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General Studies Track Reviewed and Reported from East Richland High School, Olney, Illinois

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Eastern Illinois University

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GENERAL STUDIES TRACK REVIEWED AND REPORTED

FROM EAST RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

(TITLE)

Olney, Illinois

BY

James A. Ahlfield

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Specialist in Education

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1973

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PHILOSOPHY

Purpose of Study

For many years student ability grouping has been practiced in various forms in the Olney community schools as well as most other public schools in the United States. As this paper is being written there is an in depth curriculum review underway from which it is desired that future curriculum direction may be established. Specific attention of this paper will be a review of contemporary literature concerning student grouping, a report on extant grouping practices in East Richland High School and an in depth look at the same. Emphasis will be placed on study of the general studies students and their curricular pattern.

A literature review in contemporary educational journals leads to the impression that innovators and theorists must surely have strong tendencies toward idealism. Apparently the practical applications lead to much aberration of the original theories when they are applied to specific local situations. A further view which may readily be accepted is that in reality little of that which is "new" in education today is "new" in fact.

An analysis of printed materials concerning ability grouping leads to the idea that in its gross form it is parallel to tracking as it has been practiced in at least the last five decades. In recent years tracking has been argued both pro and con and it may be helpful in development of this paper to look at some of those arguments that might show the relationship.

East Richland High School's Educational Philosophy

In the opinion of this writer it is the intent of the East Richland community schools that education should be made available to every student commensurate with his abilities, needs, and desires insofar as the same can be accomplished within the essential physical limitations of the community's resources. This intent appears to be implied in the statement of philosophy prepared for the '71 - '72 evaluation of the community's schools by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

PHILOSOPHY

The school receives its directional influence from the people, whose members constitute a source of opinion and judgement that keeps the educational program in harmony with the desires and capacities of the community. The function of the school is to help each student develop physically, socially, and emotionally, as well as intellectually, to a degree which is consistent with his current and potential capacities. The staff recognizes that today's student needs to acquire more knowledge with greater efficiency than ever before. The student is encouraged to inquire into problems and discover

answers, shades of meaning, and relationships for himself. Progressing through and participating in meaningful and creative experiences, he is being prepared to assume adult responsibility in a democratic society. The program of the school develops within the individual an appreciation and understanding of democratic ideals and affords him the opportunity to practice democratic procedures under the guidance and supervision of the staff.¹

It is further exhibited in the provision of the general studies curriculum through which it is hoped that students, who might otherwise find little value in education, may be retained in the formal educational program. Therefore to further clarify the stance of this paper it may also help to look at the characteristics of students who are most likely to drop out of the educational pattern prior to graduation from the secondary school system. Concern for the average and higher ability student is expressed via curricular patterns which were felt to be appropriate to that type of student ability and interests.

Educational Ideals in Perspective

The thesis of American education appears to stem from the idealistic propositions set forth in "The Great Didactic" by Comenius in 1632. The education he proposed "includes all that is proper for a man, and is one in which all men who are born into this world should share." He specifically

¹ "Philosophy and Objectives of East Richland High School" as stated in the North Central Evaluation of 1971-1972. (unpublished)

said that the first desire should be that none should be excluded for reason of age, social or economic status, or sex so that all human beings may become educated. His second wish was that all persons should become "wholly educated, rightly formed not only in one single matter or in a few or even in many, but in all things which perfect human nature..."²

We may project from the foregoing ideal that it was felt that all people should benefit from similar educational experiences. It may also be assumed that when it was written, most people were more likely to attain similar life experiences other than through formal educational procedures than is possible in the varied contemporary life styles.

In 1969 Goodlad appraised the schools as being "conspicuously ill suited to the needs of at least 30 per cent of their present clientele." He expressed that day's dual view of the state of education in that we, "put on one pair of glasses and the schools appear to be moving posthaste toward becoming centers of learning marked by concern for the individual. Put on another, and they appear to be mired in tradition, insensitive to pressing social problems, and inadequate to the demands of learning."³

²Silberman, Charles E., Crisis in the Classroom, (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 1.

³Goodlad, John I., "The Schools vs. Education," Saturday Review of Literature, (April 19, 1969).

Further discontent with the educational scene comes from Leonard's Education for Ecstasy. He said,

The wonder is, when you think about it, how long our schools have managed to stay the same. Since 1930, even such staid institutions as banks have changed almost beyond recognition. And yet, the average second-grade classroom today resembles nothing so much as the classroom in which I day-dreamed my way through second grade back in 1930.

He expressed surprise that schools had not taken retreat as has its predecessors; the farm, village, church, and guild and that they have made no significant changes in the substance and style of their teaching. He compared the most common mode of present day instruction to the Renaissance classroom which had a teacher sitting or standing before a student body in a single classroom, presenting them with facts and techniques of a "verbal-rational nature."⁴

It is generally now agreed that education is an unending growth of knowledge gleaned from all life experience of the individual. It should be established here that future references in this paper to "education" will be limited to that formal, planned exposure which students receive in the classroom. This should not be taken as an effort to limit the effect of the mass media, churches, libraries, etc. in all of which it has been estimated that students may even learn more basic information than they do in schools.⁵ It should be accepted here that

⁴Leonard, George, Education for Ecstasy, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969).

⁵Silberman, op. cit., p. 5.

education is more than the skeptical view issued by J. B. Conant that education is what goes on in schools and colleges. Silberman expresses education more narrowly as "the deliberate or purposeful creation, evocation, or transmission of knowledge, abilities, skills, and values."⁶

A Theory for Contemporary Education

It was once assumed that our society had always needed a few highly developed intellectuals. As time passed, the assumption changed toward a social need for masses of intellectuals. Now it is restated that future needs should be expressed in terms of masses of educated persons rather than masses of intellectuals. In this term education is felt to be the development of ability to feel and act as well as to think.⁷ Purely cultural, intellectual preparation is held to be the vehicle of social destruction as evidenced in the history of the China of the T'ang and Sung periods. Within a century educational dedication to maintenance of the purely intellectual in man destroyed what had been the world's leader in both art and science. Robert M. Hutchins is reported to have considered the thing most essential to becoming a human being the learning to use his mind. He

⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

said that human action derives from human thought. It is argued however that human thought devoid of feeling cannot create a totally human being.⁸

Education for Fallibility

Idealism or Utopianism has frequently provided the basis for proposition of social change. It is argued here that acceptance of less than perfection is more probably the only method of achieving practical changes in any major social process such as public education. Ideals assume that man can have knowledge of a perfect society. This may be accepted as a gross social goal if it is accepted also that no one individual or group may be expected to achieve it. Most theorists seem willing to agree that nobody is perfect and we all make mistakes. This is the basis for a "Fallibilist Theory" presented by Perkinson. He says that effort in social analysis should not be directed toward the actual change or reform. Rather, primary attention should be on the identification of social evils. Efforts to reform in this posture are seen as probes or trials which we can criticize or as experiments from which we can hope to learn. The fallibilist would hope that proposed changes will remove a social evil such as inadequate "appropriate" education for all; however he accepts that people will in time

⁸ Ibid., pp. 7 and 8.

view those efforts as inadequate. He continues to be confident that through criticism we can improve anything. Thus the theorist should retain awareness of his own ignorance of the totality and be prepared to modify his position constantly.⁹

Our educational history leads to the thought that men have regarded education as the way to improve the quality of life. They have longed for life in an educated community from which ignorance would be banished. The fallibilist accepts ignorance as being eternal and infinite, and thus trades the dream of the educated community for another dream of the possibility of building an educative society in which people attempt to advance incomplete knowledge and improve the quality of life via critical analysis. This approach to life makes all of us as individuals responsible for ourselves and our society. Although education is not seen as the cure for all evil, the fallibilist does feel that it can help us to assume our responsibilities via the teaching for the acquisition of critical reasoning powers, the potential for which are assumed to be inherent in all mankind. There would be a

⁹Perkinson, Henry J., "Fallibilism: An Alternative for Now," The Educational Forum, Volume XXXV, Number 2, (January 1971).

change away from seeing education as a positive force that molds or shapes the learner to some ideal. The direction would be toward a new, negative view of education which would reveal ignorance, mistakes, errors, and inadequacies. It would demonstrate the way to improvement and advancement through becoming aware of our faults. Further, it would be an education to allow children to make mistakes, detect them, and modify actions to create anew. Major emphasis would be on the advancement of knowledge rather than on the acquisition of the same.¹⁰

Although the foregoing is not wholly acceptable to this writer, it is believed to be worthy of examination prior to adoption of student and system objectives for an education unit. Recent emphasis on individualization may be closely related to that philosophy for social systems. There is one reservation which might be that distinct attention should be directed toward not becoming excessively idealistic about not being idealistic.

Goodlad offers an appropriate comment to innovators in that before we criticize present society for not providing what we would like, we should first ask fundamental questions about where we are. Specifically he asked:

To what extent is each individual being provided with opportunities to develop his unique potentials? To what extent is each individual developing a deep sense of personal worth-the kind of selfhood that

¹⁰ Ibid.

is prerequisite to self transcendence? To what extent are our young people coming into critical possession of their culture? And to what extent are our young people developing a mankind identity- an identity that transcends all men in all times and in all places?¹¹

Education today must have active and ordered evaluation systems to study both processes and products. Careful conception, continuous evaluation, and willingness to modify should become keynotes of all innovations as well as giving a philosophically progressive look at all contemporary programs.

An Argument for the Future

Recent criticisms of public education calling for school accountability report that we are failing in one out of four cases. It seems that deficiencies are becoming more evident as a result of increased technological demands, but it is assumed that they have always existed. In the past, students who became disenchanted with education could drop out and still find an occupation for which they could qualify through on the job experience. Thus extensive education was not absolutely essential to being self sustaining. Dissident voices are becoming more prominent and parents are no longer willing to accept the statement that their child just cannot learn. Demands are made on educators to assume a revised commitment that every child shall

¹¹ Goodlad, op. cit.

learn. Further, educational systems must adopt a commitment to change from nonproductive effort and to seek causes of failure within the system and its personnel rather than just blaming the shortcomings on the students.¹² This seems to be in agreement with the prior statement by Goodlad and could be held as a basis for his questions in the preceding paragraph. It is paramount to saying that schools must be held accountable for the end product of their services. The fact that one fourth of our students leave school somewhere between the fifth and twelfth grade suggests graphically that we have not previously acted effectively to arrest that rate of social and economic fatalities. (This statistic is from a national source reported by Stenner and does not reflect the pattern in East Richland Schools.)

Characteristics of the Dropout

According to a Talmudic axiom, educators should not let their learning exceed their deeds. "Mere knowledge is not the goal, but action."¹³ This could be easily accepted for an ultimate goal but internal to the total educational process must be a gathering of knowledge adequate for the situational need. Since much of the intent of this paper deals with the under achiever who is a possible school

¹²Stenner, Jack, "Accountability by Public Demand," American Vocational Journal, (February 1971), pp. 33-37.

¹³Silberman, op. cit., p. 9.

dropout, it seems appropriate to review some of the characteristics of the school leaver. From these may be derived a philosophy for education of the low achiever.

The following list of characteristics was developed in an extensive study conducted in the state of New York.

1. Of the 21 factors associated with early school leaving, the one that characterized the greatest number of dropouts was "old age" i.e., being two or more years older than the regular grade group. Pupils who were at the age of the grade group were more likely to graduate.
2. The student who was one or more years re-tarded in grade school because of failure also was highly vulnerable to dropping out. At grade, or above his regular grade, the student was more likely to stay in school.
3. Low I.Q. was the third most frequent factor; below 90 I.Q. led to dropping out; above 100 I.Q. pointed to staying in school.
4. Little or no interest in school work, low school marks and poor reading ability tended to augur dropping out, while high interest in school work, marks of B or above, and a reading ability at or above his grade level indicated conditions favorable to remaining in school.
5. The student who dropped out usually had marks predominantly below C. The stayer had predominantly B or above.
6. The dropout characteristically had a reading ability two years or more below his grade level, whereas the student who graduated read at or above his grade level.
7. A negative parental attitude toward graduation was definitely conducive to dropping out, whereas a positive attitude was favorable to remaining in school until graduation.

8. Known to the Bureau of Guidance and used in this checklist was the fact that generally fair or poor adjustment heralded school-leaving, while good general adjustment was favorable to a student's remaining.
9. Where there was no participation in out-of-school activities the prospects of staying were poor, while planned and reasonable participation was characteristic of the "stayer."
10. Chronic absenteeism (20 or more days a year) characterized the probable dropout, while the student who was seldom absent (10 days or less) was more likely to complete school.
11. Acceptance by other pupils played a moderately important part; the school-leaver was not liked, while the student who completed school tended to be well-liked. (Only extremes were used, perforce, and therefore are not conclusive indicators; they serve only as pointers.)
12. Children with four or more siblings tended to be dropouts, pupils with only one or two siblings tended to stay.
13. The potential dropout resented school controls while the student who stayed willingly accepted them.
14. Youths whose mothers achieved grade ten were apt to graduate; those whose mothers reached no higher than grade seven were found to be "vulnerable."
15. If the parents were vacillating in their attitude about graduation, it was a bad omen; a firmly united attitude was more likely to result in the student's completing school.
16. The potential dropout did not participate in school activities, whereas the student who finished school took part in a planned and reasonable amount of activity.
17. The father's education level was rated seventeenth in importance--somewhat less influential than the mother's which rated fourteenth.

18. The father's occupation in the case of the dropout seemed more often to be unskilled or semiskilled. The student who completed school was more likely to have a father in professional, semiprofessional or managerial work.
19. The potential dropout was more frequently ill or easily fatigued, while the graduating student had consistently good health.
20. The pattern of jumping from school to school belonged to the dropout category; school histories of few or no transfers were more likely to be traceable to the staying student.
21. Physical size was the least important factor considered on this checklist, though even that distinguished the dropout by his small or large size as compared with his age group, while for the staying student no size demarcation was characteristic.¹⁴

Summary

The dropout situation and low achievement have received much attention in recent years. The blame has at sometime or other been laid at the feet of almost everyone concerned with schools. The total problem contains so many facets that it probably has become a conglomeration of many complex issues which are far beyond the scope of this paper. For most social ills one can find an idealist who can tell how it should be; however the realist will likely have difficulty in translating the theory to action. Pure

¹⁴Liggero, John, A Successful Approach to High School Counseling, (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), pp. 82-84.

idealistic views can probably provide a basis for social reform; educators may generally ally themselves with a philosophy; but the ultimate decision for direction of action must be made in full cognizance of the issues at hand as they are related to the local situation.

CHAPTER II

PERSPECTIVE ON STUDENT GROUPING

Introduction to a Curriculum for Ability Grouping

Curriculum design has been identified as being a "logically structured sequence of cultural content taught to produce an interface of student and culture resulting in an outcome of desirable behaviors."¹⁵ The technical aspects of the design have historically followed cultural development. Recent emphases have evolved from strong senses of social imperative which were usually initiated as a result of some crisis such as war or economic upheaval. Degree of permanence for the emphasis has varied in accordance with the strength of the motivating influence; but these shifts have in the main been temporary and were retained within the general design for their tenure. Quoted examples are in the areas of vocational emphasis, binding of school learnings to social needs and problems, and recently increased attention to the subject areas of science, mathematics, and foreign languages.¹⁶

¹⁵Eash, Maurice J., "Aberrant Curriculum Designs," The Educational Forum, Volume XXXV, Number 2, (January 1971), p. 197.

¹⁶Ibid.

Curriculum designers of today present a broad range of underlying philosophies with regard to content. It may be possible to establish polarities such that the range would be from those who are entirely directive in subject or pattern possibilities to those who feel that the student should be almost completely in control of his educational experiences. An example of the latter may be found in Wagschal.

FREEDOM FOR THE BLISS OF IGNORANCE

It is difficult to conceive of a more irrational and stultifying perspective on human learning than that embodied in our educational institutions. If young children can learn so much before they enter school, then on what basis are we entitled to assume that they will fail to learn other necessary skills without the aid of formal structures? If, for example, it is crucial for children to be able to read in our society, then do we not have the confidence to allow children to find out that fact on their own and then proceed to learn to read by their own devices? And if it is possible for at least some people in our society to get along quite happily without knowing how to read, then does it not make sense for us to allow them the possibility of continuing in that blissful state? Why are we afraid to allow human beings the freedom to decide for themselves what they need to learn, when they need to learn it, and how they wish to proceed in learning it?¹⁷

The Subject Centered Curriculum

The curricular pattern most widely employed, one which has been seldom challenged in the U.S. public schools, places emphasis on blocks of cultural content commonly

¹⁷Wagschal, Peter H., "The Free Enterprise Teacher," School and Society, (April 1969).

called subjects. Most changes have come from modification of content within a subject, shift of educational method, or adding new concepts or subjects. However the pattern, directions, and objectives have remained relatively similar over many years. Deviations from the subject centered approach have either disappeared or failed to gain sufficient acceptance to constitute a major effect on the general pattern of the national education scene. Objectives of the subject centered curriculum were to produce an educated populace having the necessary skills to assume a position in the social system as contributing, responsible members. A design which used abstracted cultural content organized into subject areas has been the primary system for perpetuating this approach. With exception of isolated local plans which restricted teaching of certain subjects because of local prejudices, the design remains very similar throughout the United States.¹⁸

The apparent presumption of the subject matter orientation is that it is both possible and educationally desirable to extract units of experience from the students' life for isolated training. It must also be assumed that at some point in education there should be a reintegration of all that was separated so that the learner may obtain a unitized understanding of his life preparation. Although

¹⁸Eash, op. cit., pp. 198-202.

it is not the intent of this paper to argue that the students should be allowed the extent of option suggested by Wagschal (1969), it is proposed that a more individualized view should be taken of each student and his personal characteristics should have a great effect on the selection of his training experiences.

Tracking/Grouping Pro and Con and Pro and Con

A question may be raised as to the validity of the culture unit extraction; but rather than to presume to oppose an educational system heritage, attention will be directed toward tracked curriculum. It is presumed that a comprehensive school system can offer an appropriate program for all. Although school systems may not openly state that they are tracked in program, it would appear to be true in practice.

Tracking According to Hansen

The idealized concept of tracking is in part that it provides a planned curriculum for all with allowances made for individual differences, both in mandated and elective courses. Hansen, who seems to be one of its chief proponents, lists eleven objectives which seem to be pro arguments covering the foregoing statement. The other major element of his objectives seem to say that it is a convenient administrative arrangement. Emphasis is

placed both on the slow and fast learner with the majority group of average students covered mostly by implication.¹⁹

Hansen seems to see a strong relationship between tracking and grouping by ability. This is expressed in naming his tracks Honors, College Preparatory, General, and Basic Education, all listed in descending order by student abilities assumed appropriate to that track. He cites the following practices in ability grouping.

1. Grouping by age: grade placement ranging from K-12, the major aim of which is social and maturational homogeneity. However it does not assure a teachable range of student differences within a class.

2. Grouping by the failure method: an increasingly selective process which would tend to narrow the range of teachability but would require a high drop-out rate.

3. Grouping by excluding extremes: the general practice of teaching to a supposed average for the class which neglects both the fast and slow learner because of time limitations.

4. Grouping within classes: a common practice which should reduce the ranges covered within a specified amount of class time; however it is one which can reduce the time per student contact when a wide range class mandates many small groups.

5. Grouping by schools: special purpose schools which may use ability as one of their selection factors. This

is differentiated from the tracking concept in that there the selection is accomplished within a comprehensive school.

6. Grouping by classes: practiced, to some extent at least, in most secondary schools. Examples are in the offering of two parallel English or mathematics sequences based primarily on student ability. In some cases this is specified as either college prep or non-college, as is the case in East Richland High School. Via a complex selection process, students may be advised into math courses, etc., which are deemed most appropriate for the student.

Tracking/Grouping Dissidence

The total purpose of ability grouping as seen by Hansen is to provide equal opportunity for maximal development in all students. He says, "this cannot be achieved by putting all (random group) pupils together in the same classes."²⁰ Various writers have expressed the opinion that equal opportunity can not be achieved in a "heterogeneous" classroom because it is not considered possible to appropriately challenge all learners in that organizational pattern. Hansen says the track system provides a most "convenient" method of ability grouping through its structure, plan, specialization of instruction, and appropriateness of materials. In his rationale achievement data and scores on various standardized tests provide a

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 20-22.

system for setting minimal and optimum standards for either track which would tend to lock a student into a certain pattern of course options. It is possible to shift into a higher track but first the student must make up any "deficiencies." Or in other words the high school doors are open to all but the free selection of curriculum is not. He differentiates between individualized programs and the track system in that the former attempts to maintain a fiction of free choice by the pupil while the latter establishes standards for eligibility which may require placement in specific courses.²¹

The educational rationale for tracking is summarized by a Curriculum Survey Committee in the following statement. Emphasis on administrative management benefits should be noted throughout, even in the statements which presume to be stated as student benefits.

We recommend that beginning with the ninth grade separate, fixed curricula--such as academic, commercial, general, and industrial arts--be established. Students should be held to one of these on the basis partly of achievement, partly of preference and interests, with the possibility of shifting from one curriculum to another according to achievement. Such a system would prevent able students from taking easy courses in order to make high grades with little effort; it would prevent all students from wasting time with dubious or irrelevant electives; and, by reducing programming to a simple routine easily handled by administrative clerks, it would relieve many teachers from counselling and return them to the more important work of teaching.²²

²¹ Ibid., pp. 22-25.

²² Curriculum Survey Committee Report, (San Francisco: Board of Education, San Francisco Unified School District, (April 1960), p. 10.

Opposition to tracking is voiced by many. One source argues that equality in education for various racial and ethnic groups is a myth, that formal education is unsatisfying for large numbers of young people of all backgrounds, that schools barely tap the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral potential of nearly all youth, and that the alienation of individuals and groups can be traced directly to schools which fail to provide the idealized concept of equal opportunity and to unenriching, unfulfilling, and dull school careers. However, this source does concede that there are other influences which also contribute to that situation.²³

Opponents to tracking or grouping take compulsory education laws to task. A major objection is that these laws were created for the benefit of society more than for the benefit of the individual child. Prior to compulsory laws it is reported that only eleven per cent of high school age youth were in school but two thirds of those who graduated went on to college. Subsequent to the attendance mandates the student population not only multiplied, but became equally as heterogeneous with regard especially to academic ability, achievement motivation and occupational aspirations. Recent desegregation laws also receive their share of criticism for expanding the schools and creating instructional

²³Schafer, Walter E., and Olexa, Carol, Tracking and Opportunity-the Locking Out Process and Beyond, (Scranton, London, Toronto: Chandler Publishing Company, 1971), p. 1.

difficulties. Grouping practices in general and the track system specifically drew the criticism of Schafer and Olexa. They directed attention to the questionable underlying assumption of tracking which presumes that a child's maximum educational potential can and will be accurately measured. This was of significance in the Hobson v. Hansen case in 1967. Case studies presented along with the negative argument find that judgments by teachers and counselors played a vital role in track assignment. Although parents presumably had the right to oppose and reject placement it was seldom questioned. Thus, the counselor or teacher has a vital influence on the school program pursued as well as the subsequent life career followed by the student when subjective judgments are rendered which assign or "aid his selection" into a certain track.²⁴

If we may relate tracking as a form of ability grouping we should accept criticisms of grouping as also being applicable to tracking.

Research in this area began in the 20's and presumably continues today with varying levels of emphasis at different times in the interim. In the 1965-1966 school year it is reported by NEA that 43 per cent of elementary school districts studied were practicing some form of grouping. However these statistics covered special classes only; and therefore do not represent the total picture of the variety

²⁴Schafer, op. cit., pp. 2-9.

of groups which one may see in a full study of grouping. Most significantly it omitted the intra-class divisions which are much more widely practiced. Vertical grouping is said to be grade or age selection while internal class grouping is called horizontal.²⁵

Critics pointedly state that although grouping is practiced to some extent in most schools there has been no conclusive evidence that homogeneity in a class is superior to heterogeneity. Research has been both inconclusive and contradictory. Some who have studied the situation feel that ability grouping has been a negative factor for low ability students while others report a benefit for that group. The argument is presented that ~~competition~~ competition is inherent with the American way of life. Therefore, separation of the high ability students into a select class removes the challenge which they will encounter in adult life. From that reference schools would not be properly preparing youth for adulthood. To shelter the child from reality is to develop an inaccurate self awareness which might probably be destroyed when real life situations are encountered.²⁶

²⁵ Rinehart, George, "Ability Grouping: Out or In?" Education Digest, Volume XXXVI, Number 6, (February 1971).

²⁶ Ibid.

Aspy reports research which says,

- (1) that homogeneity is more apparent than real,
- (2) that measurement techniques used for grouping are inadequate,
- (3) that speed is not necessarily important in learning,
- (4) that evidence of more learning in ability groups is inconclusive, and
- (5) that such methods may do actual harm to children's self concepts.

He quotes Schwebel of New York University as rejecting all the studies of grouping. Olson of the University of Michigan is said to have found fault with the research which has been done on the grounds that "it tends to be small, inconsistent, complicated, and difficult to interpret." He further said that on the basis of what is now known, no one plan can be considered superior for enduring achievement growth. The major negative aspect reported by Aspy was concerned with grouping being purely for administrative benefit and destructive to children because they develop negative self images. His main point seems to be that a person's perception of himself influences his school behavior and assignment to slow classes labeled students accordingly. Student achievement was related to teacher expectations. These were formed on the basis of assignment and the students performed accordingly without regard to true potentials. Aspy concedes that some form of grouping is probably essential to school activities. He proposes that we seek the ideal of grouping for "teachability." This would be a constant evaluation process in which students would be matched to teachers and his group. Exchange within

groups would be encouraged as a result of new understandings being developed in all the people concerned. He also proposes a faculty which is in a constant personal and professional growth.²⁷

Piland and Lemke investigated the effects upon training and transfer of: ability grouping, intelligence, sex, and temporal test. The purpose was to refute criticisms of research concerning grouping and determine whether grouping when studied under rigorously controlled conditions could actually be held responsible for more efficient concept learning. It was felt that improved control should help prove whether or not grouping is a significant variable for school practice. Of all the factors tested on both training and transfer tasks, intelligence was the only factor found to be statistically significant. Neither homogeneous nor heterogeneous grouping made any significant difference. They found their results consistent with previous research using intelligence as the stratifying factor.²⁸

In View of the Arguments

Why are educators unable to agree on the effectiveness of ability grouping? Rinehart says that they have not yet

²⁷Aspy, David N., "Grouping or Groping for Teachability," Contemporary Education, Volume XLI, Number 6, (May 1970).

²⁸Piland, Joseph C., and Lemke, Elmer A., "The Effect of Ability Grouping on Concept Learning," The Journal of Educational Research, Volume LXIV, Number 5, (January 1971).

agreed on what individual factors are most indicative of differences in ability. In actual practice most schools check a variety of factors before assigning students to ability groups. The NEA study in 1965-1966 reported reading level most often used. This was closely followed by teacher opinion and achievement test data. Because of variations in criteria it is difficult to compare ability grouping schemes; but even if all students were matched by a single method they would still be divergent on other analyses. Thus it would appear that no class can be truly homogeneous in all aspects. Social factors operating outside the school would still be different and would have effect on school behavior. Advocates of ability grouping say that educational standards are low in heterogeneous classes because of the teachers central tendency for instruction. Studies have suggested however, that each case must be quoted individually because some bright students benefit more from heterogeneous than homogeneous classes. Another pro argument is that low ability students do better when matched with their class because they are more able to compete successfully. Accordingly they are more willing to exert the extra effort to excel in their group.²⁹

There appears to be a polarity of endorsers and opposers of ability grouping. Obviously this does not reflect the silent majority. Those in favor generally see academic

²⁹ Rinehart, George, "Ability Grouping: Out or In?" The P.T.A. Magazine, Volume LXV, (November 1970), pp. 10-12.

achievement as the major goal of education. Oponents usually stress the social implications. They argue that if school is to be successful it must prepare students for the life they will see rather than some artificially contrived social group all showing like characteristics.³⁰

Specific objections include: (1) procedures for assigning students to a track at the beginning of high school or earlier intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against those from lower-income or minority-group families. (2) Track systems are inflexible to developmental change which prematurely locks students into a particular educational or occupational career pattern. (3) Education given lower track students is inferior to that provided for the upper track group. (4) Through economic and racial segregation imposed by tracks and that influence on friendships, there is limited contact with other student backgrounds. (5) Because of student rebellion against the stigma of special classes, the school is actually contributing to dropping out and delinquency rather than decreasing it as planned.³¹

Summary

Regardless of the philosophical stance adopted by educators, schools continue to be faced with students who do not achieve. What can be believed concerning the best method of meeting student needs? There are probably as

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Schafer and Olexa, op. cit., pp. 10-14.

many who will argue in favor of grouping, or tracking specifically, as there are those who vehemently oppose it. Research is contradictory. Can we reject all that we read or must we at some time align ourselves with one side or the other? It would seem to become an administrative problem to decide what can best satisfy the local situation and provide direction for teachers based on that position. If we analyze much of the contemporary literature it surely must be assumed that there is presently no "best" answer based on published information.

CHAPTER III

UNDERACHIEVERS

Introduction

A truism has been expressed in the statement that if we do not know where we are going when we start, we are liable to wind up somewhere else. Since we have no defined and generally accepted set of guidelines for a "best" method of teaching all students, it would seem that time could be well spent in searching for the destination of our teaching efforts. The specific intent of this chapter will be to look at underachieving and low achieving students and set the stage for discussion of one approach to meeting their needs.

Goebel tells us that "Academic underachievement results in one of the most fundamental wastes of any period." In recent years much attention has been given to this area of social difficulty. So much attention has been thus directed that search for a solution has at times taken on the appearance of a witch hunt. Parents may blame poor schools while the schools may prefer to blame the home situation. There seems to be more ego involvement with intellectual waste than any of the current physical resource wastes.

American parents traditionally have been ambitious for their offspring to be "successful" in school because the schools are seen as the vehicle for upward social mobility.³²

A peace making effort has been attempted by many through research of educational practices. As a result we arrive at some point where the researchers are now contributing to the witch hunt because of their inability to agree on that which is best.

Underachievement Defined and Related

Underachievement has been variously defined and over the years we have arrived at some descriptions which use intellectual potential as the basis for comparing that which is to that which should be. In actuality there are many leading theorists who tend to refute any contemporary definitions of intelligence. In other words underachievement defined in terms of intelligence may be as totally unfounded as was the house in the ancient story that was built on sand which could shift with each change of wind or tide. So too could our theories, thus founded, be destroyed or reinforced as we read more on the mysterious element called intelligence. Guilford tells us that the notion of intelligence may be the greatest mystery of all.³³

³² Goebel, Barbara L., "Dilemma of Underachievement," The Educational Forum, Volume XXXV, Number 2, (January 1971), p. 203.

³³ Guilford, J. P., The Nature of Human Intelligence, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

Human behavior is "explained" by various schemes. One such account uses a chronology of "I" words. Some forty years ago inferiority was used to explain why some people did not behave as they were expected to do. It was assumed that their feelings of inferiority in one area would cause increased effort to excel in others. However acceptance that failure in an area might be due to real inferiority led to reduced importance for the inferiority complex. Then "immaturity" was taken as the reason why some exhibited different behavior than others. The adopted goal of education was to aid the learner in achieving maturity. Later, "insecurity" became more significant as a devastating force. The insecure child could display baffling behaviors ranging from withdrawal to hyperactivity and aggression. More recently "identity" has become the "in thing." Now we attribute negative social responses to the inability of young people to resolve their identity conflicts.³⁴ What then, is the relationship of intelligence and behavior to achievement?

The concept of underachievement is an elusive one. We may assume that it is a comparison of an individual or group with some performance standard having specifications which were not met.³⁵ Insofar as schools are concerned

³⁴ Kowitz, Gerald T., "The Tiger in the Curriculum," The Educational Forum, Volume XXXV, Number 1, (November 1970), pp. 57-58.

³⁵ Goebel, loc. cit.

we may consider the standard to be some degree or element of learning since that is assumed to be the reason students are required to go to school. Accordingly we find need for another definition.

Learning also is a vague term, made so by its multitude of definitions. Certain characteristics seem to be common among many of the definitions. From these it may be generalized to state that learning is a "process whereby changes in behavior are brought about by practice-excluding such changes due to physiological maturation and fatigue." Some would modify this to say that the actual behavioral change is not essential to the occurrence of learning; merely the potential for behavior to occur can constitute learning. It is accepted that in order to demonstrate learning there must be observation of changed behavior.³⁶

Thus in education, to substantiate the degree of progress toward a standard there must be a system of measurement of that progress. The system must be sensitive to changes in behavior. It follows that to measure learning there must have been at least two measurements with the second showing an advancement over the first. However this should not be taken as a restriction to the use of only tests. Rather, it might include the full range of possibilities in both subjective and objective analysis.³⁷

³⁶Roberts, Dennis M., "Measurement of Academic Learning," The Educational Forum, Volume XXXIII, Number 2, (January 1969), p. 207.

³⁷Ibid.

Therefore if we can accept a system of measurement of learning, which is observed change in behavior, and compare it to some standard we will have a definite means of assessing the amount of underachievement. Our next question would logically be, where do we find the standards for the determinations.

The subjective analysis might be founded in the accepted philosophy of the school and the behavioral objectives developed in pursuit of the philosophy. Of course the objective evaluation will relate to those also but there seems no other scale for quantification of a value system.

If we accept a system of determination of the degree of underachievement it should emanate from the types of deficiency observed and those sources which are felt to be the cause. A further integration at this point may lead to the expansion of the underachiever concept to include all low achievers. Although this may tend to neglect some with high potential and only average performance, it will serve to more completely identify those students who exhibit a general academic behavior of lower than average performance. Regardless of the learning problem source, this is the characteristic which the teacher must deal with in the classroom. On the large scale these are the problems which the school system must strive to accommodate if we are to approach the ideal of an appropriate education for all.

The Low Intellectual Ability Low Achiever

The most commonly accepted group of low achievers is in the low average ability range having an intelligence

quotient of 80-89. Unfortunately many educators, and a greater portion of the general populace, attribute this definition to all low achievers. For those people the educational picture is not bright. It should be expected that approximately 15 per cent of the total population will appear in this group. When no special provisions are made for them it is anticipated that they may struggle through elementary school but in junior high they are likely to experience much difficulty because they are poor readers and also deficient in mathematical skills. Their future in high school depends on their familial circumstances. Lower class students in this category are likely to leave school at or shortly after the legal age for leaving school to enter the labor market or to join the ranks of the unemployed. Unless the school makes special provisions in the curriculum, those who remain in school may probably fail if the school's academic standards are high. As they drift along they will learn little and become a nuisance to the school system as they drag the median of the class down. However when schools provide courses in general, technical, and vocational subjects at a level which the low ability student can assimilate information the whole of society will benefit from their continued school attendance. They may thus be prepared to work at the lower skilled tasks in businesses, industry, and agriculture.

The provision of an adequate educational program may permit them to become worthy and productive citizens.³⁸

The Disabled Learner Low Achiever

Another large body of underachievers actually may contain many smaller segments of society which have been grouped together because of related educational behavior. An example of one of these is in a biographical sketch about a person who was for many years "lost in a forest of words." Although those closely associated with his early childhood felt certain that he was intelligent, he was unable to succeed in school. Both numbers and words caused him to exist in a state of complete frustration. He could observe the symbols but could not integrate them into any sort of organized patterns. His major academic success was in drawing; he could both sketch and paint and he could also learn mechanical skills. In his estimation he must be stupid because he could not learn the same way other students learned. At age fifteen he was recommended to be put into a class for retarded youngsters. When his parents refused he became a school "push out" without a salable skill or ability to read. For several years his native intelligence was employed in coping with the situations this presented. He ultimately found through educational television that he could assimilate information

³⁸ Baller, Warren R. and Charles, Don C., The Psychology of Human Growth and Development, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1968).

effectively via the auditory channel. Still more years passed before he was able to learn enough about his disability to accept himself as a worthy individual. Since that time he has been in constant pursuit of knowledge. As of this June 1972 report he had made substantial progress toward a college degree, all through auditory learning exclusively. He still does not read.³⁹

Educationally, does it make any difference whether his disability is called dyslexia, minimal cerebral dysfunction, asymbolia, or some other exotic term? It seems the world of education might well divorce itself from physical terminology and be concerned exclusively with behavior. Educators can do little about the physical cause of the problem; but a more extensive understanding might lead to greater acceptance of the potential of these students and therefore increased opportunities for their remediation and ultimate development.

Extensive testing has shown that children may have normal vision, hearing, intelligence and no detectable brain damage or other disorder. Still they are frustrated by school and unable to learn from the typical public school curriculum. This condition may exist in varying degrees and be exhibited in as many ways; but it is little understood. It is thought by Dr. N. C. Kephart, Director of the Achievement Center for Children at Purdue University, to affect as

³⁹Smith, Burt K., "Free to Learn," American Education, (June 1972).

many as 15 to 20 per cent of all students. Other experts say at least 10 per cent are affected but these are just rough guesses because only a small fraction have been completely diagnosed.⁴⁰

A conservative estimate would be that moderate and severe disorders are found in about three out of one hundred elementary school children. They come from all socioeconomic groups throughout the world. (Smith, 1972 tells us that there are five or six times as many boys as there are girls thus affected.)⁴¹ This group has generally normal or superior intelligence and nearly a majority of them have been behavioral problems since infancy.⁴²

Different persons have attributed causes to biological, psychological, social or environmental conditions or possibly to a combination of these. Some speculate that there may have been pre-natal, peri-natal, or post-natal insult to the central nervous system. Regardless of the cause, the condition of non-learning exists in the classroom. Although the typical behavioral symptoms may disappear by twelve years of age, there continues to be damage to the emotional and self-image development during those critical years between ages five and twelve.⁴³

⁴⁰ Cole, William, "Breaking the Hidden Barrier," Parents Magazine, (September 1972).

⁴¹ Smith, B.K., op. cit.

⁴² Journal of Learning Disabilities, Volume IV, Number 9, (November 1971), p. 525.

⁴³ Ibid.

In summary, the condition of "learning disability" is generally attributed to a child with adequate mental ability, sensory processes, and emotional stability. He has specific deficits in perceptual, integrative or expressive processes which severely impair learning efficiency. He will often have fallen at least two years behind in school work.⁴⁴ He is also the student who will arrive in high school through administrative promotions and he held there by compulsory attendance laws or until he can exhibit behavior which warrants his being eliminated from the educational scene.

The Unmotivated Low Achiever

Another category of low achievers is presently expanding at an alarming rate. This is the group who just do not see education as being relevant to their lives. These young people may be found in all socioeconomic strata and in all ability levels as measured by I.Q. tests. Some find their scapegoat in the home, others in an overall international moral decay, and still others fail to relate education to potential vocational success. Secretary of Labor J. D. Hodgson says they may be suffering from aimlessness and frustration. They are students who are confronted by a wide and bewildering array of potential choices. However they may have entirely unrealistic views about what it takes to succeed in

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 491.

the occupations. They see little prospect of real job training in school and feel they aren't going to be able to do much after school anyhow. Hodgson says that as their frustration level rises there is a corresponding decrease in motivation. It is easy to drop out of a system that seems to offer so little or requires so much for what it does offer.⁴⁵

Another point which should be considered before leaving low motivation as a source of low achievement is that it could be possible that it is not necessary for everyone to be a high school graduate. It may be difficult for educators to accept that they do not have the answers for all cases; but it actually may not be essential to be a graduate in order to find occupational or personal success. Some low achieving students may be entirely self accepting and therefore see no need to strive for the social goal of school success. The need to achieve seems to be rooted in the individual's basic personality structure. When low achieving behavior is found to be rewarding to students this is the trait which they will value and perpetuate, whether or not our frame of reference sees the behavior as an acceptable social or educational goal.⁴⁶

Summary

Whatever the etiology, it seems likely that there will continue to be low achieving students in school. Whether

⁴⁵ Hodgson, J. D., "Youth Motivation," Chronicle Guidance Professional Service, SE4/72-73/p.2., (New York: Chronicle Guidance Publications, 1972).

⁴⁶ Goebel, op. cit., p. 205.

we see one who does little because he cannot do more or one who does little because he chooses, it appears that we must continue to serve the low achiever. There is a need to divorce emotions from the problem. Parents and teachers should act toward changing the contributing conditions rather than being punitive toward the students. Acceptance of the non-learner and attention to his development of self image, in his own right, may help to prevent his continued alienation through efforts to force him into some socially approved mold.

Just as the "average" and "exceptional" students have been accommodated in the comprehensive curriculum, so should there be programs provided which will be appropriate to the interests and abilities of the underachiever. It may be held that intensive effort should be directed toward remediation in the early school years. This could include training for self acceptance and understanding of the student's handicap and, whenever possible, training to overcome the handicap. Until the time that it may become possible to train all handicaps which can be identified, curricular provisions should be made which will cause the compulsory education years to be a meaningful experience for students. As long as students with poor or no reading ability continue to arrive in high school they deserve a program which will prepare them realistically for life with their limitations, regardless of whether it is a result of marginal intellectual capacity or an ineffective input channel for learning.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF FIELD EXPERIENCE

Grouping Practices at East Richland High School

Beyond the intra-class grouping which one may expect to find in a class that is not totally homogeneous, there is a provision for some ability isolation but only in a very broad form of course selection.

Entering freshmen may choose from either general mathematics or algebra. Advisement in this selection is based on scores attained on achievement tests, algebra aptitude tests, and the eighth grade teachers recommendation. More advanced math courses are available to students in subsequent years which contemporary writers describe as a form of ability grouping; however participation in these courses is essentially voluntary with exception of advisement in accordance with the student's expressed educational goals.

Another ability selection occurs in English. All graduates are required to successfully complete three years in this curriculum area with the freshmen and sophomore courses being common to almost all of the students. The third year of English is divided into a college preparatory

and a non-college approach. Participation in either course is optional with advisement. Again there is a voluntary senior level course offered which presumes prior success in the eleventh grade college preparatory program. Students in the non-college course are not prevented from pursuing the twelfth grade course but it is assumed that they will experience difficulty unless they are highly motivated and have done well in the eleventh grade.

Other required courses are essentially common to all students. The elective courses are considered open to all applicants with exception of foreign languages. There it is presumed, based on prior experience, that students who were low achievers in eighth grade language arts or in high school English will have a reduced potential for success. Again, they are not prevented from attempting the foreign languages, but they are advised according to the anticipation.

An exception to the foregoing exists in that there is a special education track provided in all the required courses areas. Placement in that curriculum is based on identification by a school psychologist as educable mentally handicapped. In practice this course assignment is made only when the parents or guardians of the student concur with the decision that is most appropriate for the student.

With few exceptions these arrangements make suitable provision for the large body of "average learners" and both the upper and lower extremes of ability. It does not appear

to appropriately accommodate the low achiever who by virtue of his individual characteristics did not seem to belong to the E.M.H. class but who still did not find success in the standard curricular offerings. This category includes those persons having less than average intellectual capacity but more than can be accepted in the special education program. It also contains the students who achieve low or failing grades even though their intelligence is measured as average or better. This type of student was described in the preceding chapter as being a handicapped learner for such reasons as learning disability or inadequate motivation. It may be assumed that this group of students would furnish a large portion of the school dropout population unless adequate provisions are made for their education.

Moral and Legal Basis for Special Classes

At any point in the education of young people it may be assumed that the main concern of the schools is to see that the students develop the skills that will enable them to transfer what they learn to "real life." Regardless of the nature of the skill, whether it be mathematical, English, social graces, or technical competencies the goal remains the same. That is that a person who is unable to perform a skill essential to his adopted life style at an acceptable level of competency should be instructed in order to do so.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Roberts, op. cit., p. 208.

This presumption seems applicable to any eligible member of the public school population wherever they fall in the full spectrum of learning abilities or disabilities.

A recent court case which expands the principle of the Pennsylvania right-to-education case deals specifically with exceptional students. The terminology in the decisions rendered in the Mills vs. Board of Education of the District of Columbia could have far reaching effects on the total educational picture in the United States. It was held that mentally, physically and/or emotionally handicapped children have a constitutional right to a public education. Part of the commentary dealt with financial potential not being an adequate reason for failure to provide an "appropriate" educational program. Further statements were concerned with mandated school attendance. That is, requiring parents to cause children to attend school under pain of criminal penalties presupposes that an educational opportunity will be made available to the children. A summary of one of the specific findings was--"That the District of Columbia shall provide to each child of school age a free and suitable publicly supported education regardless of the degree of the child's mental, physical or emotional disability or impairment. Insufficient resources may not be a basis for exclusion." Although this case was brought on behalf of a class of exceptional students, the judgement appears to be open for interpretation to include all students. Since it

is a constitutional holding it was felt to have stronger precedential value than related cases.⁴⁸

Nothing in the report quoted in the preceding paragraph established limitations on the degree of special needs or identification procedures to be employed in establishment of categories. Thus it appears that application of the edict may become a matter of local interpretation so long as it is not tried via legal procedures. It may be assumed that appropriate education may be held to belong to any individual, or more practically, to any identifiable group of individuals having peculiar educational needs. Surely this would include the group of students suggested in the preceding chapter who do not learn in average ability classes and who do not qualify for special education because of "measured" intellectual capacity beyond that accepted for such assignment;

An On Going Provision for Low Achievers

A curriculum segment similar to this one is presently undergoing study in the Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania high schools. They called it an achievement class for under achievers. The expressed purpose of the class was to help the students who were not adequately served in other curricular

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"Mental Retardation and the Law, A Report on Status of Current Court Cases," prepared by Paul Friedman, Fellow Center for Laws and Social Policy and Staff Attorney, National Council on the Rights of the Mentally Impaired for the Office of Mental Retardation Coordination, October 1, 1972.

programs to graduate with the skills and training needed to make a good adjustment to the world of work and to enable them to make a significant contribution to society.

Initiated in 1970, it was to raise achievement levels and reduce the dropout rate by providing: a curriculum tailored to the needs of underachievers; intensive counseling for academic, vocational, and personal guidance; and inservice training for teachers in handling special problems.

Assignment was made through a complex process of teacher and counselor observations in conjunction with a thorough review of each cumulative record. Only those students with parental consent were accepted in the class because it was assumed that much of the educational experience must be enhanced by a positive home environment. It is presently being expanded from its initiation in the tenth grade downward to include grades seven to nine and upward toward graduation.

The curriculum is designed to focus on student strengths, to be flexible enough to accommodate individual differences, and to be relevant to students' present and future needs. It stresses development of practical communicative and mathematical skills in the tenth and lower grades. Job orientation is emphasized in the eleventh grade culminating in "hands on" work experience in the twelfth grade. A low student counselor ratio enables the counselor to maintain

almost constant contact with the student in all phases of his individual program, both in school and on the job. The educational program of each student may be modified as quickly as it is recognized that his needs are not fully served.

Strong community support has been given. Behavioral objectives have been established and are continuously reviewed. In summary, this approach appears to be a student and community centered attempt to provide "appropriate" education. There was no evidence given of the degree of improvement but in a group of twenty-five potential dropouts, twenty-four were retained in school after the first year of operation; the educational stage in their lives during which the students reached the legal age which permitted them to leave school.⁴⁹

Rationale for General Studies

There are few precedents from which to draw a direct example when it is applied to a localized situation. The idealism quoted earlier in this paper may be used as a point from which to deviate toward practicality. Comenius' expressed desire for universal education can be the springboard which launches the search for a slice of curriculum to meet the needs of another group of the total population. The decision whether or not to isolate students into a "track" or other type of student group should be made for utility rather than expediency. Even though there may be a labeling effect, as the theorists tell us, its negative:

⁴⁹ Saunders, R. Harold, "The Counselor's Role in a Program for Under-Achievers," The Guidance Clinic, April 1973.

may be of less strength than the positive which may derive from the change, especially if it results in dropout prevention. Furthermore, if the contemporary books and journals are thoroughly reviewed with regard to student grouping it is found that the vocal society has reached no conclusive stance. Amid the ensuing confusion the administrators of a local school system are asked to provide "appropriate education."

One of the first questions to develop is, how much of the before quoted labeling can be conclusively laid at the door of the schools? Also, what is the effect of the gross society in building the child into any present state? What has the home and sibling relationship contributed? Regardless of whether the non-learners are in a special group or not, will the 'other' students not know about their inability? Should there be more attention to teaching tolerance to the entire school population? It is the opinion of this writer that too much has already been said with insufficient foundation. None of the reports read as background for this study claimed to isolate student grouping from its social aspects. Rather, they all took grouping out of its social context and treated it as an educational variable exclusively. It is argued that formal education is only one of the many variables which develop the learners' personality and that when it is philosophically founded in the total

context it may be one of the better methods of treating one of society's ills. Like all others, it is just an opinion. The responsibility for decision continues to be incumbent upon the local school administration to devise a locally effective plan of attack in the struggle to provide optimum educational benefits to all. Perhaps the fallibilist theories of education for analysis of error could provide a more applicable preparation of all students for the "real life."

Introduction of General Studies

Accordingly the writer extends admiration to an educational system which is willing to experiment with finding an improved method of caring for its less fortunate clients. Beyond the grouping previously reported, the East Richland High School also has a "General Studies" (GS) curriculum. According to information received from the principal it was established for the types of students described as low achievers. Its purpose was to provide "hands on" experience in a laboratory setting wherever possible. It was planned that the classes should be small; the number ultimately decided upon was fifteen. This was to permit extensive individualization in each of the subject areas. Those subject areas were three years of English, one year each of mathematics, biology, World and American History, and a semester each of social and physical sciences. Thus all the required courses were to be presented in a manner which it was hoped would provide

suitable learning experiences for the low achiever. Optional courses were to be selected from the total curricular menu in a comprehensive arrangement which included business, agricultural, trade and industrial, home economics, etc.

Study of East Richland General Studies Students

The purpose of the following study was to learn more about the characteristics of the General Studies student and to examine the possibility of a prediction in the elementary grades of which students may become candidates for the General Studies classes. Data used in this study was taken from the existing standardized testing program.

Selection Method

Students are selected into the General Studies program much the same as in the Wilkes-Barre Achievement class. Guidance personnel study the cumulative record of each student entering ninth grade for low scores on achievement tests. Also, the eighth grade teachers are asked to judge the students according to a scale which is attached as Appendix A. Scores on an algebra prognosis test are also considered in the mathematics area. Average achievement for early eighth graders on the California Achievement Tests in the East Richland District varies somewhat above an obtained grade placement of 8.6. The method of evaluation is attached as Appendix B.

Space and philosophy dictate that not more than thirty students be selected into the General Studies program. Accordingly, after each student has been quantified in this procedure the selection is made of those who appear by least number of points to need this class more than the others in the student body. This results in the nomination of approximately ten per cent of the entering ninth graders to the special class. Thereafter, all such students are counseled in the registration process concerning their course selection. None are forced into the General Studies program and thus far it has been possible to obtain both student and parental concurrence after a thorough explanation of its purpose.

Students may be in one or more areas of General Studies depending upon their unique needs. For example they may have only General Studies English and be in all other regular classes. They may be in all General Studies classes for required subjects. After entry into the General Studies track a student may change into regular classes if acceptable progress is achieved. For example they may complete General Studies English I during their freshman year and then change into regular English I for their sophomore year. Although these are both freshman courses it is counted as two of the three required courses in communications. It

is also possible at anytime during the year for a student in the regular classes to move into General Studies if he is subsequently identified to have that need and space is available in the special class.

Until this time there was no documented study of the students. In efforts to gain more understanding of them and attempts to predict future need for the program, it was decided to individually study each student presently enrolled in both the ninth and tenth grade communications classes. The number of cases will vary for this study because some of the cumulative folders did not contain complete test histories. Wherever test data deficiencies were found, that case was eliminated for that phase of the investigation. The data reported includes both ninth and tenth grade students in each category because there was not enough in either class to give a good statistical review.

Design of Study

In order to consider each student individually in respect to achievement it was decided to convert data to a learning quotient. Tests used were the California Achievement test which is administered annually in October to all students in grades two through eight along with their intelligence tests. These are the Otis alpha given in March of the first grade and the Otis beta in March of the fourth and eighth grades.

The learning quotient was taken from Johnson and Myklebust in their writing on learning disabilities. They proposed use of a ratio of educational age to mental age. The educational age was taken from the achievement test obtained grade placement plus five years. (e.g.: grade placement of 2.3 equals educational age 7.3)⁵⁰ That formula was later expanded by Myklebust to take into account the experience learning outside of school and also to include more accurate information on students who may have been over age in grade. He then expressed the ratio as educational age divided by half the sum of mental and chronological ages. In algebraic statement this becomes

$$\text{Learning Quotient (L.Q.)} = \text{Educational Age (E.A.)} \quad 51$$

$$\frac{\text{Mental Age} + \text{Chronological Age}}{2} \\ \left(\frac{\text{M.A.} + \text{C.A.}}{2} \right)$$

According to Johnson and Myklebust each person should achieve at least 90 per cent of his potential if there were no disabling factors. They determined less than 90 per cent in either of reading, language, spelling, or arithmetic to indicate a specific disability in that area.⁵² In each case they suggested descriptive terms which did not appear to

⁵⁰ Johnson, Doris J. and Myklebust, Helmar R., Learning Disabilities: Educational Principles and Practices, (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1967).

⁵¹ Myklebust, Helmar R., Progress in Learning Disabilities, Volume I, Chapter I, (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1970).

⁵² Johnson and Myklebust, op.cit.

this writer to be educationally prescriptive, but it did provide an acceptable method for identification of special needs.

Educational irrelevance of intelligence as measured by I.Q. tests is suggested in the following data. Table I reports the variations in intelligence quotients of General Studies students. To be recorded as a change, there must have been at least five points difference. Lines showing a net decrease are indicated with an asterisk.

TABLE 1

INTRA-PERSONAL COMPARISON OF INTELLIGENCE MEASUREMENTS
TAKEN FROM CUMULATIVE RECORDS OF THE 1972-1973 GENERAL
STUDIES STUDENTS AT EAST RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Grade 4 with respect to Grade 2	Grade 8 with respect to Grade 4	Number
*down	down	7
down	up	1
*down	same	11
up	up	0
up	down	8
up	same	4
same	same	3
same	up	0
*same	down	5

Notes:

A change in either direction represents a difference of at least five points. Thus a change of plus and minus four would be counted the same. Also a change of minus four in the fourth grade with respect to second grade and a similar loss between fourth grade and eighth grade would be counted as no change. Of further significance is the fact that the first, third and last lines are net downward scores which included twenty-three cases out of the thirty-nine in which all three test scores were available.

It may be assumed that a relationship could be found between reading disability and decline in measured intelligence.

(Test Instruments used were the Otis alpha and Otis beta Intelligence tests.)

TABLE 2

RANGES OF INTRA-PERSONAL DIFFERENCE IN INTELLIGENCE
 QUOTIENTS OF EAST RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL 1972-1973
 GENERAL STUDIES STUDENTS AS MEASURED IN THE
 SECOND, FOURTH, AND EIGHTH GRADES

<u>Range</u>	<u>Number</u>
0-5	3
6-10	8
11-15	9
	<hr/>
	20 = Sub-total
16-20	8
21-25	6
26-30	3
31-35	1
36-40	1
	<hr/>
	19 = Sub-total
	<hr/>
	39 = Total

Notes:

It may be noticed in TABLE 2 that 48.7 per cent of these students measured 16 or more I.Q. points difference in their three tests. This is equal to at least one standard deviation on these tests. Thus the educational relevance of the intelligence test may be questioned, especially if there is doubt about the reading ability of the individual student.

(Test data were taken from the Otis alpha and beta Intelligence tests.)

TABLE 3

INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT DISTRIBUTION OF EAST
RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL GENERAL STUDIES CLASSES
1972-1973

Intelligence Quotient Range	Number 2nd Grade	Number 4th Grade	Number 8th Grade
131-135	1	0	0
126-130	0	0	0
121-125	2	0	0
116-120	3	0	0
111-115	1	0	0
106-110	4	2	1
101-105	7	3	2
96-100	9	13	4
91-95	6	18	10
86-90	3	8	9
81-85	2	1	13
76-80	4	2	4
71-75	1	0	6
66-70	1	0	0
Total	44	47	49
Mean	98.4	94.2	87.5

Notes:

Data was taken from the student cumulative files. Measurement instruments were the Otis alpha Intelligence Test in the second grade and the Otis beta Intelligence test in the fourth and eighth grades.

It may be noted that there was a continuous decrease in the mean intelligence quotient. Also the upper ranges decreased by five intervals and the lower range became one range more narrow. Thus it appears that the group became more homogeneous with respect to intelligence as measured on the Otis alpha in grade two and the Otis beta in grades four and eight. The degree to which this may be attributed to a comparative loss in reading ability may only be assumed. It is noted that the beta test requires increasing reading ability for average performance when compared to the alpha instrument. Therefore it may be surmised that the decrease in intelligence may be more apparent than real.

TABLE 4

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES OF EAST RICHLAND
HIGH SCHOOL GENERAL STUDIES STUDENTS
1972-1973 ACCORDING TO LEARNING
QUOTIENTS PROPOSED BY JOHNSON
AND MYKLEBUST

Curriculum Area	2 or 3 Years		1 Year		Area Totals	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Reading	31	60.8	16	31.4	47	92.1
Arithmetic	19	37.2	18	35.3	37	72.6
Language	19	37.2	22	43.1	41	80.4
Spelling	24	47.1	18	35.3	42	82.6

Notes:

Learning quotients were calculated by the equation:

$$L.Q. = E.A.$$

$$\frac{M.A. + C.A.}{2}$$

L.Q. = Learning Quotient

E.A. = Educational Age

M.A. = Mental Age

C.A. = Chronological Age

There were a total of 51 cases considered in the above data. In some cases test results were not available in one or more of the curricular areas reported. Therefore it may be assumed that a greater number of disabilities would have been detected if complete data were available. It may be noted that over 70 per cent of the total population studied was deficient in at least one of the four curriculum areas. Further, only one of the cases studied did not have an indicated learning disability in at least one area.

One of the major objectives of the study was to find a method of identification of future General Studies students as early as possible during the elementary school years. From that point it might thereafter become possible to develop remediation practices which could reduce the requirement for these special courses. After the scores of each student were converted to learning quotients via the revised Myklebust method, a correlation study was done which compared each student on three sets of data in each of the curricular areas. They were quotients of the second and eighth grades; quotients of the second and fourth grades; and quotients of the fourth and eighth grades. The correlation formula below was taken from Garrett's text-Elementary

Statistics.⁵³

$$r = \frac{\sum x'y' - C_x C_y}{\sigma_x \sigma_y}$$

⁵³Garrett, Henry E., Elementary Statistics, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1956).

TABLE 5

CORRELATION OF LEARNING QUOTIENTS FOR GENERAL STUDIES
STUDENTS IN EAST RICHLAND HIGH SCHOOL 1972-1973

Grades	Second to Eighth	Number	Second to Fourth	Number	Fourth to Eighth	Number
Reading	0.35	38	-0.05	34	0.39	40
Language	-0.40	37	0.22	40	0.20	45
Spelling	0.16	36	-0.01	38	0.32	45
Arithmetic	-0.02	36	0.06	36	0.57	44

Notes:

Achievement and intelligence test data were converted to learning quotients in accordance with the Myklebust equation:

$$L.Q. = E.A.$$

$$\frac{M.A. + C.A.}{2}$$

The purpose of that computation was to incorporate individual intelligence and achievement test results into a single piece of information for each student for each year being studied. Correlations were in accordance with the equation:

$$r = \frac{\sum x'y' - C_x C_y}{\sigma_x \sigma_y}$$

Discussion of Correlation Data

A test of significance of the correlation data was performed in accordance with Garrett's test. Explanation of the process may be found on page 152 of that publication.⁵⁴

Specifically noted was the indication that the only significant positive correlation between grades two and eight was in reading in which the level of confidence was greater than .05. In this data there was a negative correlation in language with confidence greater than the .05 level of significance. Between grades two and four there were no correlations of sufficient significance to be considered indicative.

Achievement in the eighth grade may be predicted from fourth grade data in three curricular areas with assurance. Both reading and arithmetic may be accepted at the .01 level of significance and spelling was significant at the .05 level of confidence. There was also a positive correlation in language but it was insufficient for prediction.

The foregoing was taken as an indication that academic habits were not fully formed in grade two because of the inconclusive evidence between grades two to four and two to eight. If this is accepted it may also be assumed that

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 152.

the correlation data between grades four to eight indicates that the future learning patterns of this student population were formed by grade four. Thus an achievement screening study of all students in grade four might be expected to identify potential candidates for either remediation or future General Studies classes. This does not in any way suggest that it might not be possible to identify them even earlier than in the fourth grade. From this it may be extrapolated that remediation efforts should be concentrated in the lower elementary years.

Discussion with the high school principal, director of guidance, and teachers of General Studies classes reveals that there is no general agreement on philosophy and objectives for the classes. An impression is that all concerned felt personal association with the program and were genuinely interested. However, a criticism may be rendered that the General Studies students were seen as being difficult to teach. Expectations of the teachers seemed to be founded in the low mental ability group rather than in the full spectrum of intelligence which actually was measured. The course content related closely to that presented to average achievers but decreased in difficulty. As nearly as this writer could determine the methods of teaching were also similar to those employed in regular classes, rather than being directed also at the

needs of the disabled learner and the socially maladjusted students which appear to comprise a substantial portion of the class.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Throughout the history of American public education there has been the ideal of mass education. Especially since World War II there has been increased criticism of the schools both in method of instruction and curriculum content. Perhaps the most acceptable of all the arguments is that education fails to keep pace with social change. Attempts to place blame for this have done little to actually instigate a more rapid response to social pressures.

Idealists tell how it should be from one perspective. Realists suggest a practical application of the ideals. In most cases it appears that the published commentary continues to present a generalization which can only be a guide to the ultimate practice of an operating school. Nothing seems to serve local practice more than an approach to an identified need which has built into it an evaluation of the end product, in this case the student who leaves the school to enter his role as a contributing member of our society. Continuous study of a school system should provide an indicator of direction for change. It may be accepted that schools are created by society to serve social needs. It

may also be taken that since social relationships seem to be in an evolutionary process of some sort, schools should also be evolving to a more complete service to their clients.

Whether we "group" students or not appears to be a matter of choice when local needs are considered because the reports of research do not conclusively reject any one pattern. Vontress argues that when human groups exist separately they will in time develop habits, personalities, perceptions, values, and norms which guide their behavior. They become culturally different. It should be accepted that American citizens are separate and unequal; however there should be nothing to exclude them from becoming whatever they are capable of and willing to do insofar as it does not infringe upon others.⁵⁵ It is suggested that the grouping practices at East Richland High School do not create separate culture; rather, they tend to draw back those persons who may have been excluded due to personal or social deficits. A statistic reported in this study was that schools fail in one out of four cases to provide adequate education. School dropouts are essentially excluded from their peer group for a large part of their day. The dropout rate from East Richland High School is less than 1 per cent. According to reasons given by students

⁵⁵Vontress, Clemmont E., "Counseling: Racial and Ethnic Factors," Focus on Guidance, (Love Publishing Company, 1973).

for leaving that school almost all of them re-enroll in another school. Therefore it is assumed that the total curriculum and administrative arrangement do contribute to pulling the various social classes of the community back into the educational picture. It is accepted that there will be sub-grouping within the student body just as with any other concentration of people. In spite of the subordinate associations, the gross relationship of age mates continues. Young people do remain in school and the school continues to serve as a socializing agency.

Grouping by academic ability and student desires is practiced to some extent in the East Richland High School. Little effort is made to force students into a specific program but there is attention to providing for individual differences. One may assume that individual programs are at least implied, if not mandated, by recent court actions dealing with "appropriate" educational programs. It is thought that in the near future school districts will be required to provide a more nearly adequate curriculum so that none are left out of the educational picture. Recent directives from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Illinois may be interpreted as laying this responsibility on local education administrators. Compliance may become one of the elements of recognition of schools by that office.

Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania is attempting to meet the needs of low achieving students. Although there are obvious differences between their program and the General Studies curriculum in Olney, they might assume a similar philosophy. In both cases it seems the purpose is to hold students in school until they are graduated from high school or as long as they may find improved chances for benefit from further education. Regardless of whether or not there is a form of social isolation, there seems to be distinct advantages in permitting young people to pursue an educational program from which they may anticipate both immediate success and transfer to an effective adult life. It is believed that neither advantage nor disadvantage has been conclusively established with respect to administrative grouping practices.

The General Studies student in the East Richland High School may be broadly categorized as one who is functioning at a low academic rate. Thereafter they could be separated in a multitude of need areas. Maintaining the General Studies classes in the same required curricular pattern as all other students may reduce feelings of ostracism. Diligent attention is aimed at selecting those who will derive greatest benefit from the special classes. Unique needs of each student may dictate only one or more courses in the General Studies pattern.

Individual analysis in this study is done by using a learning quotient. Variability of intelligence quotients suggests that it may not be a completely valid predictor of special needs; but it may still be used as one of the indicating factors when it is converted into its chronological and mental age elements. The mean intelligence for General Studies students is shown to decrease for these students at each subsequent measurement. (See Table 3, page 59) However, specific language disabilities may be suspected of contributing much to this apparent loss of intellectual capacity. Correlation studies suggest that it may be possible to identify General Studies qualified students at least as early as the fourth grade with present data.

The New York dropout characteristics listed on pages 12, 13, and 14 of this paper could be directly pertinent to these students unless they are regularly presented situations in which they may experience success. Typical cumulative records of elementary grades indicate low or failing achievements. Frequently there is a notation of "administrative promotion." When they arrive in high school they may be at least one year over age in grade. An appropriate educational philosophy and program has at times provided these students with feelings of adequacy and success in pursuit of learning. A typical comment from these students relates to their first year in General Studies subjects being the first time they have felt good about being in school.

The statistics of this study suggest that remediation practices should be instituted in the first four grades of elementary school. Hopefully this would relieve the need for some of the General Studies classes at the high school. But, until such times that the elementary schools may be able to alleviate learning problems, especially reading, or until promotion practices change, it may be assumed that continuous promotion will each year bring students into the high school who are deficient in learning skills. Therefore, in order to prevent the complete frustration of low achievers, they should at least partially be removed from the unfair competition of regular classes.

Accordingly it is recommended that General Studies subjects be critically appraised, founded on detailed objectives, and retained in the curriculum until a better system may be devised. Since there is a preponderance of low ability in reading among the General Studies students it seems desirable that educational methods be generally applied in the General Studies courses which are less reliant on reading as a primary source of learning input.

Consideration might also be given to the addition of courses dealing with manual skills development in the vocational departments which presently require average reading ability for success.

A further recommendation is that there should be further study with the intent of developing a better

procedure for identification of students having special educational needs. It is felt that a group screening examination should be administered during or shortly after the second grade to identify all students exhibiting learning deficiencies at that time. Possibly there should be repetition of the screening in third and fourth grades to assure a more complete listing of special needs.

Another alternative to be considered could be acceptance of a philosophy that there are some students who should not become high school graduates. This program attempts to serve approximately 10 per cent of the student body. Can we accept responsibility for that great a loss of trained persons?

APPENDIX A

TO: EIGHTH GRADE TEACHERS OF EAST RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT #1
FROM: MR. AHLFIELD, DISTRICT GUIDANCE

The eighth grade teacher is considered one of the most valuable sources of information relevant to more complete understanding of a student as he comes into high school. Many factors, such as achievement and aptitude test scores along with cumulative teacher grades, are considered concurrently with the student's expressed desires in helping him to find an appropriate point to enter the ninth grade curriculum; however, none of these reveal the vast changes in personality which result from the maturation he experiences as he passes through the vitally important eighth grade. Even the grades based on academic achievement, awarded by the teacher in that year, cannot be a completely true reflection of the student because of the many changing influences on his life during the period.

Your observations of daily conduct can contribute much to the total student picture which is not available from any other source; therefore, you are requested to perform a mental review of each of your eighth graders and place them somewhere in the range from one through four. The following guide is provided to aid you in that

consideration. Of course no student will fit all the comments associated with either of the numbers, but possibly you can select one which is most nearly descriptive in each case. Please record a number in the appropriate teacher recommendation column for each student listed on the attached forms.

(Note: When this letter was sent to the teachers there were rosters of each of their class sections attached which had columns for each curricular area evaluation.)

STUDENT ANALYSIS SYSTEM FOR PLACEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL LEVELS

Please make these judgments entirely independent of the standardized tests.

I. MATH

1. Undoubtedly capable of performing satisfactorily in algebra. This student can think symbolically and has good command of the fundamental math processes. Usually displays good work habits.
2. Probably capable of performing satisfactorily in algebra. Has good command of the fundamental processes and has shown average or better progress in eighth grade math to this date. May have shown deficiencies at times but in the teacher's best estimate of ability, this student is probably able to achieve at least minimally acceptable success in algebra.
3. This student would be expected to have considerable difficulty in algebra. May have deficiencies in applying the fundamental math processes. Would probably have difficulty in transposing from literal to real number systems. Would benefit from a review of arithmetic fundamentals applied to practical situations. An introduction to algebra and informal geometry could prepare this student for entry into an algebra course.
4. This student needs an extensive review of fundamental processes. Seems to learn most when exposed to concrete situations. Can achieve minimally when subject matter is presented in relationship to practical situations within the probable experience range of the student. Needs help in developing logical thought processes.

II. Social Studies, Science, and English

1. This student reads well and is able to extract the primary information from written matter pertaining to this portion of the curriculum with little difficulty. Employs good work habits and is able to assimilate information from various sources into a unified body of knowledge. Has made good progress in the eighth grade course thus far. Could be expected to succeed in most demanding freshman courses in this subject.
2. In most circumstances, this student displays good habits in class. Is well adjusted to his age group and performs as good as or better than the average student in this level of study. May have shown deficiencies at various times but in the teacher's best estimate this student is able to perform satisfactorily in an academic area which places reasonable intellectual demands on his age and experience group. Reading ability seems adequate for this age group.
3. This student is able to achieve at least minimally acceptable progress in this subject areas, but seems to have to work harder than the average student in order to do so. Might possibly be a slow or ineffective reader and does not always display good command of grammar. Social adjustment is usually adequate for this age group.
4. This student would probably benefit more from this subject area if he had the advantage of a specialized course in reading and grammar designed to improve his vocabulary, comprehension, and reading speed. Progress in the eighth grade program to date has shown deficiencies which might be expected to be present in ninth grade work also. Seems to be intellectually incapable of performing at the average rate of his peer group in this subject.

APPENDIX B

GENERAL STUDIES PLACEMENT

1972-1973

1. All persons initially screened for assignment to general studies classes or who asked for the classes themselves will be thoroughly studied on the basis of test scores and teacher recommendations.

a. In the mathematics area both math reasoning and math fundamentals scores will be converted to a point value in accordance with the scale below and considered along with teacher's recommendation.

b. The language area is the basis for placement in English classes. Due to the heavy emphasis on the mechanics of English by the test publishers it was decided to use the composite language score so that it would also give some recognition to spelling abilities. Scaled scores also are taken from the table below. The teacher recommendation also is considered in assigning total points.

c. Reading comprehension and vocabulary portions of the achievement tests will be considered along with the teachers recommendation in both the science and social studies areas.

2. Scale values are established as follows:

a. California Achievement Test obtained grade placement conversion to a numerical value.

up to 4.5=1 point	6.6 to 7.0=6 points
4.6 to 5.0=2 points	7.1 to 7.5=7 points
5.1 to 5.5=3 points	7.6 to 8.0=8 points
5.6 to 6.0=4 points	8.1 to 8.5=9 points
6.1 to 6.5=5 points	8.6 to 9.0=10 points
	(no higher values assigned)

b. Algebra Aptitude Test Scores are converted to points as follows:

Raw score of 30 and below	= 2 points
" " " 31 to 38	= 4 points
" " " 39 --48	= 6 points
" " " 49 or higher	= 8 points

c. Teacher points are assigned on the basis of:

Recommendation for General Studies = 2 points

Probably able to achieve in regular courses = 4 points

Should do very well in regular courses = 6 points

Student with potential for high achievement = 8 points

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