

Individual Differences

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Human beings differ in physique, mental ability, personality, educational achievements, and in all other characteristics. Not only is one man unlike another, but every man is essentially different from every other, so that no training, no forming, nor informing, will ever make two persons alike in thought or in power.

In the field of education the differences are eliminated somewhat by having every one of the same chronological age begin school at the same time. But a cross-sectional study of children of any given age, however, would show that both the physical ages and the mental ages of a large group of children of the same chronological age give indication of a great variation within themselves and between the two. Among seven-year-olds, for example, physical growth status may range from extreme underdevelopment to exceptional over development, especially in height and weight. Similar variations can be found among seven-year-olds in their relative degree of mental ability, ranging from very low mental status to superior mental acuity. In general, therefore, there appears to be no guarantee that a child at any given chronological age will have reached "normal" stage of growth either physically or mentally.

The teacher has constant experience that the children before him are unequal in all bodily and mental qualities, and that as they grow older these inequalities, far from disappearing, will accentuate themselves.

Some systems disregard the age grouping plan in individual cases and place a child with a group of a younger chronological age in order that his mental maturity level is somewhat the same as that of the younger group. The opposite may be done with a child who has superior mental abilities -- place him in the grade ahead. Generally, however, children are grouped according to their chronological age.

And since this is true, the curriculum must be so adjusted as to catch all differences in the net. There is the Winnetka plan. During the time devoted to individual work in the common essentials every child does his own job. If one steps into a "fourth-grade room" for example, he may find each child doing a different thing. One is just finishing third-grade arithmetic, another has begun compound multiplication, another is in the middle of long division, while still another may be beginning fifth-grade work in fractions. A child may be doing fourth-grade arithmetic during one period, but a few minutes later, in the same room, be doing fifth-grade reading.

However, this system is too individual and too concerned with subject matter and not enough with the child as a personality. For grades one through six the "unit-of-work program" is a way for handling inequalities. It accommodates the differences in working speed, way youngsters learn, their readiness, willingness, intelligence, and interest. This "unit-of-work program" follows a pattern consisting of these four steps: orientation, planning period, working period and culmination of activities. It includes the three steps in learning: readiness, exercise, and effect. To execute a successful unit takes careful planning on the part of the teacher, wide general knowledge resulting from a first-class general education, and an understanding of the needs of each child in all the different phases of learning which are: language experiences, as well as social, number, scientific, healthful, creative, and most of all religious experiences. This integrated curriculum program rids the classroom of the lock step, teacher imposed method and instead provides for the individual variations that do exist.

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