

CAN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS BEST ADJUST  
to  
EACH CHILD?

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The first settlers in the United States were from England. Thus, American education acquired an English heritage. The home and church, rather than the state, were primarily responsible for education. Education was meager at this time. Often the children were taught in the homes of their teachers, or in their own homes by their parents.

Until trade and industry became important, the religious influence in education was the dominating influence. Schools tend to reflect the conditions and beliefs of society. The development of elementary education during colonial times illustrates this idea.

Due partly to the Lancastrian System, the emphasis in education began to shift from the education of a few to the education of many. Numerous towns had a one-room district school though larger towns had bigger schools. The school program became more diverse than in previous schools. Certain accomplishments were deemed appropriate at certain levels and the emphasis was on subject matter. Some of this ordering and regimentation began to appear in the Lancaster Schools. Consequently, as the advantages of smaller classrooms with a single teacher for each age group were recognized, the graded system began to take effect. The Quincy School was recognized as the first full-fledged graded school. This system led to rapid standardization of text books, subject matter, and teacher education.

However, learning does not follow a logical sequence. It is a relatively unorganized process. The organization comes in the purpose of the learner. Schools have the responsibility for all children, recognizing, accepting, and providing for their individual differences. A sequence which is logical for one child may not be for another.

Many experts in the field of education began to question the graded system and sought to develop alternatives. It was felt that each child should be considered more individually than in terms of generalities.

One alternative was the child-centered school. Children's daily experiences, both in school and out, were considered a great source of education. Because children were to learn by doing, lessons were developed from objects rather than on objects. Children learned to live by daily participation in the responsibilities of life.

At about the same time, other plans were being developed to consider individual differences of children. There were programs to take out the slow learner and offer additional instruction. The gifted were offered advanced programs. Various types of individualized programs were established. These programs helped children of varying abilities move ahead unhampered by strict grade expectations. This helped pave the way for nongraded situations.

Although ability grouping has gained wide acceptance all over the United States, much criticism has accompanied it. Many feel that there is a great overlapping of children's

abilities. A group which appears to be homogeneous at one point may vary quickly at another point. Others feel that the attitudes of teachers become keyed to a certain level.

Another popular trend in elementary school organization is the nongraded program. This is simply a plan whereby children between kindergarten and sixth grade, (or possibly only to third grade), are grouped together on the basis of achievement. In the nongraded system, there is no question of failure since achievement is measured on the basis of the individual's ability to cover the required materials at his own rate. Continuous progress, related to a child's ability rather than to numerical grade standards, is desirable.

Another improvement toward the more accurate grade placement of elementary school children is to rely on their behavior age rather than on their chronological age. When children begin school before they are ready, they are often thrown into automatic promotion. Every child at six is not ready for first grade. Perhaps for some, especially boys, seven is a better age to begin first grade. Readiness for learning is not determined by age in years. Each child should be placed in an environment which will provide for the best stimulation and opportunity for growth.

Individuality need not be lost in grouping. If groups are flexible and adaptable then children will fit into the groups comfortably and securely and continuous growth will be achieved.