

A SURVEY OF SOME APPLICATIONS
of
THE UNGRADED PRIMARY UNIT
FOR THE RIDGEFIELD, CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this study is four-fold: (1) to determine why such plans were instituted, (2) to discover where such plans are in operation, (3) to discuss the inherent advantages of such plans and (4) to assess their effectiveness in present practice. The Primary Unit differs from the traditional school organization of the early years because it is ungraded and promotions of the usual type are eliminated. By flexible grouping and curriculum, and with emphasis on continuous progress, the unit organization is geared to the needs and interests of all school beginners.

From our studies we have found certain similarities existed. Continuous progress, related to a child's ability rather than numerical-grade standards, is fundamental to this type of plan. Progress is in terms of reading levels. In the ungraded system there is no question of failure for achievement is measured on the basis of the individual's ability to cover the required reading materials at his own rate. Two other areas which are considered in most of the literature, pertain to the need for parents to understand the plan and participate in the function thereof. Careful records must be kept by the teacher. There must be continuous evaluation of the system itself as to its progress and its merit.

Check lists may be used to show a pupil's progress in skills, habits and attitudes, also in social maturity. The form adopted should be drawn up by the faculty, including suggestions made by the parents and possibly the pupils. Conferences with parents should be held twice a year, one in the first semester and one in the middle of the second semester, and a report to parents at the end of each quarter. In this way parents are able to follow the achievement of their child.

The reasons for adopting the Primary Unit in Ridgefield were several. Many members of the Veterans Park Faculty felt that the school was not meeting the needs of all the pupils. The groups which were suffering the most were the rapid-learners or gifted children and the children with ability who were late in maturing and developing. The needs of the so-called average child and the slow-learner were being met more adequately. Some children mature and develop slowly. These are the ones who often become the repeaters and are subject to the "rehash" of the same materials. The so-called average child fares the best, but has been penalized because of the amount of time a teacher may devote to the slow-learner. The rapid learner, it was believed, was being held back due to the fact that the teacher generally has had children of too wide a range of abilities and achievements. Time and opportunity were lacking for the regular classroom teacher to develop special methods and materials suited to the teaching of the gifted and, therefore, these children were not getting the enriched program which they need. The faculty in general felt that the school

was not carrying out its basic philosophy which had been defined some years earlier and stressed among other things, educating a child within his capacities but to his potential, seeing him as an individual interacting with his environment, constructing a curriculum to meet the student's needs, individualizing methods, and developing the child's ability to work with others.

The procedure for grouping is based upon the recommendation of the teacher, after observation of the child, and testing and recommendations of the staff and psychologist in the Ridgefield Public Schools.

The Primary Plan has been tried so far in enough communities, and progress and interest are such that there is basis for continuing experimental efforts. There are still problems calling for future experimentation such as rating of pupils in reading achievement and parent-teacher understanding of the Plan.