A Research Survey in The Current Trends in Grouping For The Learning of Reading in The Elementary School

Lola Carter  
*Fort Hays Kansas State College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses)

Part of the *Education Commons*

---

**Recommended Citation**
[https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/569](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/569)

---

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.
A RESEARCH SURVEY IN THE CURRENT TRENDS IN GROUPING
FOR THE LEARNING OF READING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Being

A Master's Report Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
for the Degree of Master of Science

by

Lola Adams Carter, A. B.
Arizona State College, Flagstaff, Arizona

Date May 16, 1957
Approved
John Martin
Major Professor

Ralph A. Coker
Chairman Graduate Council
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. BACKGROiUND AND HISTORY OF GROUP LEARNING</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rote Learning -- Coaction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Centered Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Emphasis on Interaction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose for Grouping in the Classroom</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Democratic Living</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing Needs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Learning Experiences</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification of the Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing Capacities</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability Grouping</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE RESEARCH</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Interest</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Investigations</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Research</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Plans</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loosely Controlled Experimentation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research During the War Years</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Present Decade -- in Research</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Selection Defined</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Selection Illustrated</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Summation of the Most Significant Trends</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of the Individual</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving Proper Grouping</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Summaries</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Research</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Studies of Sub-Grouping</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research in the 1950's</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Gains Resulting from This Research</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY
OF GROUP LEARNING

Introduction. The pendulum which was set in motion when the first caveman attempted to teach his offspring the hunting tricks which he had learned continues to swing. From that prehistoric beginning of individual instruction, the slowly moving centuries have brought with them gradual changes from one extreme to the other, from the teaching of one to the teaching of many in a single group. When life and the earning of a livelihood became so complex that an individual parent could no longer give his time to each of his many sons, professional teachers became a necessity. Fragments of records show that the size and type of groups varied from the apprenticing of two or three boys to a tradesman, to the teaching of the five thousand by the Master of all teachers on the shores of the sea of Galilee.

Rote learning -- coaction. Education of our ancestors, for the most part, meant rote learning of all knowledge which the youth was supposed to acquire. When this is the goal of teaching, the knowledge might just as well be given to large as to small groups. Rote learning is sometimes called coaction: the teacher dispenses information and the students recite their response. It is entirely a teacher-to-pupil and pupil-to-teacher relation.

The other extreme of this early rote type of group learning was that of the highly individualized instruction given by the private
tutors of the young "gentlemen," which was the accepted form of education during the middle of the eighteenth century. With the development of democracy and the education of the masses, however, rote learning was still believed to be the best way to learn all the knowledge that was deemed to be of value in adulthood. Little or no thought was given to the feelings, interests, or viewpoint of the child who was doing the learning.

**Child centered schools.** With the standardization of the Binet intelligence tests in the early 1920's, individual capacity began to take on new significance. But true to human nature throughout the ages, the teachings of Dewey and other farsighted educators were carried to the extreme of individualism and resulted in the so-called progressive and child-centered schools of the thirties. Traces of the mistakes that were made by well-meaning disciples of progress can still be seen and heard. However, educators are beginning to realize just how far-reaching this new outlook of education can be in the future. This new outlook considers the maximum development of each child's abilities.

**Present emphasis on interaction.** Fortunately for the children in today's classrooms, the vast pendulum has reached a point at which they can profit by the best that can be gained from either extreme of educational method. Neither private tutoring nor rote learning by groups is being advocated today. Classrooms are, for the most part, freed from meaningless memorization and drill, complete dependence upon textbooks, and autocratic teachers. With the building of each new school building, more children are being allowed the freedom of informal classrooms which lend themselves to
meaningful activities and face-to-face communication where conclusions are drawn by group discussion of alternate solutions. Teachers in workshops and young people in training schools are grasping the meaning of teaching the individual an awareness of his relationship to the members of his group.

As a contrast to the earlier coaction between teacher and pupil, today's schools stress interaction. Facing each other, all students are encouraged to participate in life-like situations. The leader assumes certain responsibilities for group management, but all are led to understand that they share the responsibility for arriving at a goal toward which all are striving. Children sitting around a conference table, setting up goals, planning, assuming responsibilities, and finally evaluating achievements are living democracy instead of learning about it. They are not preparing to use it at some far off time in the future, they are using it now. Individuals sharing in the working out of group problems find specific uses for their particular talents. The morale is higher in such an atmosphere; it is a class in which cooperation takes the place of competition.

Teacher education. The greatest difficulty facing teaching based upon democratic cooperation is the lack of understanding which the average teacher has of the procedure. It is true as Ragan says in his discussion

of group work that the techniques for directing this phase of the program are more difficult to master than the techniques of working with individual pupils. The writer of this report speaks with the voice of experience in adding that a teacher who has learned all of her grade school, high school, and college lessons in the older, traditional manner cannot merely read about these new methods and put them to work immediately in her classroom. Teachers need not be elderly to have received their methods' training in the type of instruction of the late 1920's or early 30's. Instructors who have taught successfully, by locally accepted standards, are frequently not interested in changing methods, do not agree with the new ideas, or have not had the time or opportunity to learn about the new trends, much less try to put them into practice.

Teachers who have accepted the fact that education must be concerned with developing responsible behavior, as well as the acquiring of knowledge and skills, understand the more complete definition of education. They realize that learning, if it is to develop contributing citizens, must be a modification of the behavior that lays the foundation for contributing citizenship. These teachers realize that the organizing of the class for living and learning is a most difficult task and a most crucial one.

Today's teacher who is effectively teaching the children who will be tomorrow's leaders and followers must be an expert in human relations as well as a teacher of skills. She must know how to keep several groups working harmoniously and profitably; she must have an intimate knowledge
of each child's needs and abilities; and she must be able to get each child to cooperate and to develop his capacities to the utmost. The educational program in the modern classroom teaches cooperation by utilizing the constructive interests of the group in such a way that the individual is consciously adjusting to the group. Rather than interfering with individual rights this method, gives to all the best guarantee that the individual's rights, his freedom, self-expression, and self-realization, will be preserved. "The schoolroom is the social laboratory where the best interests of both the individual and society may be served."²

CHAPTER II

DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

Purpose for grouping in the classroom. The organization of the classroom procedures will depend upon the objectives and aims of the school, the community, the administrators, the teachers, and the students. If one of the objectives is the development of responsible behavior, the classroom planning and organization will be different from what it would be if the objectives were the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The newer and broader concept of education makes interaction and democratic living a part of any classroom program. With the ultimate goal of attaining the proper balance between learning necessary fundamentals and democratic behavior, three definite purposes for grouping in the classroom can be stated. The first is to teach democratic living; the second reason is to meet the differing needs with greater precision; and third, but no less important, is to make for a happier learning experience for the children.

Teaching democratic living. When research centers in business and industry are spending as much time and effort as they are today to develop effective group relations, it is time for the schools to recognize the importance of individual participation in organized group experiences. At the outset, teachers must understand and believe the democratic principles which should be taught in today's schools. They must know that democracy is not freedom without restrictions; rather it is a method by which individuals collectively accept responsibility for that which is in the best interests
of all. The teacher must realize that democracy demands skills as well as attitudes and understandings. These are the skills of leadership and group membership, skills of delegating responsibility and evaluating individual and group contributions. These skills, which must be learned just as any others, must be learned in meaningful situations to be effective. Teaching democratic living, then, is the first reason for grouping in the classroom.

Differing needs. The differing needs that have to be met are a very important consideration if we have before us the aim of developing each child, as nearly as possible, to the limit of his potential. Instead of having an objective which every child must reach regardless of his capacities, the modern teacher recognizes individual differences and realizes that she must have different goals and standards for each child. Since it is impossible in a class of thirty to have a class session for each child, it is advisable to group them as nearly as possible so that they can work and progress together under conditions that will permit the fullest possible development of each individual.

Grouping is based on common interests and needs. A teacher will probably divide the class into three groups according to their needs. Children may move from group to group during the year as their growth progresses at different paces.


When a teacher divides the class into three ability groups, she will usually plan for the slow-learners to work together. The average children will work together in another group, and those who are able to grasp skills quickly and need more time for developing abstract concepts will be in a third group. Some educators advocate four groups. Those who advocate four reading groups have a good point in their favor if the grouping is done on the basis of ability. However, more than that is seldom advisable because of the time element, except in cases of extremely wide deviation. Durrell and Sullivan explain that there are usually two types of children in the lower or middle groups, although it may take a good testing program and shrewd observation to detect it. The teacher needs to be aware of the child who has the ability, but for one reason or another, is not using it. It is understandable that he will not need the same kind of instruction as the child who can be expected to progress at a slow pace because of his limited ability.

_Happy learning experiences._ As educators have searched for still better ways to challenge each individual to develop his capacities as much as possible, they discovered very interesting and helpful information concerning group dynamics. It is important for a child to feel at ease and happy in his group placement. It is more likely that this feeling will

---

be found in smaller groups where each child has an opportunity to express himself and is expected to make a contribution. There are times when children have to be shifted from one group to another in order to find this congenial atmosphere of acceptance and cooperation. For instance, the ability grouping may place one lone boy (or girl) in a particular group. When this is embarrassing and works a hardship on the child, a shifting may be advisable. Likewise, it can happen that two children who need each other's friendship and encouragement are separated. If a happier and more profitable learning situation would result if they were allowed to work together, a change in grouping would be not only permissible, but desirable. Different personality combinations could be used to illustrate this point. One of the most common would be that of two timid children finding security and confidence in shared interests and problems.

In fact, grouping in the classroom should never be set up on a hard and fast basis. Turney states that the dominating aim should always be to improve the learning situation. Those who have worked with children know that they progress at different rates. For this reason teachers must be alert continually to notice specific instances of progress and make provisions for transfer from one group to another when it is advisable.

---

Justification of the Problem. Grouping, in order to get the best results in the many learning situations arising in the classroom, is a problem for every teacher whether her room is large or small.

The writer has long been concerned with the problem of grouping in the classroom. Organization of the reading groups has been the problem which has given rise to many questions and misgivings. There have been times when supervisor's suggestions have helped; other times when they did not. The writer has tried many different types and sizes of groups with varying degrees of success. In spite of the continuous effort to devise subtle means of hiding the fact that some children are in the "slow" group, parents continue to come with the plea, "Can't I help Johnny so he can get in the "fast" group?"

A conviction that there must be a better way to group for the effective learning of reading has led to individual efforts to find such a method. The desire to obtain more satisfying results in developing individual capacities by reorganizing the reading program has led to this survey.

A study of the exceptional child, with emphasis upon the gifted, has led to a deeper understanding of the differences in the learning abilities of the deviates on both ends of the intelligence scale. Research has shown that there have been studies made by outstanding educators who have recognized similar problems.

Delimitation. Since the problem facing this writer is one of effective grouping for reading, this research is not particularly
concerned with grouping in other areas. The whole field of grouping in the classroom is too broad a subject to be covered in one project of this type. Groups should change during the day as interests and activities change. Each is important and deserves special consideration, but in this paper the emphasis will be on the selection, the organization, and the objectives of the reading groups.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Grouping.** There are many variables by which children can be classified into groups. Austin H. Turney of Kansas University has divided these into seven categories:  

1. Physical development
2. Intelligence
3. Achievement
4. Motivation
5. Social factors
6. Special abilities and interests
7. Special disabilities

All of these areas are important, and in setting up her program, the teacher should be aware of each child's rating or limitation in each of the seven categories. However, since the generally accepted practice is to select reading groups on a basis of abilities, it seems expedient to give some time to an explanation of the two terms, "groups" and "abilities."

It is often assumed a child's group is defined by saying he is six or ten and that he is in the first or the fifth grade. Classrooms do limit the frequent, close contact with others of different ages during the day. However, the teacher finds other forms of grouping equally

---

7 Ibid.
valuable. She will divide her class into several groups for reading, and later during the course of the day, she will have different groups for spelling, music, social studies, and other activities. The child often finds these smaller groups more helpful and more meaningful than the larger classroom group. As he works with different learning groups during his classroom experiences, he will find that his role in each group differs. Grouping should be flexible, it needs to be a changing process, not a rigid pattern, that must have first consideration. The child's reading group should be one in which he can have an opportunity to work with other children in many different ways.

With recent studies as a basis, Seagoe states that no longer can any number of children greater than one in any combination be considered a group. A group in the sense in which it is used in this survey and in educational research consists of persons who are interacting with each other, helping and accepting help from each other, and working together toward a mutually accepted goal. When the group is defined in this co-working sense, care must be used in the selection of the members of the group if there is to be ease in interaction. If a group is to work together well and the greatest individual gain is to be realized, the group should be relatively small, homogeneous, self-chosen, and familiar.

May V. Seagoe, Research on Ability Grouping: A Critical Analysis in Study-Discussion Group 9 at the ASCD Convention, St. Louis, Missouri, 1957.
Differing capacities. Consideration must also be given to the extent a child can differ from his companions and still work as a contributing member of the group. Children who fall near the norm do not present much of a problem since most of them can meet the teacher's and the group's requirements. The children who fall in either extreme in their ability are the ones whose problems may be acute. There may be a deaf child who needs to learn lip-reading; the slow learning child may need much drill, which might frustrate the bright one who needs independence and abstraction. It may be necessary to do some shifting, even between classes, to bring together possibly three to five of these extreme deviates in a single room.

Ability grouping. Ability grouping has been a controversial issue since its inception. One of the reasons for this is the fact that we have failed to define "ability" in any logical or consistent way. Too often educators have given the impression that ability is judged solely on the results of group mental tests. This idea is open to criticism because we know that adults have many kinds of abilities, many of them highly specialized. These specialized abilities are not always discernible in the lower grades and can sometimes be recognized only as general ability.

Another error that has caused misunderstanding has been the use of "ability grouping" and "homogeneous grouping" synonymously. Mental tests have been given and the subsequent grouping, based on the results has been called "homogeneous." They forget that those who score alike in
scholastic tests may show great heterogeneity in special abilities, physical development, and social maturity. In other cases children of the same age are grouped together regardless of general ability. Here homogeneity in physical development has been substituted for homogeneity in mental maturity. It would be better to reserve "homogeneous grouping" as a concept that children who are alike in some characteristic learn together more easily. The term "ability grouping" should be used when referring to children who are grouped together because of similar capacities for learning specific academic subjects.

Ability. The word "ability" needs to be defined in terms of specific educational ends. From references made to ability by the general public, the conclusion would be drawn that the same kind of ability is needed to read, to work arithmetic, write, play games, participate in a group, sing, paint, or stand stress, and that all subjects require the same sort of capacity. Although there is considerable overlapping, each school activity requires different abilities on the part of the children. The ability which we refer to when we are considering a child's place in a reading group may be quite different from that which is used in his social studies or on the playground.

To define "ability," then, is to think of it as consisting of whatever powers may be essential to perform a given task. When defining ability in this way, it is easy to understand that the mental ability which is measured by tests is only one of the abilities with which a child approaches learning.
The World is a great book,
Of which they that never stir from home
Read only a page.

-- Augustine 9

Reading of printed symbols is most likely to be the only
meaning to be associated with the term "reading" . . . Everyone
must learn how to read spoken words just as truly as
everyone must learn how to read printed words to serve with
greatest effectiveness in modern society.10

The teacher in the traditional school, whose objective was that
of teaching the three R's, could have been satisfied with the teaching
of printed symbols. The teacher who is attempting to teach the next
generation to make discriminating responses must consider the teaching
of reading in a much broader sense. Teachers now recognize concepts
as an important part of reading readiness. Grouping for effective
learning is also an important phase of reading.

Spencer continues:

. . . Words are symbols of ideas about things. Consequently,
words serve only as cues for the association of ideas which the
word user and the word reader must think, if communication is
accomplished. There must be therefore, a more primary form of
reading than word reading. One must read the things and create
the ideas which words are used to symbolize. The reading of
things is the primary source of meaning of judgments and of
significance. The reading of symbols utilizes the products of
these more basic reading acts.11

9 Peter L. Spencer, "Reading: A Process of Behavior," Reading
(Washington D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International,

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
In the above quotation Spencer has distinguished between two kinds of reading: one which may be classified as primary (the direct reading of things), and the other as secondary (the reading of symbols).

With this definition of reading in mind, it can be explained how the rich and varied experiences which parents and children share in the home can be utilized to develop concepts of association which aid in learning to read. For example, the child who sees the traffic light and knows that red means "stop" and green means "go" has an easy step from primary to secondary reading when he sees it pictured in the school room thus:

![Traffic Light Diagram]
CHAPTER III

THE RESEARCH

Public interest. If you want to become thoroughly discouraged about the progress which our schools are making in almost any area, particularly reading, ask the average man-on-the-street if he thinks that reading has been neglected in our schools. He will probably bombard you with strong accusations and gloomy predictions. You may even wish for the proverbial hills to hide you from his wrath. If you don't believe this, try it sometime. The truth of the matter is that never in history has a country been as reading conscious as we are today. Never has so much reading material been available nor so many people reading. More attention has been focused upon the schools and what they are teaching in the last twenty-five years than ever before. And because we are human we recall that which was best in the past and see only the worst as we look at the present.

Scientific investigations. William Gray has very adequately explained the reason for the present interest in the reading methods taught in our schools. He tells of the 2500 scientific investigations that were made from 1925 to 1952 and compares those with the five hundred made in the previous quarter century. With all of these

---

research studies being published in rapid succession, it is small
wonder that people are beginning to take notice. This is especially
ture when some of the most sensational articles, based upon reports
of these investigations, are reaching the public through such publica-
tions as Reader's Digest and Life.

Besides the studies by educators, there have been many others
conducted by local, state, and national committees. Hundreds of work-
shops are held locally to acquaint older teachers with the new methods.
Some of these workshops are worthwhile, but others presenting untested
theories have doubtful value. In most cases, theory has developed more
rapidly than practice. Some schools adopted forward-looking programs
much more readily than others. Variations in practice are wider than
they have ever been before, and both extremes are accompanied by vigorous
claims and counterclaims.

All of this indicates that there is an urgent need for carefully
conceived in-service programs which will acquaint all teachers with the
modern trends. When changes are made, the teachers and the administrators
should understand and believe in the new methods and their objectives.

Also public opinion has not kept pace with developments. Most
laymen judge all classroom procedure and practices by what was done when
they were in school. With this attitude, it is not strange that they
should fail to recognize the praiseworthy efforts which are being made
today.
Evaluation of research. When the research is studied and evaluated, it is found that the most significant studies on grouping were done prior to 1936. They are recorded in the Thirty-Fifth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, which was devoted to the subject of the grouping of pupils. Nearly all of these studies are done on an interclass level, instead of with sub-groups in individual classrooms. Most of the group situations deal with social studies and activity programs rather than the skill subjects. There have been many hundreds of studies made in the field of reading, but few, considering the number made, are for the purpose of determining which is the most satisfactory method of grouping within the classroom.

The third factor which limits the value of these studies, as far as this survey is concerned, is the fact that they have been too loosely controlled. Academic abilities, socio-metric backgrounds, teacher competence, and many other important controls have been lacking when comparisons have been attempted. And last, these group studies were made over twenty years ago. Considering the changes which have taken place in teaching methods and objectives in the last two decades, one hesitates to accept the findings published in 1936 as conclusive.

Seagoe stated that the long dormant issue of ability grouping has again awakened interest. This is due to the current interest in the gifted child as a growing number of people are looking upon democratic

---

education as a development of individual potential instead of a leveling process.

Small group plans. The writer of this survey has noted with interest several different trends of thought as she has studied the various teaching techniques which have been advocated in order that the individual child would receive the maximum assistance. These vary from Olson's early studies of independent reading and the class procedure which he called "self-selection,"\textsuperscript{14} to Durrell's early plans for several small groups,\textsuperscript{15} through the many plans which advocated a three level grouping, to the "invitation classes" or multiple-level program described by Kathleen Hester\textsuperscript{16} and the present trend toward the use of Olson's original self-selection.

Willard Olson was far ahead of his time when in the early 1900's he was advocating independent reading. Although special work had been started with the mentally retarded as early as 1900, little had been done to give the average and superior child special consideration until after Terman's work in the early 1920's had put the intelligence quotient on a scientific and measurable level.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{15}Donald D. Durrell, \textit{Improvement of Basic Reading Abilities} (Yonkers-on-Hudon, New York: World Book Company, 1940).


\textsuperscript{17}L. M. Terman, et al., \textit{Mental and Physical Traits of a Thousand Gifted Children} (Stanford University Press, 1925).
Loosely controlled experimentation. In 1930 J. L. Meriam was recommending that "The best way to teach reading is not to teach reading but to provide the occasion . . . in which reading functions . . . Let pupils read to learn; incidentally they will learn to read." He presented data to prove his theory. As with many such studies, the experiment was loosely controlled. Such variables as the comparability of the groups, the qualifications of the teaching staffs involved, and the nature of the learning environments involved made his findings of questionable value. In his research, as in other cases, the comparability of the groups, the qualifications of the teaching staffs involved, and the nature of the learning environments involved were not considered. Many times new practices, based upon uncontrolled experiments, were advocated and introduced into the schools without studying their relation to the existing organization, the objectives involved, and the local teachers' qualifications. The latter must include the teachers' understanding of the techniques of the method as well as their belief in its worth. The instances have been rare in which new practices have been tried in schools on a controlled experimental basis.

One of the carefully planned studies carried on in actual classroom situations is described by J. T. Worlton. This experimentation was done


in the public schools of Salt Lake City, Utah, during the three years prior to June, 1936. At this date he published his findings in an article about individualizing the instruction in reading. One of his conclusions was that if the needs of individuals are to be provided for adequately, many of the teaching problems can be met only by forming small ability groups. Another result of this research was that Worlton also concluded that children of all types -- the slow, the average, and the fast learners -- have a better opportunity to "learn to read and read to learn" when individual consideration is given. "Children read under a stimulus of a personal and vital motivation, and the teacher was better able to meet the needs and interests of the pupils."

All of his recommendations have a familiar ring. Most of them are accepted practices today. However, he finished his article by noting that this experiment had involved fundamental changes in the philosophy and method of instruction. If such changes proved to be desirable, he further contended, they would have to undergo an evolutionary process. He forecast that the transition period would likely be a time of concern and mental stress for the teacher. He could foresee that the experimental technique would require better training of teachers and a permanently heavier teaching load. These were only two of many problems then awaiting further experience and research.

Hildreth collected and classified reports from twenty-two experienced teachers in various public and private schools in grades

---

20 Gertrude Hildreth, "Individualizing Reading Instruction," Teacher's College Record, 42:123-37, November, 1940.
two to eight, concerning methods used in individualizing reading instruction. She did this survey prior to 1940 when it was published. She found that sub-grouping within the classroom with differentiated materials was the most commonly used practice.

It was during the 1930's that much attention was given to the organization of ability groups in homogeneous classes although the above mentioned research shows that the technique of sub-grouping in the classroom was receiving consideration. Unfortunately, many unsatisfactory outcomes can result when sound educational doctrine is applied inconsistently. The X, Y, Z groups that seemed at first to be the final answer to grouping problems became known as the "smart" group or the "dumb" one. Shame, heartache, and parental disapproval were a natural result.

Durrell, as mentioned earlier, suggested a plan of small-group instruction which further subdivided the class and resulted in a highly individualized program for meeting the needs of children. According to Durrell, small-group work may be variously organized, depending mainly upon the availability of books to fit various levels of reading ability. From the four suggested types of organization suggested below, the teacher should choose the one which she finds the most practical for her purpose.

21 Durrell, loc. cit.
1. A Unifying Center of Interest. Interest center with reading for different ability levels.
2. Independent Group Interests. These might be the sea, animals, adventure, etc.
3. Class Preparation and Group Recitation. All would prepare the same lesson and then divide into small groups for recitation.
4. Unit Adjustment Plan. This is less desirable than some of the others. The work is divided into units of study. The class is divided so that those who comprehend are in larger groups than those who need drill on reading mechanics.

Durrell states that his technique has been used by several hundred teachers, and its effectiveness has been measured. He reported that standardized tests of reading achievement revealed that the gain in classes so taught was about 50 per cent more than that resulting from the two- or three-level plans of grouping.

Research during the war years. Summaries made by both Gray and Traxler show that there was a decided decrease in reading research during the war years. The research in the field of sub-class grouping for reading seemed to have reached a plateau at that time also.

The idea that a classroom should have three reading groups based on ability has been almost universally accepted. As Gray stated in his report to the Annual Reading Conference at the University of Chicago in 1949,

---


it was the current practice to group the pupils in three groups for purposes of all basic instruction.

Kottmeyer\textsuperscript{25} presented evidence of the grave need of adjusting instruction and materials to individual differences in 1944. He concluded that when ten or twelve grade levels in reading ability appear among a group of eighth graders who have had approximately the same amount of time in which to achieve, there is cause to examine critically the program of reading instruction which would bring about such results. According to Kottmeyer, the Division of Tests and Measurements in the St. Louis Schools customarily administer the Traxler Silent Reading Test to survey the reading achievement of the elementary-school graduates. Results of the tests given in June, 1943, to 4,236 children of eighth grade level showed that 21 per cent of the white pupils and 60 per cent of the Negro pupils were below 7.0. Below 4.0 were 6 per cent of the Negroes and 0.8 per cent of the whites.

A reading improvement program was carried out during the following school term which stressed individual needs and the plan of teaching reading by stages of development instead of by grade levels. When the tests were given to the graduating eighth graders in June of 1944, the mean score for whites had been raised from 8.77, which it had been in 1943, to 9.15 and for Negroes from 6.78 to 7.71. The percentage scores

\textsuperscript{25}William Kottmeyer, "Improving Reading Instruction in the St. Louis Schools," \textit{Elementary School Journal}, 45:33-38 September, 1944.
below 7.0 was reduced for whites from 21 per cent to 16 per cent and for Negroes from 60 per cent to 38 per cent.

Jones\textsuperscript{26} reported in 1948 on an experiment in Richmond, Indiana, involving 448 pupils and 34 teachers. The problem was to find the difference, if any, between the progress in skills of children at the intermediate grade level when taught on their individual levels of accomplishment, regardless of grade placement, and the children taught as a group the curriculum prescribed for their grade.

The Richmond study of difference was based on the amount of growth from one point of measurement to another rather than level of achievement at a given time. A study of the total average growth made by each group gives a basis for comparison for the over-all picture. The control group made a growth of almost nine months or .87 in the interval between the September and May testing. The experimental group made a growth of 1.11. This indicated almost two and one-half months more than the control group.

The members of the two groups had similar chronological and mental ages, hence similar I.Q.'s, as well as comparative achievement scores at the outset.

A study of typical situations and pupil reactions in the two types of classrooms in the Jones' experiment indicates teacher domination and whole-group action in the conventional classrooms as contrasted with that of pupil planning and individual or small-group action in the experimental

classroom.

The following conclusions from Jones' experiment were based on statistical data and can be verified with figures.

1. Children taught on an individual level regardless of grade placement make a greater amount of growth than comparable pupils taught as a group the curriculum prescribed for their grade.
2. This difference in amount of growth is consistent in reading, arithmetic, and spelling.
3. The difference in growth is consistently true for superior, normal, and dull.
4. The difference in growth in reading, arithmetic, and spelling is in an inverse ratio to the level of the ability of the pupils.
5. The differences in growth as a result of individual instruction are more significant for normal and dull than for superior children.

Jones concluded by stating that there was sufficient evidence to support the conclusion that each child as an individual has a right to materials and procedures within his capacities. If given such a program, each pupil will find himself in a learning situation in which he can succeed, in which he is not repeating tasks he has already mastered, in which he has something to contribute to the group, and in which he can progress through participation in the group. This type of teaching-learning situation, used by the experimental group eliminates pupil failure and breaks down any artificial grade barriers. Gaps in learning are eliminated and repetition becomes unnecessary. Education becomes a series of progressive steps toward maturity.

Much information concerning trends in reading can be obtained by surveying the monographs which give the proceedings of the Annual Conferences on Reading which are held at the University of Chicago. Ruth
Strickland\textsuperscript{27} states in her report to this conference, that most primary-grade teachers divide their total class into two or three reading groups arranged on the basis of reading ability. The teacher provides different reading experiences for different reading ability levels, or she arrange grouping which permits the brighter children to make more rapid progress through the work of the grade. If the teacher did not vary her instructional techniques to meet the need of individual children, she might as well teach the entire class in a single group.

The present decade - in research. Engelhardt\textsuperscript{28} reminded teachers in 1936 that new practices are frequently brought in on a wave of reform or on the advice of leaders and carried on year after year because they are the accepted practice. The use of three sub-groups in the classroom has fallen into this position in too many cases. The practice has become so widespread that some beginning teachers think they must have three groups. Russell and Wulfing\textsuperscript{29} remind us of Stendler's\textsuperscript{30} cautioning of the dangers of a fixed type of grouping. They pointed out the difficulty


\textsuperscript{29}David H. Russell and Gretchen Wulfing, "Eight Controversial Issues in the Teaching of Reading," Contributions in Reading, No. 7 (Chicago: Ginn and Company, Publishers, n.d.)

of keeping two groups quietly busy while the third reads. They also believed that this arrangement does not give the child, especially during the primary stages, enough practice in reading. Another shortcoming, even with three levels of activities, is that the teacher cannot hope to meet the needs of the individual child. With fixed, daily, group action both children and parents become conscious of individual differences, and those who cannot measure up to higher group standards are pressed beyond their capacity.

Flexible group situations are recommended by Russell and Wulfing. As children progress and are capable of work with another group, the grouping should be changed. In the course of a day, a child should have the opportunity of reading with his sub-group, as an individual, with a partner, or small committee, or with his whole class on items of common concern. If reading is varied and flexible, there should be little need for controversy over group reading.

Again we are reminded of Dr. Gray's statement that theories in teaching develop more rapidly than practice. After all of these years of striving to recognize children's needs, some teachers are beginning to say out loud what many of us have been thinking for many years. "Three reading groups do not meet individual differences." In scattered sections

---

31 Russell and Wulfing, loc. cit.

of the country we are getting reports of teachers who are grasping the
torch that Olson has been holding out for so long, and these brave
pioneers are showing the rest of us what he meant by "self-selection" and
individual instruction.

Kathleen B. Hester\textsuperscript{33} describes her plan, which she calls the
multiple-level program, one which will meet the needs as they vary
from day to day. If reading is to be one of the means used to help the
child to achieve his maximum learning growth, the teacher must record and
pace each pattern of growth by supplying instructional materials in
accordance with the needs and interests of each child. If teachers
accept this philosophy, they can no longer set up three or four different
groups with the only variation being the speed with which material is
covered.

With multiple-level grouping, the pupils may join any or all of
the groups that meet their needs. If a particular group is working on
reading skills, vocabulary development, or some aspect of comprehension,
anyone who feels that he will profit by the instruction is free to
join.

Hester states that it has often been her experience to have
teachers question the ability of children to select wisely. After
trying the plan, however, they are soon convinced that often the children
sense their own weaknesses more accurately than do the teachers. These
teachers find that a child will participate in, profit by, and enjoy work

\textsuperscript{33}Kathleen B. Hester, "Every Child Reads Successfully in the
October, 1952.
in which he attains reading success through his own selection. The children are also happy for a chance to gain the help they need for greater success. The results, concludes Hester are gratifying to all.

**Self-Selection defined.** Self-selection means giving each child an opportunity to choose the book he wants to read. Many books would be available from which the child could make his choice and progress at his own rate of speed. He would be encouraged to discover for himself particular skills in which he needed instruction. These aims of self-selected reading and the developing of needed skills are attained by flexible grouping which varies from day to day and which most accurately meets individual needs.

**Self-selection illustrated.** To illustrate how a self-selective program can be put into effect, the plans of a first grade teacher using this method might be followed. At the beginning of the school year she would arrange the various interest centers much the same as they are in any well-planned first grade room. She would be careful to have a much wider variety of reading material available than the teacher who is planning to use a basic text.

As she meets her children the first day of school, this first grade teacher knows that she needs to get acquainted with each child's interests,

34

capabilities, and attitudes in order to help him to choose wisely as he begins to learn to read. Therefore, her readiness program of conversation, stories, listening games, picture and color matching, and rhythm exercises is observed with individual characteristics and responses being noted and recorded. Following the reading readiness program, experience charts which the children make and read develop further the teacher's knowledge of each child's interests and capabilities.

These charts give the children the beginning of a basic vocabulary. The books through which all have been free to browse take on new significance as the children discover in some of them the same words that they have learned in their reading charts. The teacher, being aware of the contents of the books, arranges and displays them so that words learned from chart reading will be encountered. Some of the very easy books which have only a word or short sentence under each picture will quickly offer a challenge to the brighter children -- they are reading a book! When they find that they can read these books independently, the self-selection program is under way.

Observing and recording on cards the selections of each child as they are made, the teacher notes individual difficulties and capabilities. From the information acquired on the cards, the teacher organizes her daily reading program. Some pupils may be having trouble with a particular beginning consonant. The teacher will bring this mutual difficulty to their attention and suggest that they work it out as a group. Several other pupils who are interested in Johnny's animal story might form a group to hear him read. Still other children might need flash card drill on such words as "was," "saw," "where," and "were," or other words presenting difficulty.
Groups may change from day to day, or there may be times when a group may meet together until a special problem is ironed out. There may be two or ten children working together. The books that individuals are reading may vary widely in difficulty. The important thing with these groups is that they are flexible; their purpose is for the working out of specific problems. For the remainder of the school year, then, the teacher continues to use flexible grouping to develop the reading of each child as much as possible.

Experiences of many teachers show that children of all grades are able to choose books which meet their needs with a minimum of suggestions from the teacher. They also tell of the ingenious ways children find of helping each other when given an opportunity.

In the room where the independent choice of reading materials is used, children are learning to read because they want to read. The material available has a personal appeal and an interest which gives each child a vital incentive to learn to read.

---


38 Garretson, *loc. cit.*
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

A summation of the most significant trends in grouping as determined by this survey of related literature. Even though this report has been limited to a survey of one of the hundreds of problems which have been worked out in the field of research in reading, it has given this writer more comprehensive views of the situation. There are so many facets to be considered when dealing with problems of teaching and learning that it is small wonder that we often become confused. Above all other considerations, teachers must keep the knowledge that in their hands they hold the developing citizens of tomorrow's world. They have the responsibility of imparting, as much as possible, the meaning of democratic living.

The schools first concept of democratic opportunity was reflected in the plans in which all were to be taught the same things from the same books. Courses of study were geared to that idea. In the present courses of study, enrichment projects are suggested at all levels.

Recognition of the individual. Early studies made by Willard C. Olson, a professor of education and director of research of the University of Michigan, were cited as an awareness of the importance of giving individual attention to children. Terman's standardizing of the Binet intelligence tests at Stanford University in California in the 1920's was also given as an example of educators who were awakening to the fact that all did not have the same capacity for learning and
therefore could not be expected to achieve the same goals.

**Achieving proper grouping.** By the time the mid-thirties had arrived, the child-centered schools and special rooms were flourishing; enthusiastic leaders inspired uninformed followers to try out the new plan of ability grouping before they fully understood the procedure or the objectives. John Dewey's dreams for progressive schools were so badly misinterpreted that even today the mention of "child-centered schools" brings caustic remarks and criticism. In all probability, the direction to which Dewey was pointing has been found through the three-fold purpose for grouping. In grouping for learning with the self-selection method, the first purpose is to teach democratic living; the second, to meet the differing needs with greater precision; and the third, to make learning a happy experience for children.

**Research summaries.** The summaries of William S. Gray and Arthur E. Traxler have been used as guides in research which is concerned with the problem of grouping for learning of reading in the elementary grades. Gray and Traxler find that exactly the opposite of the popular concept is true; More children are reading now than ever before. Not only more are reading, but children are now reading with more understanding than they have in times past. Attention has been focused upon the academic achievement of our schools today because of this extensive research, because of the sensational articles in magazines, and because of the urgent need for highly trained technicians in our increasing competitive industries.
Evaluation of research. Although many hundred of programs of research have been carried out, covering almost every phase of the learning of reading, there are comparatively few which deal with small group situations within the classroom. Most of the experimentation has been done on an inter-class level. The question for many years has been whether or not slow, average, and fast classes should be organized in schools. Any number of surveys can be found which attempt to prove that homogeneous grouping is good or bad. One significant observation is that results can be found favoring either type of classroom organization. This would lead us to believe that there were other important variables which were not considered that influenced the final outcomes. Research to be valuable must be carefully controlled.

Early studies of sub-grouping. J.T. Worlton of Salt Lake City, Utah, gave us one of our first carefully controlled studies of classroom organization which recognized individual differences. He recognized it as a method that would need understanding and skillful teachers. He found that children learn more when their individual needs are considered no matter what their ability level.

Reports were collected and classified by Gertrude Hildreth which showed that the common practice among experienced teachers was to divide their pupils into sub-groups with differentiated materials in order to meet individual needs. Durrell stated that hundreds of teachers had found that small-group instruction which further subdivides the class and results in a highly individualized program of instruction was far superior to other types of grouping.

During the war years Kottmeyer presented evidence that showed a grave need for a change in teaching methods that would give more consideration to the individual child in the classroom. Jones showed that
learning growth was consistently greater when differences were recognized, and that the slow child profited more from special consideration than the superior child. Another significant result of this research was that the learning growth in relation to the starting point is of more importance in measuring achievement than the reaching of an expected grade norm.

The Annual Reading Conferences at the University of Chicago have given us much valuable information concerning trends in reading instruction. Ruth Strickland gave an appraisal of different types of reading programs. She stressed the fact that it was necessary to use different approaches to teaching reading to children of different levels.

Research in the 1950's. Reports are coming from all parts of the country that show that teachers, as well as laymen, are becoming increasingly unhappy over the "fixed" or inflexible three-group method which has been almost universally accepted as the only way to organize a classroom. From both the East and the West coasts come summaries of successful outcomes where a new and completely flexible plan of classroom grouping has been used. This is the program which Olson designated as a self-selection plan of conducting a classroom on a truly individualized basis. Self-selection, a permissive program which allows the children to choose their own reading materials and the fields of instruction which they need, encourages pupils to read because they want to read. It is an individual program of reading and a method of instruction which combines the best elements of recreational reading and skill teaching.
Personal gains resulting from this research. The true value of this research project cannot be measured at this time, from a personal standpoint. From the standpoint of clarifying the thinking of this writer, it has been invaluable. It has shown that there has been a gradual development in the methods of teaching which has brought about this present trend toward self-selection. As a pyramid is built by putting one stone upon another, so educational methods have advanced toward a more satisfactory way of meeting individual needs and of allowing each child to develop to the limit of his potentiality.

Supervisors and in-service training instructors, as well as a personal realization of a need that the ordinary classroom procedure did not provide, have led this writer to choose research in grouping methods. At this time she is satisfied that she has found in the self-selection method the means to teach reading skills more efficiently to elementary pupils and to make their learning experiences more pleasant and effective. Having read in full the report that could only be briefly summarized here, the writer should be able to combine them with her own knowledge, which she has gained from experience, and organize a flexible grouping plan that will meet the needs of the children in her classroom as individuals.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS


B. PERIODICALS AND BULLETINS


Gray, William S. "Summary of Reading Investigations (July 1, 1938 to June 20, 1939)," Journal of Educational Research, 33:481-523, March, 1940.


C. MONOGRAPHS AND PAMPHLETS


D. UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL