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# Reactions to the Dual Progress Plan

*Testing of assumptions and results is needed.*

ONE of our most cherished dreams for children is to realize our quest for quality education. It is encouraging that many efforts designed to improve the elementary school are under way. However, we do our profession serious harm when we initiate new programs without concern for basic values and when we accept them with limited or no evidence of their merit. The history of elementary education is not static. There have been changes. Its values are well established and there are many strengths in the elementary school of the mid-century. Leaders in elementary education have been alert to receive and act on suggestions, advice and help.

There are those, however, who tend to accept any innovation as being "good." They do not examine the new in terms of its expressed purposes and specific consequences. One should not pass judgment on a given new program without examining the assumptions which underlie it nor without having a clear-cut statement of the purposes to be achieved.

Some innovations in education are urged by persons outside the profession, often innocent of knowledge of what has been found best for children. To be sure the professional educator in the elementary field does not have a monopoly on ideas for improvement. However, those working closely with children and their teachers should be central in shaping basic changes. It would seem that teachers, principals and others working closely with elementary schools should be the best prepared persons to chart the course for improvement. Teachers and elementary school specialists did not actively participate in the initial design of the Dual Progress Plan. The plan was financed by The Fund for the Advancement of Education and is presently being demonstrated in two public school systems in New York State—the Ossining and the Long Beach systems.

## Purposes Differ

The Dual Progress Plan places emphasis upon a departmentalized system, graded in certain areas and nongraded in other subject areas. Teachers concentrate on their subject speciality. Children as young as eight have six different teachers in a day. No one teacher sees them through the whole day to integrate the

diverse subject offerings. Hence, no one teacher knows the child well. Parents must consult with a number of teachers to learn about their child's progress.

Most modern educators would agree that the primary goal of the elementary school is to create an environment favorable to the discovery, promotion and nurture of the unique potentials of each individual child. In addition, careful provision for wholesome group living is cherished. Such an environment has certain distinguishable characteristics including the following:

Develops close, friendly relationships between children and the teachers

Builds regard for the role of purpose in living and learning to the end that children engage in quality experiences

Provides opportunities for children to plan, discuss, arbitrate, disagree, solve problems, think, evaluate, value

Recognizes the need for knowledge

Recognizes that continuity of living and learning is essential and makes flexibility of work necessary

Promotes a maximum of challenge for the development of interests

Permits teachers to observe a child's value system over a long period of time

Fosters creative growth of each child.

Quite different assumptions undergird the development of the Dual Progress Plan and similar plans for organizing the elementary school:

1. There is an assumption of diagnostic precision, and a faith in the validity and reliability of achievement tests. This assumption must operate when the organization of learning groups is by subject areas. There must be an acceptance of some quality of sameness or homogeneity that is expressed in a similar test score. There is an assumption that all children having an achievement of 4.7 in science are at the same starting point. Moreover, when these data are combined with other tests, there is an assumption that the child's ability to advance further in this area can be predicted along some prearranged sequence of science understandings and knowledges.

2. There is an assumption, in use of the term "nongraded advancement," that the learnings, toward which this plan is directed, progress in an orderly and sequential manner. There are levels of "easy mathematical concepts" that can be identified, taught and used as steppingstones to more advanced types of learnings.

3. There is an assumption that the growth and development of children can be best provided for in a curriculum that is presented by a series of teachers whose orientation and training are focused upon the subject for which they are responsible. Previous plans requiring many separate subject experiences have necessarily almost eliminated from the school program rich experiences for children, such as trips, dramatics, and three dimensional art.

4. There is an assumption that the specialist teacher, through concentration on specialized knowledge, can bring about maximum all-round growth in children.

## Problems in Implementation

The implementation of many of the departmentalized type of programs such as the Dual Progress Plan creates a host of the same problems that led to the abandonment of similar proposals in past

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years. Obviously this plan is better designed for large elementary school units which provide multiple sections of the same grade in order to permit the intricate groups to be structured. Further, although the arrangement was not part of the original Dual Progress Plan, it was not accidental or unexpected that both school systems in which the plan is being carried out adopted homogeneous grouping for their elementary grades.

Several curricular problems are suggested by the implementation of the Dual Progress Plan. These are:

1. In order to get children to the special teachers and special rooms for instruction, half the children are moving somewhere every 40 minutes or so. This prevents continuity in learning activity. It also creates traffic problems, confusion and consequent disciplinary rigidity that must accompany the movement of large numbers of young children.

2. The lesson already learned in many communities is that improvement of instruction and learning cannot be gained through mechanical redistribution of teachers and children. This is especially true when such plans attempt to oversimplify the activity of teaching by assigning to it a more restricted subject centered role.

3. One of the features of the Dual Progress Plan is its claim for individualizing instruction. However, the evidence on compartmentalizing learning into subject areas seems to indicate that this purpose cannot be achieved by such a plan. Consider the plight of the special teacher of mathematics who meets a succession of groups of children for 40 minutes each. During the day he may meet over 150 children. Individualization of instruction cannot be achieved when time and numbers of children in combination with static teaching materials, curriculum guides, and a subject centered program provide the dominating structure.

4. The separateness of the subjects under the direction of specialist teachers introduces instructional problems requiring a high level of communication and coordination among the teachers. It is difficult to provide time for essential team planning. This has been the perennial problem of secondary school teachers. Without coordination of effort, the needs of children are met sporadically and in isolation. The school day becomes a series of subjects taught in separate compartments, thus forfeiting the learnings that grow out of the integration of language arts with science, or music with social studies, and the many combinations of activities which give substance and meaning to the school experiences of children. In a more wholesome plan the classroom teacher values the expertness of the specialist when he is functioning as a co-teacher and consultant while the classroom teacher ties together the children's learnings.

5. The complex planning and scheduling of classes with limited time must ultimately lead to the reduction of the number of intensive out-of-class activities that children experience under a more flexible time schedule. The problems of scheduling field trips that lead to many kinds of quantitative, language, and creative experiences increase with the numbers of teachers and class groups that are involved. A logical result is the reduction of enriching experiences for children, and a greater adherence to the preplanned curriculum.

6. The current emphasis on the special areas of science and mathematics as well as the revering of the specialist, result in an alleged higher status for the specialist teacher than for the "core

teacher" who has assumed the functions of the generalist. This tends to create problems of staff morale. Also such emphasis on these subjects places in a minor role curriculum areas such as language arts that have been defined as the "cultural imperatives," while the "cultural electives," science and mathematics, become, at least in a surface way, more prized and valued.

## Evaluation Is Needed

It is unfortunate that the Dual Progress Plan was not conceived as an hypothesis to be tested rather than as a demonstration. The fact that it is a demonstration with no control groups, indicates acceptance without genuine research. In terms of research design, some appropriate plan of matched groups could have been built in to enable the investigators to compare the experimental (DPP) with other teaching plans. This comparison would have made possible some mature basis for acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis.

Then, too, often the pressure of inaugurating a "new" plan with much publicity, many visitors, and continuous testing yields "improvements." This is often temporary and illusory. Had it been possible to give equal attention, support and help to a more developmental elementary program and to build appropriate evaluation techniques for both the Dual Progress Plan and the comparison program, a sound study would have been possible.

As it now stands, emphasis in the Dual Progress Plan is on academic learning. There is extensive use of achievement tests. These tests are to provide a comparison of pre-test and post-test data. Such procedures often freeze the curriculum and teachers tend to teach for the test. Also, these procedures limit evaluation to achievement testing rather than employ a more comprehensive plan in which a variety of evaluative procedures (formal and informal) are used. The emphasis on achievement testing fails to make use of unlimited informal classroom techniques which supply important data on attitudes, interests, creativity, work habits, values and concepts. Useful among these techniques are observations, self-inventories, children's work, exhibits and conferences. Furthermore, use of these more personal ways of evaluation lead the teachers to look more closely at the individual child rather than his individual normative achievement score. One of the persistent needs of *all* elementary education is to develop diversity in evaluation techniques. Evaluation can be a means of extending learning.

Today's secondary schools are struggling with their problems created by over-departmentalization and subject-centeredness. It is a shame to impose the old organizational pattern of secondary education upon the elementary school.

Those who have worked in a devoted manner in the past for curriculum improvement in the elementary school look to the vast backlog of experience, past and present, and to research to chart future directions. Dedication to a conception of elementary education grounded in the philosophic principles of total development enables teachers to create a sound learning environment. Leaders need to communicate with teachers, parents and children to formulate hypotheses for significant continued research. Cooperative, continuous evaluation practices are essential if next steps for improvement are to be valid.

Many elementary educators would gladly participate in a study of the Plan based on genuine comparative research.

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