodlad questions:

Do teachers behave any differently under one plan of organization than the other? Nongraded schools are in part an attempt to provide organizationally for individual differences. But perhaps teachers in nongraded schools "grade" their classroom activities anyway and end up with the same old rigidity under new labels. We need to know more about the extent to which changes in school structure presumably designed to free teachers to be more creative actually lead to more creative practices in the classroom. A new pattern may be ingenious, but new patterns in themselves do not guarantee the improvement of instructional practices (10:125).

Research on ability grouping, one of the more controversial issues of classroom organization in recent years, is summarized by Goodlad:

The evidence slightly favors ability grouping in regard to academic achievement Teachers tend to react more favorably to teaching groups in which the heterogeneity has been somewhat reduced than to teaching groups selected at random (8:224).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I. ANALYSIS OF THE MOSES LAKE PROGRAM

From the comments given in the previous chapter regarding the three areas with which this study is concerned, the following guidelines for analyzing the Moses Lake program have been drawn:

1. Provision for individual differences is a necessary part of a good instructional program.
2. Nongrading has implications for further exploration of the concept of individual differences.
3. Practice in providing for individual differences should be consistent with theory.
4. Change in organizational structure should be accompanied by appropriate adaptations in instructional practices in the classroom.
5. New organizational patterns in and of themselves do not guarantee the improvement of instructional practices.
6. Further research is needed to determine whether or not teachers behave differently under one plan or organization than under another.

7. There is a question as to whether the nongraded program is merely a "proliferation" of levels still defined by closely graded teaching materials.
8. Nongrading has implications for further curriculum changes.
9. Ability grouping is an accepted and sometimes favored method of classroom organization.

An examination of the Moses Lake program in the light of these guidelines would indicate that it is based on sound educational practices in attempting to provide for individual differences, and that grouping by ability is the favored method. Teachers are actively involved in planning this program and in carrying it out. From the activities reported earlier and the teacher growth observed by the supervising principals, it would seem that teachers behave somewhat differently under the new plan.

It is possible that further development is indicated in the areas of curriculum change, the study of individual differences, and the appropriate adaptation of instructional practices in the classroom. An actual study of classroom practices has not been made. There is also the question of "proliferation" of levels while subject matter remains graded.

The question now arises as to whether the apparent

success of the program should be attributed to the organizational change or to other factors. According to Brickell, any instructional innovation seems to be distinctly better to the people using it than what they were doing before. In his survey of fifteen hundred of the most promising recent innovations in New York State, he found that almost anything that was new seemed to work better. It was possible to find two school systems which had in effect "traded" programs in that each adopted a program the other had discarded. Both were likely to have reported better results.

He reported that some people think that it is the change itself that is stimulating. Others think that when teachers are involved in planning a new program and putting it into effect, they are determined to make it succeed.

Brickell also points out another factor he considers to be even more powerful. "The attention, encouragement, and recognition given to teachers by people outside the classroom during the introduction of new programs are the strongest causes of their success" (3:35).

II. SUMMARY

There is evidence in many areas that the program is highly successful. Teachers are enthusiastic about it. In their opinion they can do a better job of teaching. Teacher growth has been felt by the teachers and by their

supervising principals. Response of parents is favorable, and discussion of the program has stimulated increased interest in the schools. Whatever the reason, there is a feeling in both Knolls Vista and Peninsula schools that this innovation is good. It is true that this is a subjective judgment, but it cannot be ignored. This feeling has been felt throughout the district and has helped to create a more favorable climate for educational experimentation. Whatever its limitations, the nongraded program in Moses Lake would appear to have made a contribution to quality education.

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APPENDIX

PENINSULA SCHOOL

ACHIEVEMENT UNLIMITED

A
NON-GRADED PROGRAM

10	ENRICHMENT
9	3 ₂ READER
8	3 ₁ READER
7	ENRICHMENT
6	2 ₂ READER
5	2 ₁ READER
4	FIRST READER
3	PRIMER
2	PRE-PRIMER
1	READING READINESS

Dear Parents:

Many of you have questions regarding the progression of your children in the "non-graded" program being developed in our school. This slip is intended as a supplement to the regular report card and is an indication of your child's adjustment. There are ten steps in the program and the level has been checked showing where your youngster is at this time in reference to the program.

_____ is in _____ year in program
(excluding kindergarten) and at level _____ of this program.

_____ progress is _____ for children _____ age.

_____ is making _____ progress when compared to
_____ ability.

In the event of transfer to another school this youngster
should be placed in grade _____.

Teacher

COMMENTS: