A SURVEY OF ORGANIZATION AND PRACTICE
IN SEVERAL SEMI-NONGRADED
SCHOOL SYSTEMS

BY

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Development</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation of the Nongraded Plan</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. TREATMENT OF DATA</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Ungraded Plan</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan in Operation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of Plan</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials for Reading</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting to Parents</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives Sought Through Nongraded Vertical Organization</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample of Questionnaire</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE CONSULTED</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to obtain first-hand information concerning the organization and administration of nongraded school systems.

Five semi-nongraded or nongraded schools were visited. Principals, personnel and parents were interviewed. Principals of the five schools also responded to a written inquiry. In addition, representatives of two schools not visited granted interviews and completed the written inquiry. All schools approached cooperated.

Some similarities in operation and administration were evident:
1. All of the schools responding were organized on a "levels" plan for reading skills.
2. Initial ungrading began with some or all of the primary years.
3. Thorough orientation of staff and community was deemed highly important.
4. Lack of appropriate materials was a limiting factor.
5. More funds for equipment, materials and additional personnel were needed.
6. Each school devised its own reporting plan.

Operation and administration varied in these respects:
1. Bases for evaluation of pupil progress (teacher judgement, reading tests based on textbook, and/or general achievement).
2. Plans for reporting to parents (conference, card, anecdotal, and/or combinations of two or more).
3. Number of levels for each year's work (from four per year to as many as seven).
4. Financial support of initial innovation (district or foundation).
5. Source of instigation for the plan (administration or teacher-administration group).
6. Organization of groups within classes (by achievement and/or interest).
7. Basis for assignment to classrooms (achievement, age, personality).
8. Extent of curriculum and years which were ungraded at first and currently (only reading in one or more primary grades to all areas in entire school).

There appeared to be no one "best" plan for implementing a nongraded school. There was only a consensus of philosophy. Administrators, staff and parents were generally enthusiastic about the plan. There was a lack of objective evaluation, even in the schools which had operated the plan the longest number of years.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The organizational structure of American public schools has long been the object of critical scrutiny. Schools are organized vertically into primary, elementary, junior and senior high schools, junior colleges, colleges and graduate schools. These units are subdivided into grades at the lower level and years at the higher levels. In the traditional graded structure of elementary schools, students move upward grade by grade a year at a time. Adjustments of student placement are accomplished by retention of the learner for an additional year (non-promotion) or through acceleration (skipping a grade). These alternatives represent attempts to adjust the learner to the school's vertical organization.

Nongrading, as a promising alternative to the lock step of graded structure, is one of several schemes now being applied to vertical organization. For definitive purposes, the nongraded school as here considered is one in which grade labels are removed from some or all classes. It is an organizational pattern that permits continuous educational progress for all by providing opportunities for individual students to work at their own speed without failure or pressure. The plan provides that children will be taught in logical steps according to their achievement. It disregards grade level placement and the rigid assign-
ment of subject matter to grade levels. Both the slow and
the rapid learner can receive the instruction suited to
their needs. Acceleration or retention can be overcome
since pupils move in a continuous upward pattern of develop-
ment. Nongrading is characterized by central concern for
development of the unique potential of all students. It
recognizes the importance of subject matter to be presented
but emphasizes the necessity for learners to move within their
own flexible time schedule. Proponents of nongrading do not
claim it as a panacea for all structural ills. Rather, they
state that the plan simply provides an opportunity for
adjusting the vertical organization of the school to the
individual differences of all children.

This investigator plans to survey the organization
and practice of nongrading in several schools and to make
a study of each based on observation, interview, and
examination of instructional materials.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to obtain first-hand
information concerning the organization and administration
of nongraded school systems. How were theory and function
made compatible? What were the identifying features of each
scheme?
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The procedures that follow were proposed as a means for accomplishing the goals of the study. The investigator would visit a minimum of five schools while in session. Those proposed were C. E. Mason, Beaverton, Oregon; Sherwood, Greeley, Colorado; Miles Avenue, Billings, Montana; Seth Woodard, Spokane, Washington; and the Longfellow, Bozeman, Montana -- representative of the five elementaries of District 7. Structured interviews would be arranged with parents and personnel of the schools visited.

The investigator further proposed to examine materials, teaching techniques, measures of achievement, and methods of reporting to parents. Specific areas of questioning, structured into a critical examination of information obtained from interviews and observations would be used.

LIMITATIONS

It was assumed that in the evolving patterns of non-gradedness then practiced, there were elements of graded structure still existing. There might have been teachers who were involved in but not sympathetic with the opportunities provided. It was also assumed that much of the information gleaned would, of necessity, be subjective since little statistical data had been recorded. There were, currently, no assessment procedures nor instruments compatible with the nongraded philosophy. Standard achievement
tests with their "grade" norms and percentiles based on a year's block of subject matter obviously would not work.

Self-appraisal and perceptions would be part of the investigator's findings, and treated as such. It was recognized that considerable self-appraisal and prejudicial perception would enter into a study of this kind. It was also assumed that factors other than nongradedness might color the picture. To this end, the investigator would make an effort to examine only what "was" rather than "what were the effects?".

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Nongrading, as one of the experimental plans for displacing traditional graded structure, merited careful consideration. The information gathered through making this study would be valuable as resource material for inservice training (group or individual studies) in an elementary school. Understandings of methods and mechanics of operation not only were essential to carrying out an adopted plan for reorganization; they would also be used as guidelines in the study itself. First hand knowledge of the administration of several nongraded schools would enable the investigator to facilitate a study of, and it was hoped, implement some form of a continuous progress plan for vertical organization in the Elementary Schools in District 7, Bozeman, Montana.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The National Education Association Project on Instruction defines nongrading as "a vertical plan of school organization." In the nongraded school, grade labels are removed from some or all classes. Each child goes as far with the curriculum content as he can during the year. At the beginning of the next term, he begins where he left off and again moves at his individual speed. There are no promotions (social or academic) and no retentions. A slow child may require more time to complete the work, but he does not repeat. The fast learner may complete the curriculum faster but he neither skips material nor adjusts his pace to the average student. The goal is to provide maximum opportunity for the continuous progress of each learner. The nongraded school proposes to emphasize individual differences in an organizational framework where the ingenuity of teachers may more readily be brought to bear on the variability of students.

In pure nongrading, the sequence of content is determined by the difficulty of the subject matter and the student's ability to cope with it. As yet, few curriculums have been devised which are ideally adapted to the spread of individual differences. In nongraded schools, however, there are no rigidly prescribed blocks of subject matter or groups of skills to be covered in a set time. Instructional materials are chosen to meet the individual needs of children as
they move upward according to their own readiness to proceed. Proponents of nongrading claim that in function, content, and recognition of individuality, their plan is based on nationally recognized assumptions concerning school function and the learner.

The National Committee lists these three assumptions about school function, about what should be taught, and about the stubborn reality of individual differences:

1. The instructional program of the school should be designed to develop the potentialities of all members of the school population, as individuals and as members of society.
2. The instructional program should include the learning of basic generalizations and the development of ways of knowing and thinking.
3. The vertical pattern of school organization should provide for the continuous, unbroken, upward progression of all learners, with due regard for the great range of differences among and within them.

On the basis of these assumptions the Committee makes the following recommendation for vertical school organization:

The vertical organization of the school should provide for the continuous, unbroken, upward progression of all learners, with due recognition of the wide variability among learners in every aspect of their development. The school organization should, therefore, provide for differentiated rates and means of progression toward achievement of educational goals.

Nongrading and multigrading are promising alternatives to the traditional graded school and should be given careful consideration in seeking to provide flexible progress plans geared to human variability.

In schools where there is an emphasis on mastery of subject matter and also a philosophy which encourages differentiated rates of progress, a nongraded plan war-
rants consideration. It is necessary to take into account the history and development, present operation, and implications for the future to fully consider the nongraded plan of school organization.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Nongrading in America existed as far back as the Dame Schools, where individual instruction was the practice. Later, some schools used a monitorial plan in which the older pupils tutored the younger ones. Criticism of the traditional graded structure which has characterized our schools since 1848 has led to a search for better ways to administer our educational system. John Dewey was one of the first to protest the lack of flexibility in traditional vertical organization. He urged that individual differences be supported rather than minimized. The now famous Progressive Movement was an outgrowth of this theory.

As Dewey is to the Progressive Movement, so Goodlad and Anderson are to the Nongraded Plan. Back in the thirties, these two young men began their teaching careers in widely separated rural areas of America. Several years later, they met at the University of Chicago where each had taken time out to think, read, listen and "let some wounds heal." For Goodlad, memory of a mentally retarded boy from his first teaching assignment was a wound that he carried like a battle scar. Ernie, trying to fit the length of his thirteen years into a first-grade desk; Ernie, trying
to play with the buddies he couldn't join for school work -- losing his temper -- using abusive language; Ernie, sometimes wearing his sheepish grin and sometimes laying his red head down on his desk and weeping -- "a strange, whimpering sort of cry" -- Ernie was a living wound. Goodlad was never able to do much for this boy with his estimated I.Q. of 68. But because he was unable to forget the hopeless trap in which Ernie seemed to be caught, he came to believe that schools must make provision for the reality of individual differences. (9:iii)

On the basis of their common belief, John I. Goodlad and Robert H. Anderson joined forces to develop a plan of continuous progress for the vertical organization of schools. By 1956, they had conducted studies of non-promoted children and had written numerous articles bearing upon the theory of nongrading. They had read almost everything available on practices supporting their theory and had visited schools where elements of nongradedness were used. Anderson had actually opened a school at Park Forest, Illinois which had a nongraded primary. In response to many requests for information and advice, they decided to pool their experiences in producing a handbook on nongrading. Their book, The Nongraded School, published in 1959, has become the primer for those interested in creating nongraded schools.

The basic concept of nongrading has been the basis for experimentation since the turn of the century. Western Springs, Illinois replaced primary grades in 1934 but has since reverted to a graded structure. (9:62) Richmond,
Virginia has used a junior primary unit, replacing kindergarten and first grade, since 1936. In 1939, the College Avenue School in Athens, Georgia began a program which still exists. Since World War II, the movement has gained momentum.

While the nongraded approach has become prominent only in very recent years, there has been a slow but continuous growth since 1942, when Milwaukee opened its Primary School, the oldest nongraded program now in existence. Moreover, the basic concept of nongrading, which is individualization of instruction, has been attempted in several related plans. In addition to Dewey's Progressive School, there has been the Batavia Plan, the Winnetka Plan, the Joplin Plan, the Dual Progress Plan, and others. All of these innovations moved in the direction of nongradedness. One at least, the Joplin Plan, set up time blocks, and moved children to appropriate reading levels at a particular time of day. Retention was practiced, but not repetition. Many so-called graded structures today retain this element of the Joplin scheme.

Several studies have been conducted to determine to what extent the nongraded plan has now grown. On the basis of a questionnaire survey in 1959, the N.E.A. Research Division reported that about 230 of all urban school districts in the nation were using the primary block plan either system-wide or in selected experimental schools. Goodlad and Anderson reported a lower proportion in their 1960 studies. They estimated that a maximum of 125 school districts were operating truly nongraded schools and that
the number of individual schools was perhaps not more than 1,000. Dean estimated that 776 urban places had a nongraded primary unit in 1960. It is possible that Dean's higher estimate resulted from the term "primary unit" which he failed to define as nongraded, in his questionnaire.

The nongraded plan has had many names to date, each reflecting various emphases and the years or parts of the elementary program organized in this fashion. Some of the more familiar are: nongraded school, ungraded school, flexible primary unit, continuous growth in reading plan, ungraded primary, primary schools, primary unit, primary progress, levels system, primary block, and primary cycle. "Nongraded" is less confusing than "ungraded" since, in some systems, the latter term is associated with special education classes. Where nongrading involves only kindergarten and first grade, the program is designated as first primary, junior primary, transition first or the cycle plan.

OPERATION OF THE NONGRADED

There are almost as many variations of nongraded programs as there are schools operating them. Details differ; only the broad outlines and main features are constant. However, some generalizations regarding scope of effort and procedures are possible and are necessary to an understanding of the limited studies which have been made.
Most nongraded schools break the curriculum into levels rather than grades — small blocks of work as opposed to the giant steps of graded structure. Most nongrading is based on reading, primary unit, although mathematics is used to an increasing degree. These are the two areas where there is sufficient material to make alternative selections.

Vertical structure in the Nathaniel Hawthorne Elementary School in University City, Missouri has a typical example of organization by levels.

Level R -- Pupil not ready to read; readiness developed.
Level 1 -- Preprimers and primers (testing at a grade level of approximately 1.6).
Level 2 -- First readers and many supplementary readers of primer level (testing at a grade level of approximately 2.0).
Level 3 -- Second readers with four or five first readers that can be read with fluency and comprehension (testing at approximately 2.6).
Level 4 -- Second readers with several easier second readers read with fluency and comprehension (testing at approximately 3.2).
Level 5 -- Third readers with many easy high-level second readers read with fluency and good comprehension; child displays good word attack and some independent reading (testing at approximately 3.8).
Level 6 -- High-level third-reader material with ability to read with fluency and good comprehension; child does independent reading (testing at approximately 4.2).
Levels 7 and 8 -- These levels provide for pupils in the primary school who read well in library books and who read other textbooks, in areas such as social studies and science, with fluency and understanding. (11:63)

Levels 7 and 8 are of particular significance, pointing up the nongraded concept of "stretching" the capabilities of high achievers as opposed to the enriching technique of graded schools.
Grouping is basic to the theory and function of non-grading. Initial grouping for the primary unit is facilitated where schools have kindergartens. Readiness tests and teacher evaluation of ability and maturity provide a basis for reading groups in the first year. Milwaukee enters no child in the primary unit until he has passed his readiness tests. (23:26) Libby, Montana, operating without a kindergarten, sets up a summer testing program for determining readiness groups. (13:16) Edith Kair, writing on the Libby plan, reports that children scoring below the 35th percentile on the Harrison Stroud Readiness Test were placed in readiness rooms. The remaining children were heterogeneously grouped in regular rooms, each having three reading levels. (10:74)

Goodlad and Anderson (9:107) have recommended that there be three ability levels in different classes -- making for smooth transition from one to another. For example, the most advanced group of level C could move easily into the middle group of level D. If necessary, they can go up or down without another change of teachers. Transfer between groups occurs at no rigidly prescribed time intervals. Transfer may be of an entire group or of one or more children. (8:45)

Madeline Hunter (4:16) writing on the dimensions of nongrading points out the importance of peer group assignment to the individual child:

"...of immeasurable importance to Johnny is the peer group. This is the group that stimulates
him; the group to which he must respond. When he is with a certain group of children, is he a leader or a follower? The best ball player? The worst reader? An innovator? A clown? His role is not necessarily the same from group to group. Whatever his role in one group, that role may change when he moves to another. If many children are competing to be leaders, Johnny must earn his integrity. If Johnny has little or no competition in his group, he may find it easy to learn the leadership skills that shyness would prevent him from even tackling in a more formidable group. We cannot accept a comfortable (or uncomfortable) stereotype of a child; we must judge each child by observations of what he does -- not by what he was.....you must have alternatives in teaching style, in peer group, and in educational program from which you can select the most appropriate (group) for each child."

Reporting pupil progress in a nongraded school is more difficult than in systems where conventional marks are deemed adequate. Goodlad and Anderson, writing on the merits of several methods, state that individual parent-teacher conferences at least twice a year are best. They also suggest a folder for each child, for each subject. Detailed competitive grades are best omitted. Description rather than judgement should be used in comparing relative standing. Reporting must include the child with an eye to making him realize his potential and motivating him to approximate it.(6:67)

Sister Mary Alice, writing on pupil writing for the ungraded primary, reports three written reports a year, each followed by a conference and supplemented with bulletins. These bulletins are sent to parents periodically indicating ways in which the home can reinforce the instructional program.(18:9) Schools in Appleton, Wisconsin record dates of introduction and mastery for each new block or work. The sixth grade
pupil on individual skill cards, participates in the final reporting conference. (14:62) Milwaukee progress reports go out three times a year. (23:26) There are two grades -- C, for good progress, and D, for needs to improve. The date a child reached his most recent reading level is recorded on the report.

Proponents of nongrading have always claimed that the plan provided the emotional nourishment for mental health. Recent studies indicate a growing interest in this area.

Edward G. Buffie conducted a study involving two public school systems. Community N had nongraded primary -- Community G traditional graded structure. Four elementary schools from each community were used. Pupils were equated on basis of socio-economic levels, school enrollment, class size, type of training of, and experience of teachers at the third year primary level. (2:10)

Altogether 234 children participated in the study, 117 from each school system. Only children who had been enrolled continuously in their respective systems since beginning the primary school and who were in their last year of primary school were included in the investigation. From this large group, a random selection of pupils by school and socio-economic level in one system was made. Pupils from the other system were then matched to this first group, as closely as was possible, on the basis of sex, chronological age and I. Q.

The following tests were administered to all children:
Means and standard deviations were computed for each of the eleven different areas representing mental health and academic achievement. A series of t-ratios were then performed in order to determine the significance of the differences in mean scores for each of the areas tested.

In all eleven areas of mental health and academic achievement tested, the results favored Community N. Buffie concludes that the evidence uncovered in this investigation generally supports the claims made by the proponents of the nongraded school.

Nongraded children seem to be clearly superior to graded pupils in the areas of language and work-study skills, as well as in the over-all academic composite score. Furthermore, a trend is readily apparent indicating that this same group is better adjusted than its graded counterpart.

There have been comparatively few statistical studies in the area of achievement in nongraded schools. This is partly because records have not been kept and partly because skill achievement is not the sole criteria for excellence. Of studies reported by Anderson and Goodlad, self-appraisal and perceptions were the basis of findings. In 1960, they surveyed about 550 nongraded schools in eighty-nine communities. They interviewed respondents in each school with inquiry into ten areas of nongrading. These areas were:
pupil achievement, pupil adjustment, pupil progress, classroom atmosphere, impact on teacher, impact on curriculum development, problems, junior high school, parent attitudes, and research and evaluation. This report is not quantitative, but rather a commentary on the respondents' subjective assessments. The study reports little negative evaluation of the program. Comments were largely favorable. The investigators report some data indicating higher achievement and considerable evidence of more rapid progress. The improved mental health of pupils was noted by most of the schools. Effective participation in curriculum revision and preparation of materials was typical.

Flint, Michigan, compared achievement scores from children who had been in nongraded primary for three years with those from third graders in a graded structure. The nongraded children scored higher in language arts.

Mary King Skapski, writing on an objective evaluation of the ungraded primary reading program in Burlington, Vermont, states that two groups of comparable socio-economic background and I.Q. were matched -- graded against ungraded in reading ability. Higher scores were made in the ungraded primary than in the graded. Effectiveness of teachers and other factors may have influenced the results.

Celia B. Stendler writing on "Grouping Practices", Those First School Years, voices some criticisms of the nongraded structure. Slower progress will damage the child's self-concept as much as retention. Reading scores may be
higher at the expense of other skills. Group tests for placement are given too much importance. The gifted are still shackled. The intermediate years need nongrading more than the primary, where most individual instruction already is obtained. Nongrading may be merely substituting rigid level standards for rigid grade standards. Practice does not support theory. (20:57)

It is in the area of practical and sufficient support for the theory of nongrading that much study and research is needed. Textbook companies have not recognized the need to any practical extent. The ingenuity and dedication of the teachers and administrators involved can give the movement its greatest impetus. Schools which are truly nongraded have been forced to develop major curriculum and instructional reorganization. (9:97) Experiments with grouping and teaching techniques have made the plan work for particular schools. Further research is needed regarding what is being done to make practice and theory compatible. A great many alternatives may be necessary if each child is to be accepted, grouped, taught and evaluated according to his unique individuality. These alternatives need to be added to and shared.

Details of a study designed to learn some of these alternatives are reported in the following chapter.
CHAPTER III
TREATMENT OF DATA

The original plan to visit five elementary schools was carried out, plus a formal written inquiry following each visit and interview. In addition, representatives of two schools not observed responded to interview and inquiry. The schools visited were: C. E. Mason, Beaverton, Oregon; Sherwood, Greeley, Colorado; Miles Avenue, Billings, Montana; Seth Woodard, Spokane, Washington; and the Longfellow, Bozeman, Montana -- representative of the five elementaries of District 7. Information concerning the Rimrock School in Billings and the Holy Rosary in Bozeman was procured through the written inquiry and interview.

This survey of organization and practice in several semi-nongraded schools was undertaken in the hope that practical procedures for ungrading an elementary school might be learned. The basis for inquiry consisted in ten broad categories: Introductory, Development of Ungraded Plan, Plan in Operation, Organization of Plan, Materials for Reading, Evaluation, Reporting to Parents, Problems, Objectives Sought, and Advantages Gained.

INTRODUCTORY

The reporting elementary schools represented fairly large districts with twenty to twenty-six schools; medium sized districts with ten or twelve schools; and small dis-
tricts having five or six schools. The number of semi-nongraded schools per district ranged from one to the total number. The length of time that some ungradedness had obtained ranged from one to fourteen years with six being the average.

With one exception, all respondents were principals. Representing this principal, and in her absence, was a teacher who had been on the staff from the time the innovation was adopted. All schools approached cooperated in the study. All provided brochures, reporting systems, work shop plans, bulletins, letters to parents, suggested organizations, curriculum changes, and/or many other helpful materials.

DEVELOPMENT OF UNGRADED PLAN

It was found that in developing the nongraded plan, the idea, with two exceptions, originated in a combination of groups: administrative, teacher. One school reported that the principal instigated the idea -- another, the superintendent.

All schools planned for the innovation at least one year or more -- up to a maximum of three years. Two schools involved the community in decision for change; four acted on the joint action of the staff, one on administrative direction.

Initial financial support of five schools came from the local district budget. The parochial school was subsidized by the Diocese. One school received a Ford Foundation Grant which provided one hundred per cent support the first year,
eighty per cent the second, and was phased out into the district budget the third year.

One school reported a volunteer staff. In all others, the teachers were assigned. Preparation of teachers included inservice training in six of the schools. Three schools reported teacher-visits to nongraded schools. These were financed by the district and arranged by the administration. Three reported both individual and group study either in addition to or rather than inservice training. One school held two week summer workshops for evaluation and revision. Teachers participating were granted a stipend. This school also extended contracts for new teachers to include a two week training and orientation period. All schools reported that community orientation was conducted through the Parent Teachers Association. Teachers and/or principals presented the plan. Four schools made use of the radio and press. Explanation of the plan was aired by school officials and articles appeared in the local newspapers both before and after adoption of the plan. Six sent letters and bulletins to parents, explaining the philosophy and plan of organization.

PLAN IN OPERATION

The plans as originally adopted in the seven schools differed considerably in detail. Two were pilot schools, four were part of a district wide involvement. One shared the plan with several but not all other schools. Only one school ungraded the entire curriculum initially -- the other
six ungraded only reading the first year.

The initial extent of ungrading the reading was varied. Four schools involved grades one through three; one adopted a kindergarten through three; and one began with only grades one and two.

By 1967, all had extended their initial plans. Five of the schools had included Primary and Intermediate (one of these had also ungraded Science and Social Studies), and the two which had most recently adopted a plan had not progressed beyond the initial step, except in planning.

Class groups were determined in several ways. Homogeneity (of ability, achievement, or both) was reported by six of the seven. Multiage grouping and heterogeneity were used in two schools. One report indicated that a variety of criteria were used, depending on the particular needs of the school and the age group in question. The number of instructional sub-groups varied from two or three in primary to two in intermediate rooms. These groups within classes were formed on the basis of achievement in five schools, on teacher, parent and pupil estimated interest in one and on a combination of achievement and interest in one.

All respondents indicated that some provision was made for special problems. Four had special education classes in the district for the mentally retarded. Only three schools had a reading consultant. One had both a school psychologist and a speech correctionist. One had a "crisis" teacher for
children with emotional problems. Only one school reported
the service of teacher-aides, the only available help provided.

ORGANIZATION OF PLAN

The vertical organization, without exception, took the
form of levels. Children moved upward through the levels
according to established criteria. In one school the sole
criteria was achievement based on diagnostic reading and
general achievement tests. The remaining six listed teacher-
evaluation as one of several. Three schools included the
number of years a child had been in school. Four considered
mastery of reading skills the main criteria. Only one in-
cluded mental age.

Organization of the classroom was either completely self-
contained (two instances) or self-contained plus moving to
appropriate levels during a reading block (of time). The
school having a special reading teacher moved children in
small (1-3) groups, to her throughout the day. She planned
and carried out a completely individualized program for each
child. Her groups changed as the year progressed. Her
"class" included children who had fallen behind for various
reasons, emotionally disturbed, those with special learning
problems, and those whose mental ability barely precluded
special education. Two schools used the time-block only for
intermediates. One school was careful not to organize any
group to include all fast or all slow moving children.
MATERIALS FOR READING

Respondents all based the reading program on basic textbooks. Four schools used a co-basal plus several supplementaries. The remaining three used one basal series plus three or more supplementaries. One school included S.R.A. individual instruction as a supplement in the intermediate classes. The same school also used a three track basal (texts of varying difficulty) for intermediates. Four of the schools reported that teachers created a considerable amount of materials. Three indicated that some work of this nature was done.

EVALUATION

In the area of evaluation, five of the respondents included teacher-judgement as pertinent to achievement measure. Tests accompanying the basal texts were used without exception. General Achievement Tests, such as Metropolitan and Iowa Basic Test of Skills, were employed by four schools. Three based evaluation partly on observation of behavioral characteristics.

REPORTING TO PARENTS

Cards using three step descriptive evaluation (such as commendable, acceptable, and needs improvement) were designed by four primary units. Letter grades were used in one primary and three intermediates. Three schools employed anecdotal and one had a four-step description for primary.
In all cases, the cards were designed by the local staff and were revised as needed.

PROBLEMS

In addition to the seven specific areas above, the written inquiry included a request for comments and recommendations on problems encountered in adoption and administration of a semi-nongraded school.

Respondents indicated that organization posed problems in: keeping a balance of class load while providing for all individual differences; concern that levels might prove inflexible in content; and dissatisfaction with nongrading confined to reading only. One principal advised:

Develop carefully the objectives of the program with the total staff. Do not indicate displeasure if it is necessary to explain repeatedly, in detail, areas which appear trivial. Strive for complete understanding and uninhibited discussions of all areas involved. Experience through staff discussions leads inevitably to more professional presentations to parents.

Orientation of the community to the nongraded curriculum plans was understood by the writer as an area where careful planning is needed if patrons are to understand and support the school in such a different plan of organization. Recommendations included: make maximum effort to explain and clear up misunderstandings; make sure new people understand (principal's responsibility); insure teacher planned and conducted explanations as best demonstration for parents and teachers; take a positive approach but hold to the
concept of experimental innovation; present only an outline and keep the wording well within the majority's level of understanding; and make time available to explain educational details in private, informal discussions.

Finance was a problem in all district supported schools. Expansion of the program required more personnel, materials and equipment. Increased budget for teacher workshops, visits, and released study time was needed. Provision for teacher aides and special teachers was desired. Federal and foundation funds helped where available.

All respondents found lack of materials a limiting factor. It was difficult to find commerical materials in any area which exactly met the requirements. Reading support was in best supply but even there, teachers need to construct and devise a great deal. One school indicated that the staff would undertake the task of modifying the modern math materials during the school year (1967-1968) preparatory to its introduction in the fall of 1968. Lack of materials to meet the needs of individuals was listed by two respondents.

Evaluation posed problems in several cases. Schools having operated under the new plan for six or more years saw little current difficulty in operation and administration. Those in the beginning stages (one or more years) expressed need for revision of the report card as needed. All used some form of general achievement as a part of evaluation technique. Two expressed dissatisfaction with the policy of using general achievement tests. One stated that it
was incompatible with nongraded philosophy. Four found it difficult to establish understanding with some parents.

Staff preparation was not reported to be a problem. Some recommended specific procedures. These included: district funded workshops in the summer (one to two weeks); inservice training; visits to other nongraded schools; fall workshops for new teachers (either under extended contract or as requirement for); special effort to insure that teachers of children moving at a slower pace didn't exert undue pressure. To quote one respondent:

We found that an understanding of the total program is the best staff preparation. This must be followed by inservice work over a period of years to bring about an understanding of the application of this program to the individual child. The area of greatest concern is undue pressure for the child learning at a slower pace. We are still bothered by the idea that increased pressure produces increased learning. Time and experience have been our greatest aid in overcoming this difficulty. It is necessary to supply continual encouragement for the teachers with the slower-moving sections to avoid frustration through unfavorable comparisons.

All respondents reported continuous, ongoing study during staff and small-group meetings. Teacher involvement in leadership and reporting was considered imperative. The principal's role was considered to be the key to optimum staff preparation.

Teacher support and understanding of nongradedness was noted as a problem area in six of the seven schools reporting. In these schools, where teachers were assigned, there was need for more thorough preparation and indoctrination. Varying degrees of commitment to the philosophy and practice
hampered the program somewhat. Group pressure was seen by
three respondents as an encouraging force. Improved working
conditions and other efforts to maintain high morale were
listed as possible solutions by one respondent. There was
no report of teachers requesting transfer out.

OBJECTIVES SOUGHT THROUGH
NONGRADED VERTICAL ORGANIZATION

Following is a composite of specific objectives sought
through nongraded vertical organization and gleaned from the
seven inquiries:

1. Development of leadership ability for every pupil
regardless of the rate of learning.

2. To preclude the necessity for the individual to
repeat material previously mastered.

3. To eliminate unfavorable competition.

4. To make goals for the individual within his
reach.

5. As an administrative tool to make possible
more flexibility in meeting the individual
needs of children.

6. To remove the negative motivations for learning:
pressure, competition, false standards of pro-
gress, pride, acceptance, reward and fear of
retention.

7. To remove unrealistic time limits.

8. To improve opportunity for recognition.

9. To progress according to needs and abilities
and rate of growth.

10. To remove strain, tension and experience of
failure.

11. To make the child aware of his goals.
12. To provide a positive self-image through daily successful progress.

13. To build self-confidence through a sense of mastery.

14. To insure a happy, relaxed learner.

15. To remove "equal treatment of unequals."

16. To provide challenge consistent with ability.

Consistent and complete records were reported kept in only one school. Academic achievement was maintained or (in some years) improved in that particular school. This was not considered to be the most important criteria for evaluation of the program. One respondent listed a five-year plan of objective evaluation now in progress.

Administrators and teachers interviewed gave enthusiastic subjective evaluations. When asked if they would favor a return to the graded organization, the answer was unanimously, "No."

Parents interviewed approved the innovation. Some cited increased relaxation on the part of children and more eagerness to be in school. Several expressed a desire for letter grades but confessed to a better understanding of the child's progress through conference and examination of daily performance records. One principal described parent reaction thus:

In six years of operation we have had many compliments, and many questions about our operation. We have noticed a marked decrease in requests for preferential assignments of students. We have also noticed a decrease in unwarranted parental concern over the progress made by children. Most important, perhaps, is the increase in parental cooperation, and a willingness on the part of parents to take an active part in the education of their child.
SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to survey the organization and practice of several nongraded and semi-nongraded schools.

Development of the philosophy was traced from the Dame Schools through the work of Goodlad and Anderson in the thirties, to the present rapidly expanding movement in the sixties. It was noted that with the Recommendation of the N.E.A. Project on Instruction in 1963, there has been an increase estimated to include more than one fourth of all schools in the United States. The literature consulted was written between 1957 and 1965 and included such authorities as Goodlad and Anderson, Maurie Hillson, and Guy Wagner.

Five schools were visited. The principals were interviewed and responded to a written inquiry. Representatives of two additional schools also responded to the interview and written inquiry.

The administration and teaching staff played the major role in the original planning, development and decision to adopt. With two exceptions, initial plans were district funded. Orientation of staff and community were major endeavors.

No two schools operated the plans exactly alike. All of the seven were organized by levels. Some had more refinement
of levels than others. All established the levels on sequential skill development, in reading.

All seven schools based nongrading principally on reading. Only two were nongraded in all areas. Some included intermediate levels, others only primary (in varying divisions).

Teacher judgement and achievement were common factors in placement. Others included age, personality, readiness and behavioral characteristics. Some classes were self contained while others moved to levels in a time block.

Reporting practices varied extensively from school to school. Objectives sought were much alike. Size of school, number of schools in a system, financial support, and length of time in operation had a bearing on administrative problems. Ample orientation of staff and community was one of the items of preparation for nongradedness deemed highly important by respondents.

Little objective evidence of academic improvement was available. The advantages claimed were many and, for the most part, subjective evaluations.

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the review of current literature, the interviews, observations and written inquiries, the following conclusions and recommendations are made:

1. There is no one blueprint for successful operation of a nongraded school; there is only a consensus of philosophy.
2. None of the schools have progressed beyond the "levels" plan.

3. Administrators are either satisfied that levels provide sufficient advantages or they feel the time is not ripe to move into Goodlad's multi-age, large group, cluster organization.

4. There is not evidence of sufficient individualized instruction to be compatible with pure non-grading.

5. Conference plus anecdotal or conference with a descriptive evaluation are both acceptable.

6. Administrators, teachers, parents and children are generally enthusiastic about the plan.

7. Lack of materials is a major problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Plenty of time for study, visiting and inservice training should be allowed.

2. Plans for an ongoing orientation of staff and community should be adopted.

3. Principals should work closely with teachers, individually and in contiguous groups.

4. Kindergarten teachers, teacher aides and special area teachers would greatly implement the classroom teachers' efforts.

5. A special reading teacher, special education teachers and a school psychologist are desirable.
6. The limits of levels can be tolerated in getting a plan started if they are based on skills -- not content.

7. Plans for the future should include remodeled buildings or new ones designed for large or small group instruction.

8. Individual instruction should be increased.

9. Released time or extended contract should be allowed for annual revision and evaluation of the plans.

10. A system of objective analysis would support the subjective evaluations.

11. A pilot school with volunteer staff and federal or foundation funding is in a most favorable position to initiate nongrading. However, a district wide adoption provides strength of unity and resource not enjoyed by a pilot school.

12. Primary reading (in not less than two grades) would be an advantageous place to start.

13. Finally, administrators should foster a spirit of experiment and creativity. They should establish a climate of excitement, of change and challenge.
APPENDIX
SAMPLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE

INQUIRY INTO NONGRADING PRACTICES

I. Introductory

A. Schools responding:

______________________________ Name of School System
______________________________ Name of this School

B. Operation:

_______ Length of time that some ungradedness has operated in this school.

_______ Number of elementary schools totally or partially ungraded.

_______ Number of elementary schools in system.

C. Position held by respondent:

_____ Superintendent _____ Consultant

_____ Principal _____ Supervisor

_____ Teacher _____ Other - explain

II. Development of ungraded plan

A. Idea orginated with:

_____ Superintendent _____ Consultant and/or Supervisor

_____ Principal _____ Teacher Group

_____ Teacher _____ Parent's Group

_____ Administrative Group _____ Other - explain

B. Length of time plan was considered:

_____ Months

_____ A year

_____ More than a year

_____ Other - explain
C. Basis for decision to adopt:

____ Administrative study
____ Administrative and teacher study
____ Administrative, teacher and community study
____ Other - explain

D. Initial financial support of innovation:

____ District budget
____ Foundation grant
____ Federal Title Grant
____ Other - explain

E. Selection of staff:

____ Volunteer
____ Assignment
____ Combination
____ Other - explain

F. Orientation of staff:

____ Inservice training
____ Summer workshop
____ Group study
____ Individual study
____ Visits to nongraded schools
____ Other - explain

G. Orientation of community:

____ Study groups
____ P.T.A. presentation
____ Press, Radio and/or T.V.
____ Bulletin and/or letter
____ Other - explain
III. Plan in Operation

A. Initial extent of district involvement:
   ____ All schools
   ____ Several schools
   ____ A pilot school
   ____ Some classrooms in one or more schools
   ____ Other - explain

B. Extent to which the curriculum was first ungraded:
   ____ Reading
   ____ Reading and remaining language arts
   ____ Reading, remaining language arts and math
   ____ All subject areas
   ____ Other - explain

C. Vertical extent of initial ungrading:
   ____ First year (grade)
   ____ Primary
      _____ K-2 [ ] 1-2 [ ]
      _____ K-3 [ ] 1-3 [ ]
   ____ Primary and Intermediate
   ____ Other - explain

D. Which curriculum is presently ungraded:
   ____ Reading
   ____ Reading and remaining language arts
   ____ Reading, remaining language arts and math
   ____ All subject areas
   ____ Other - explain
E. Vertical extent of ungrading at this time:

- First year (grade)
- Primary
  - K-2
  - 1-2
- K-3
- 1 and 2
- Primary and Intermediate
- Other - explain

F. Method of creating class groups:

- Homogenous (by ability or achievement)
- Heterogenous
- Some multiage grouping
- Other - explain

G. Grouping for instruction within classes:

- Not more than two groups
- More than two groups

H. Criteria for inner-class grouping:

- Only achievement
- Sex
- Interest
- Other - explain

I. Provision for Special Problems (check as many as apply):

- Remedial teacher
- Crisis teacher (resource teacher for emotionally disturbed -- on full time or emergency)
- Special education
- Reading consultant
- Other - explain
IV. Organization of Plan

A. Mechanics of structure:
   - Levels
   - Contracts
   - Cycles (maturity grouping by behavioral characteristics)
   - Other - explain

B. Basis for assignment to instructional classes:
   - Achievement
   - Skills
   - Years in school
   - Mental ability
   - Behavioral characteristics
   - Teacher evaluation (judgement?)
   - Age
   - Combination of any of the above - explain
   - Other - explain

C. Classroom organization:
   - Self contained
   - Departmentalized
   - Moving to levels during time blocks (as reading, etc.)
   - Team teaching
   - Combination
   - Other - explain
V. Materials for reading

A. Basal:

____ One basal reader plus several supplementary
____ Two basal readers plus several supplementary
____ More than two basal readers plus several supplementary
____ Other - explain
____ Track system (Two or more basals of differing difficulty)

If so:  ____ two track

____ three track
____ other - explain

B. Teacher created materials:

____ considerable
____ some
____ none

VI. Evaluation

Achievement measure (check all that apply):

____ Textbook skill tests (Diagnostic Reading Tests that accompany the reading series)
____ General achievement test in the different subjects
____ Teacher judgement
____ Behavioral change
____ Other - explain

VII. Reporting to parents

A. Frequency:

____ 6 weeks  ____ 18 weeks
____ 9 weeks  ____ Other - explain
B. Method:

- Conference only - if so how many annually? ____
- Conference plus written - if so how many annually? ____
- If card, how many? ____

C. If card, how marked:

- Letter grades
- 3 step descriptive (as commendable, acceptable, needs improvement)
- 5 step descriptive (as accelerated, above average, average, below average, needs review)
- Anecdotal
- Other - explain

VIII. Problems (recommendations - please comment)

Organization:

Orientation of community:

Financial:

Materials:

Evaluation:

Staff Preparation:

Personnel:

Other:
IX. Objectives sought through ungraded vertical organization:

Written statement (please include):

Claimed by N.E.A. and other proponents:

Other:

X. Advantages gained from ungraded vertical organization:

Objective (test results):

Subjective (please comment):

Teacher

Administration

Child

Parent
LITERATURE CONSULTED
LITERATURE CONSULTED


4. Flint Public Schools, The Primary Cycle as Used in the Flint Community Schools, 1959.


