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INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION

By C. FENNER and A. G. PAULL

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INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION

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INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION

Being an account of an experiment in
operation at the Thebarton Technical
High School, South Australia

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INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION

I. INTRODUCTION.

“The principle of individual freedom in schools, freedom both for the pupil and the teacher, has been stressed by educationists of recent years. At the Fourth International Conference at Locarno, in 1927, authorities from many lands made valuable contributions towards a proper definition of this ideal. As one speaker pointed out, the tendencies are for a threefold freedom, namely:—(a) Freedom from the restrictions of courses of study; (b) freedom from the needless conventional methods, the routine, and the things mistakenly called discipline; and (c) freedom for the teacher, so that he may become a creative, responsible person, free from forms of pettifogging external control. The mere recital of these tendencies will arouse antagonisms and doubts among those who have not absorbed something of the revolutionary spirit that is everywhere abroad to-day. But all will agree that the subject is one worthy of careful, restrained, and well-conducted experiment.”

The experiment which is dealt with in this paper arose out of a stimulating discussion regarding the “Dalton Plan,” which took place in the Education Section at the Perth meeting of the Association in 1926. The experiment at the Thebarton Technical High School was put into operation from the beginning of 1927, and a preliminary account was read at the Hobart meeting in 1928. That account was published in abstract in Volume XIX of the *Proceedings* of the Association, and in full as *Bulletin No. 2* of the South Australian Education Department (S.A. *Education Gazette*, 1928, pp. 148-150 and 182-184).

During the past two and a half years the scheme has been further extended, and has been enthusiastically carried on with continuous modification and adaptation of the work and the methods, with the aim ever in view of achieving all that is most valuable under the class system, plus something more of independence and individuality and resourcefulness in the character of the pupils who come under the influence of this school.

Serious difficulties have been met with. Some of the methods used have proved impracticable or unsuccessful. Others have been tried and adopted in part only. The main result, however, has been sufficiently sound to justify a firm belief that the experiment is along the right lines—that of those boys who have received training under these methods none has lost thereby, and that the great majority of the students have left the school with some additional valuable equipment for their future lives and vocations.

A few introductory words are necessary regarding the school, the curriculum, the staff, buildings, and equipment. The school is called the Thebarton Technical High School, and is the only one of its kind in the South Australian Education Department. It is situated in Thebarton, a closely-populated suburb in the north-western part of the metropolitan area. It is wholly a boys' school, and the attendance averages about 450 boys, varying from 12 to 17 years of age, drawn from all parts of the State, but chiefly from the metropolitan district; no special test is required for entrance, except the passing of the examination which marks the completion of the primary school course.

The curriculum is that of the "modern" or "manual" type of secondary school. It includes a two-year, a three-year, and a four-year course of sound general education, with no Latin, but with French as an optional subject. Special provision is made for education in various branches of drawing, in experimental science, and in a variety of types of manual training. There is a certain freedom of curriculum, since this is open to modification at any time.

The main body of the school is quite free from the bondage (or otherwise) of external examinations. Those students who choose to remain for a fourth year may sit for the Leaving Public Examination, thus providing a link between this school and the University.

The staff consists of selected men teachers, all with the enthusiasm of youth, and with high qualifications either on the academic or on the craft side, as the case may be. In spite of the fact that so much laboratory work, drawing, and manual instruction is involved, all of which necessitates small classes, this experiment in Individual Freedom is being conducted at present with a staff of 21 teachers, dealing with about 420 boys, indicating that so difficult an experiment may yet be carried out with a staff that is no larger in proportion than that usually allotted to similar types of schools working under the class system. For the past three years and over, each member of the staff has given whole-hearted support to the difficult and additional work that is involved in such a complete change of school system as is at present in operation.

The building is new and adequate, well lighted and ventilated, with commodious laboratories and workshops, set in five acres of ground, and with a large adjoining sports ground available on special occasions. The practical workshops are equipped for classes in woodworking, sheet-metal, blacksmithing, fitting, turning, clay modelling, and printing.

It will be seen that the general conditions of the school are such that the stage was appropriately set for an experiment in individual freedom, such as that which has been attempted. The outstanding difficulty has been that of "tradition." Every member of the staff has received his training under the formal and traditional class-room system; every teacher has long bowed his head at the altar of examinations; every boy who comes to the school has had six or more years of "class" conditions, leaning heavily on his teachers, stopping and starting each subject when he was told, and acting almost as does the private in time of war—a cog in a machine.

To those educationists who are used to the class system, with all its excellences as well as its defects, and who may have considered the question of individual freedom purely in a contemplative way, we may express our belief that few teachers can realise the revolutionary effect of so complete a change of system. Trivial but time-honoured methods and devices prove to be unnecessary; new methods must be developed. Old practices become disconcertingly unimportant; curious and unconsidered difficulties arise. We are all creatures of tradition. Our minds have been so set in the old moulds that at times we do not realise that our hoary devices are indeed ineffective. Our minds think along the old lines, even when we believe we are considering the new. "Individual freedom," for any one of us, is indeed a difficult achievement.

It has fallen to the lot of one of us (C.F.) to launch this experiment, to watch it, to guide and to supervise, as duty and opportunity permitted and required. For another (A.G.P.) has been the business of the captain, always on the ship, his hand ever on the helm, in close contact with a crew encouraged to express individuality, steering an equable but varying course in almost uncharted waters, often with no more than stray fragments of wreckage for a guide. It is almost unnecessary to add that the greater part of this paper has been written by Mr. Paull. He and his staff have done the work of developing and originating the various details of educational technique that are, we hope, leading this experiment towards success. To resume the foregoing figure of speech, it may be said that since we left the old and chartered courses our "sailing directions" have been completely revolutionised, and the one thing that has remained clear and distinct is the "aim" with which we originally set out—the harbour we hope to reach.

It should be added, in acknowledgment, that this experiment in Individual Freedom would not have been possible without the support and sympathy given to it by the late Director of Education, Mr. W. T. McCoy, to which has

been added the whole-hearted assistance of the present Director, Mr. W. J. Adey.

II. ORGANISATION.

(a) *Specialist Teachers.*

Under the scheme of Individual Freedom, an attempt has been made to place the teachers in charge of those subjects which their special abilities make them best fitted to teach. One of the effects of this specialisation is that students come into close contact with most of the teachers, and it is believed that one of the chief advantages derived from this contact is the development of a corporate spirit within the school.

Besides being subject teachers, more than half of the men are in charge of groups of students. In this aspect of their work they play the part of guide, philosopher and friend to their charges, and watch their general progress throughout their school life.

(b) *Subject Laboratories.*

The class-rooms have been converted into subject rooms. This has been done in the belief that "the school should be a laboratorium rather than an auditorium"; a place where the students can be actively engaged, each on his own task, instead of one where teachers lecture while students listen. When a boy comes to school in the morning he elects to proceed with a certain portion of his set work, and accordingly enters the room set apart for that work.

Teachers do not go from room to room to teach their classes, as under the class system, but are visited in their special subject rooms by boys requiring their help. This applies also to the set lessons which are given. The lesson groups go from one subject room to another, according to the general time-table. An effort is made to decorate each room appropriately, and to supply it with the equipment necessary for the proper teaching of its particular

subject. The general aim is to provide the students with a suitable environment, where they may carry out their studies in an atmosphere of individual freedom.

(c) *The Assignment.*

Some teachers go so far as to say that the success or failure of any scheme of Individual Freedom in which assignments are used depends on the manner in which those assignments are prepared. While this may be a somewhat extreme statement, it is certainly true that the assignments are very important, and that their careful preparation is one of the chief duties of the teacher.

The students must be interested by the matter which is presented. In another connection Dr. Ovide Decroly, of Brussels, has said: "Interest is the sluice-gate. By means of it the reservoir of attention is opened and directed. It is the stimulus by which nervous energy is released."—(*The Decroly Class*, by Amelie Hamaide, Dent.). But he goes on to say the interest of a child is not that of an adult.

It may be seen that the preparation of the assignments is difficult as well as important, but the difficulty of securing the maximum amount of interest is one which all teachers have to face, whatever their method of teaching. Miss Parkhurst deals with this problem in her book on the Dalton Plan, and refers to the "interest-pockets" which, she maintains, are essential if the assignment is to be satisfactory. The subject teachers prepare their own assignments, which are approved by the Senior Masters before they are cyclostyled.

(d) *The Class and the Lesson Group.*

The "class," as that term is generally understood (a group of pupils enrolled on one list), is retained for organisation purposes, and each class teacher is responsible for the records of his group of boys throughout the year. As has been explained, he also acts as counsellor to his boys. He helps them to plan their work, and in other ways assists them as much as possible.

The boys do not change their class, but as they forge ahead or fall behind in their work they do the lessons prescribed for the lesson group above or below them. The personnel of the lesson groups is therefore continually changing, but the "class groups" remain fixed. This arrangement makes it possible for suitable set lessons to be given to students at different stages in the course, and at the same time the class spirit is retained. Moreover, as the class teacher has the same group of boys always under his supervision, he is better able to watch their progress and select the path along which their best development is most likely to be secured.

(e) The Time-Table.

A certain number of set lessons in the theoretical subjects are still given at definite times, and for this reason it has been found advisable to have a general time table. The various manual workshops also, for obvious reasons, are available to each group of students at fixed times, but with the element of freedom in the work and methods. About two-thirds of each student's time is devoted to free work. A time-table has been devised that, by means of symbols, etc., represents the school's activities, both free and otherwise.

(f) Records.

Students' progress cards and teachers' laboratory graphs, similar to those recommended by Miss Parkhurst, were adopted in the beginning, and have been retained with some modifications. A home-work record is kept on the back of each student's progress card. The Headmaster also keeps a register which shows the dates on which all students' cards were issued, and also the number of days taken to do the assignments. He thus comes individually in contact with every boy in his school.

(g) Social Clubs.

An effort is made to cater for the many interests of the students by activities which are not included in the school

curriculum. Numerous social clubs are in existence, and regular lunch-hour meetings are held. Members of the staff are interested in these organisations, and take an active part in their proceedings. An enumeration of the clubs will be sufficient to show the variety of subjects dealt with. In addition to the prefectures and "House" committees, and many sports teams, including football, cricket, tennis, soccer, and swimming, there are the following clubs: Science, Stamp and Correspondence, Junior Red Cross, First Aid, Life Saving, Meccano, Dramatic, and Magazine. A number of Christian Union Circles have also recently been formed.

The students take a most prominent part in the conduct of these societies, and are thus given a further opportunity of developing their individuality. Effort is made for every boy to be interested in one or more of the social and sports activities of the school.

III. DIFFICULTIES MET AND EFFORTS MADE TO SOLVE THEM.

(a) Varying Abilities of Pupils.

In 1927 the teachers found it a comparatively simple matter to see that the boys did their assignments in the prescribed time. It is not suggested, however, that all boys took the same number of days to do a particular assignment. Due allowance was made for the varying capacities of the students.

That no serious difficulty was experienced in this direction was due to the following facts, namely, that the numbers were small, that the students were fairly well advanced in their secondary school studies, that the teachers were keen, and that the experiment had then been in operation for such a short time that it was not possible for the boys to fall very far behind. When the method was applied to the whole school, however, the difficulty which the teachers experienced—in seeing that the boys of average ability did their work in the prescribed time—was in-

creased. Some of the teachers now had over three hundred boys to deal with in their respective subjects, and it was difficult to keep in close touch with them all.

Particularly was this the case with the dull boys and the less-interested ones, who rapidly fell behind in their work. The trouble, too, was cumulative in its effect. Under ordinary class conditions, each boy started afresh each day so far as the year's work was concerned. Under the assignment system, the longer the slow boys worked the further they fell behind in their assignments, and the natural consequence was that they became discouraged.

It is to be remembered, however, that even the most backward boys were probably deriving more benefit from the work they were doing than they would have done if they had been working under the class system. The new method merely made it apparent how difficult it is for the weaker students to cope successfully with the advanced school work. This fact is perhaps not so clearly realised under the class system.

At the same time, many of the students made splendid progress, and forged ahead, the quality and quantity of their work being excellent. Some of the boys who made good progress did so because they were smart and industrious, while those who fell behind owed their position in some cases to dullness, and in others to lack of interest.

But there was a third and very important class of students who fell behind. Here were included a number of good boys of average ability, who were apparently doing their work conscientiously, and who yet failed to do the amount that was demanded of them. These backward average students constituted a real difficulty, and the following measures were introduced in the effort to solve it:—

(i) Weekly Assignments.

During 1928 the teachers formed the opinion that the monthly assignment was too great a task for the average boy. He appeared to be unable to cope with the amount of work which was set, and was not sufficiently familiar with

methods of study to plan his work satisfactorily. The monthly assignment, too, was responsible for a certain amount of discontinuous study. Many students did the whole month's work in their favourite subjects before they attempted the more difficult ones. The boys were frequently warned about the ill-effects of this practice. Still they found it difficult to plan their work so that uniform progress was made in all subjects. It was therefore decided that, in 1929, instead of issuing a month's work at a time, assignments consisting of a week's work in all subjects should be given to the students. (*Cf.* the Dalton "period.") This was done, and the results were distinctly favourable (see Figure 1). This practice, which is being continued, besides providing a more manageable task for the boys, has prevented them from racing ahead with certain subjects, because as a general rule no student can obtain an assignment from his teacher before the previous week's work in all subjects has been satisfactorily completed.

(ii) Reduced Assignments.

Experience proved that in the earlier months of the experiment the tendency was to expect too much from the average student in each assignment. The teachers therefore reduced the amount of work set in their respective subjects. There was still a tendency to demand too much, however, and it was necessary to make a further reduction.

Without deliberately wishing to infringe the rights of their fellow-teachers, some of the men were setting an amount of work which took the average boy a much longer time than he could properly be expected to spend on those subjects. The teachers naturally wished to treat their subjects as thoroughly as possible, and at first were reluctant to reduce the work set in the assignments. They feared that the body of knowledge which they wished to impart would become a mere skeleton. When the position was clearly understood, however, a more reasonable demand was made on the students. Experience has proved the teachers' fears to be groundless.

(iii) Home-work Record.

Under the Individual Freedom Plan, it is not advisable to set definite home-work for the majority of students each night; the assignments carry the requirements both for home work and for school work. This fact is brought before the notice of the parents, and their co-operation is sought. They are asked to see that their boys work for the prescribed time each night. During 1928 and the greater part of 1929, however, many of the boys confessed from time to time that they had done little or no home work. Their parents either failed to see that the work was done, or else they were deceived by the boys' statements. To ensure a more beneficial supervision of the home work, the parents have recently been requested to sign the backs of the students' progress cards every night. The cards are inspected every morning by the class teachers, and boys who have not done sufficient home work are required to make an explanation of the fact. Since this measure was adopted there has been a marked improvement in the students' rate of working. Parents now report to us that they no longer have to "drive" their sons to their home work; the assignment must be done, and they do it.

(iv) Detention of Backward Boys.

It was at first thought necessary to detain slow boys after school in order to catch up their back work. It was explained to the honest slow workers that they were being detained for special help, and those who had neglected their work were given to understand that their detention was in the nature of a corrective measure. It must be admitted, however, that the boys failed to discriminate between these reasons, and some of the boys who were really trying to get their work done became discouraged, while the rest became resigned to their detention, which consequently failed to remedy their neglect. The practice of regularly detaining backward boys was therefore abandoned. At present detention is imposed only when the teacher thinks that it will be effective.

(v) Sports Period.

To encourage the good boys, and to reward those who were earnestly striving to keep pace, a sports period in school time was introduced. At first many of the boys preferred to push on with their work rather than engage in sports, but right from the start the measure has produced good results. As a result of this year's organisation, nearly half the students at present enjoy this privilege of a special sports period.

It may be argued that this loss of time will tend to retard the students' progress rather than help them to keep up. It is believed, however, that the work-time lost during the sports period is more than compensated for by the improved attitude of the boys to their work—a result arising from the desire to secure this privilege, and perhaps also from the character development that may be gained on the sports ground.

(vi) Additional Lessons.

In the reports submitted by individual members of the staff in 1929, most of the teachers advocated more class lessons. Under the original class system, each lesson was of 40 minutes' duration. It was decided to reduce their length to 35 minutes each, and to alternate class lessons with free work where possible. This measure was not a reversion to the class system of teaching, but was introduced because teachers felt that too great a proportion of the students' time might be devoted to free work, when possibly better results would be obtained if more lessons were given. It was felt that the class system of teaching, which has been so long and so thoroughly developed, has an inspirational and a knowledge-giving character that has a very high value in any scheme of education. As will be shown later, these "class lessons" have developed into something different, called "group lessons."

(vii) Free Work in Mornings.

The present arrangement is that, with certain excep-

tions, all group lessons are given in the afternoons, and the morning sessions are wholly devoted to free work. This has been done in order that the students may have a long, unbroken period of free work when their minds are fresh. Some of the practical work is done in the afternoons, and as this by its very nature is free work, about two-thirds of the students' time is therefore being devoted to individual tasks of various kinds.

(viii) Time-Table for Backward Boys.

When "Individual Freedom" was first introduced at Thebarton, it was intended that boys should work at their own rate. As has been stated, it was soon found that even many average boys failed to keep up with their work, while the weaker and more irresponsible students fell very much behind, in spite of strenuous efforts on the part of the teachers to keep them up. The ever-present possibilities of idleness and deceit had to be specially guarded against.

It was therefore felt necessary to devise some means of giving those who fell behind occasional help of a special nature, in order to enable them to catch up with their assignment work. Thus was conceived the idea of combining a small section, run purely under the class system, with the remainder of the school working under the free plan; this has been put into practice. There is one special first-year group which has a fixed time-table; the weakest boys are placed in this group. As the slower boys catch up, and the lazy ones convince their teacher that they are able to work for themselves, they are reinstated in one of the normal sections, and replaced by other boys who may have fallen behind. Thus the personnel of this group is constantly changing. Students are thus assisted when they show signs of falling behind in their work, and are consequently prevented from becoming discouraged. A similar arrangement has been made for the weaker second-year boys. It may be argued that many boys will purposely mark time in order to get into the fixed class, and so tread the path of least resistance. The scheme has been in operation for too

short a time for it to be said definitely whether this is being done, but there has been no evidence to date to point to this conclusion.

It is felt, moreover, that this state of affairs will not come to pass, and for the following reasons. In the first place, the boys know that C4 and D5 are the lowest second-year and first-year classes respectively. It is believed that those with any pride at all will strive to remain in the higher sections. In the second place, those in the lowest sections cannot gain as many marks as the boys higher up. In spite of the unreliability of "marks," boys place a high value on them, and some of the best students have said that they welcome the idea of marks being given for assignment work. It is therefore hoped that, if for no better reason, boys will strive to keep in the higher sections in order to secure more marks, which will help to determine their final averages and class positions at the end of each term.

(ix) Frequent Regrading of Students.

With the introduction of the two classes for backward boys, devoted wholly to class teaching, a more frequent regrading of the boys was felt desirable. Consequently every Monday morning after the general assembly the boys are regraded. If any have fallen behind during the previous week, they are drafted into C4 or D5 (the two class-taught sections), and the best boys from those sections are promoted in order to make room. It is believed that boys who are promoted from lower to higher groups will strive to retain their positions for the reasons previously stated. If one may judge from the present attitudes of the boys, this will be the case. It is felt that the two "non-free" classes, together with the frequent regrading of the boys into the various lesson groups, have helped to solve many of the difficulties which have had to be faced in the past.

(b) *The Place of the Class Lesson.*

As some students forged ahead and others fell behind in their assignment work, a new problem arose. Soon after

the experiment was tried with the whole school the teachers were faced with the difficulty of giving suitable class lessons to boys at different stages of the course.

Thus, if a period III lesson were being given in a particular subject to a class, only those students who were actually working at period III would derive full benefit from the lesson. Those working on period IV would not profit so much from it, since they had completed the work which was being taught; those who were still working on period II would be even worse off, because they would still be requiring help with the earlier work.

This difficulty was anticipated in 1927 (see *Bulletin* No. 2, Ed. Dept., S.A.), but it was thought that by grading the boys at the beginning of the year no serious trouble would arise from this cause. Experience soon showed, however, that there was a good deal of "shift" during the year, and therefore special measures had to be introduced in order to overcome the difficulty referred to.

(i) Quarterly Regrading of Students.

The plan which first suggested itself was to regrade the pupils at the end of each quarter, according to the number of assignments they had completed. This was done in 1928, but still the result was not satisfactory. Teachers felt that many of the students were not deriving full benefit from the set lessons. This experiment was therefore considerably modified.

(ii) Optional Group Lessons.

In 1929, therefore, it was decided that, instead of having to attend the class lessons, the students should be free to choose whether they would attend or not. A notice was placed on the notice-board, stating that at certain times lessons on the various sections of the course would be given, and announcing that those who felt the need of instruction could attend at those times. It was found, however, that comparatively few students chose to attend the lessons. Particularly was this the case with the weaker boys, who probably needed most help. Some of them argued that they

could spend the time more profitably by working at their assignments. Unfortunately it seemed that this was not so, and much of the work which they presented to their teachers was incorrect, and had to be done again. If they had attended the class lessons, they would have received instructions for the performance of their tasks, and it is felt that their progress would have been better. The system of optional lessons was soon abandoned.

(iii) More Frequent Regrading into Lesson Groups.

The situation was improved by regrading the boys more frequently. They still remained on their original class teacher's roll, but they were divided into lesson groups as often as necessary. For example, a boy in Mr. A's class (D1) at the beginning of the year might fall behind in his work, and be transferred to the D4 lesson group. He would still go to Mr. A for guidance, and would be required to show his card regularly to Mr. A, who would be held responsible for his progress. But he would no longer be doing D1 lessons. By this means it was possible for the teachers to give suitable class lessons to all students. The lesson-group rolls had to be altered whenever the boys were regraded, but this proved to be a simple matter. The rolls were required only for the purpose of checking the attendance of the boys at the compulsory lessons, and were taken from room to room by monitors in the various groups.

(c) *Primary School Conditions v. Individual Freedom.*

After having been carried downstream by the current during their primary school careers, the boys find themselves in the open sea when they come to undertake secondary school work under the Individual Freedom Plan. They now have to row for themselves and steer their own course, under the guidance of the teacher.

For the first school week every year, therefore, the boys do practically no free work, the time being devoted to a thorough explanation of and initiation into the new work and the new methods of working. It is considered that this preliminary explanation is a very important factor in the

successful operation of the plan. Many of the boys experience difficulty in accommodating themselves to the new freedom. This is not to be wondered at when it is remembered that they are fresh from schools where, under the conditions of class teaching, so much guidance and assistance are given by the teacher in the various subjects.

(i) Fixed Time-Table for First Month.

A new measure has been introduced this year, with the end in view of making the change from class conditions to the relatively free conditions still less abrupt. The result has been most encouraging, and the measure appears to have assisted the boys to more readily adapt themselves to their changed environment.

The first-year boys worked according to a fixed timetable during the first month. They were first graded into classes, according to the number of marks they had gained in their final primary school examination, and for the next day or two had the principles of the working of the school explained to them. A full time-table of lessons was drawn up for these first-year boys, and their assignments were given to them at the beginning of the following week. The method was really a judicious mixture of the assignment plan and the class system. In some cases the teachers actually did much of the work in the lesson periods, in order to show the boys how to attack their work. Other teachers taught for part of the time, and allowed the boys to do their assignment work for the rest of the lesson period. Regular home work was set, as under the class system.

It was impressed upon the teachers that this measure was not on any account to be regarded as a return to the class system, but as merely a temporary measure introduced to make the change from primary school conditions to those of the individual freedom plan less severe. By the end of the twentieth day all first-year boys were credited with the first assignment, and were ready to begin their fifth period on the twenty-first day. It is believed that much

advantage has been derived from this measure. The teachers have been better able to introduce their respective subjects, many of which are quite new to the students, while the boys themselves have settled down to their work far better than did the 1928 and 1929 boys.

(d) Average Students Who Had Fallen Behind.

Last year those students who had failed to complete their contract in 1928 were required to carry on with their work from where they had left off in the previous December. This was, of course, quite in accordance with the accepted principles of the assignment system, and would have proved quite satisfactory if the students' rate of work had remained constant. Unfortunately, however, it decreased, and the amount of work done by these backward boys was unsatisfactory.

During 1929 some of the average boys again fell behind, and the problem to be solved was how to speed these slow students up. Some of them were two or even three assignments behind, but experience had proved that, if they were just allowed to work on at their own pace, several months would probably elapse before they would be ready to commence their next contract.

It was therefore decided to treat the unfinished assignments very briefly, and then to allow these boys to begin the work which the average students should have been doing. At first it was thought that, in some subjects at least, this would be most inadvisable, if not impossible. It has been tried, however, and the result, on the whole, has been satisfactory. It must be admitted, however, that these backward boys constitute one of the knottiest problems attendant on this method of working a school.

(e) The Slow, the Weak, and the Lazy Students.

It is generally believed that the quick, the bright, and the industrious boys derive the greatest benefit from their freedom. Our experience thoroughly supports this conclusion. Such boys do the work that is required of them quickly and well. Unfortunately, under most systems of

teaching there is a tendency to pay too little attention to these students, and consequently their fullest development is not achieved. It is believed, however, that under the methods of individual freedom the above-average boys may have a better chance of developing their individuality, of advancing in their work, and of forming habits of independence and self-reliance than under the class system.

At the other end of the scale there are the slow, the weak, and the lazy boys. In his *Proper Studies*, Aldous Huxley likens the class and the fixed curriculum to the bed of Procrustes. The dull and slow boys may be likened to the short victims who must be stretched to fit the bed of the class system. They must necessarily suffer in the process. It is believed that the scheme of individual freedom may evolve and consolidate as somewhat less Procrustean. The freedom which is allowed such boys under the plan of individual work provides them with a school environment which is better suited to their needs and abilities.

It has been said that boys naturally want to learn, but, if this be true, it must be admitted that our schools as at present organised have failed to satisfy or to discover this desire in the case of a number of students. The teachers' experience has been that a relatively small number of students are really zealous in their search after knowledge. Many more are interested in their work, and do it well. Some appear to be indifferent, and, while quite willing to do as they are told, constantly have to be kept up to the mark.

Also there are a few boys who, either because they are lazy or mischievous by nature, or because we have not been able to properly understand them, will waste their time whenever they have the opportunity. Their teachers have to exercise the keenest vigilance in order to reduce their loss of time to a minimum. But, it may be argued, the idea of individual freedom is to allow the boys to work at their own pace. This is true up to a point, but no boy should be allowed to develop the habit of idleness in a free school any more than he may in the free world of grown-ups. It has been necessary to very closely watch boys who possess these

errant tendencies, and to prevent them from losing more under the assignment plan than they gain therefrom. Intellectual gains, however great, cannot compensate for moral loss.

It is quite probable that the honest, slow workers and the dull boys derive benefits under individual methods at least equal to those which they would derive from tuition under the class system. It is possible also that the boys whom the teachers tend to classify as lazy and mischievous may likewise benefit, though this is not readily apparent. Whether they do or not depends largely upon their teachers. These slow boys do not get through as much work as the quicker boys. It may at first be judged that their progress is not as good as it would be under the class system. Such a judgment may be formed by assuming that the progress made is equivalent to the quantity of work done. There appears, however, to be no such simple means of measuring progress.

The practice of giving these backward boys more lessons appears to convince them they are doing more work, and are "catching up." It is believed that the psychological effect of this device is good. Past experience has tended to prove that backward boys become discouraged, and that discouragement is one of the worst enemies of the pupils' welfare.

IV. STAFF OPINIONS.

During the years 1928-29 reports from the teachers were frequently called for. As time went on, the men ceased to enumerate the more excellent features of the plan, and concentrated on the difficulties which they had encountered. This was done in order that the problems which had to be solved might be clearly stated, and then attacked. Brief extracts from the final 1929 reports are here included, in order to illustrate the teachers' present attitude, and to emphasise the fact that they believe in its basic principles, and are making efforts to improve it.

English.—"I feel that the boys have done more work than the laboratory graphs indicate. School examination results are not a very reliable guide, but they are the only method available to us of testing whether a boy knows his work. The second-year boys this year (1929) are doing much better work in English than did the boys of 1927 who worked under the class system. I felt that this was so, without referring to examination results, and an inspection of the results confirmed my opinion." . . . "We realise that modifications are still needed, but what is firmly believed is that this plan with all its admitted imperfections is preferable to a return to the rigid system to which we were previously accustomed."

French.—"The smartest boys derive the greatest benefit. The average and weak students need more guidance than they have been receiving, and, in my opinion, more class lessons should be given. Another argument in favour of more class lessons is the urgent need for additional practice in conversation. The progress made by the students as a whole has been good."

Geography.—"I believe that, in the case of geography, the scheme works exceedingly well. The majority of boys appear to find little difficulty in completing the assignment work in the prescribed time. The boys take a keen interest in the subject and a delight in the lessons. The standard of the note-books is high, and the examination results are good in the case of the second and third year students, and fair in the case of the first year classes. . . . I believe that the individual freedom plan is superior to the old system in almost every respect, and the longer I teach under it the more convinced I am of its superiority."

Arithmetic and Mensuration.—"In reviewing the working of the new methods during the last two years, I wish to state that I believe wholeheartedly in the fundamental principle on which it is based, viz., giving the boy a task to perform for himself. I believe that it is the right method of educating boys for the tasks of life. . . . We are endeavouring to train the boys to tackle the problems of life,

and I consider that this alone outweighs many of the weaknesses that can be urged against the plan."

Algebra.—"Fundamentally, the individual freedom plan appears to lay more stress upon character development as a foundation for citizenship than upon academic accomplishment. Personal responsibility is the outstanding feature of the work, and it is believed that a useful citizenship in its fullest sense can be developed only when boys have constant training in responsibility, initiative, self-reliance, organisation and judgment. In creating opportunities for the development of the qualities referred to, the plan fits in admirably with the Vocational Guidance Scheme, for such qualities are most desirable in a boy who seeks employment. Under the new plan, his education becomes more or less a training for citizenship, and good citizens will be good workmen. From my criticism, it may appear that the undesirable features of the new methods outweigh their virtues, but, in my opinion, quite the opposite is the case. Defects have been pointed out and improvements suggested for the sole purpose of more nearly perfecting a system of education which appears to me to be far superior to the class system in moulding habits of good citizenship, individuality, and the desire to be educated in the fullest sense of the word."

Geometry.—"So far as the teaching of theoretical geometry is concerned, a serious difficulty is the absence of a text-book written for this type of teaching. In spite of this disadvantage, the progress made by the students, as judged by a comparison of examination results, has been as good as under the class system. I feel certain that we are assisting to evolve a system of teaching which will enable the child to develop his personality, and which will fit him for the responsibilities of life."

Science.—"I believe that the teaching of this subject has improved greatly under the individual freedom plan. Owing to the greater amount of practical work possible, and the desire which the students develop to read good

books on the subjects, a much wider knowledge of scientific method is obtained."

Drawing.—"The scheme has created a live educational atmosphere among the students. Most of the boys are keen to accomplish their tasks, but there are still a few who, it seems, will not thrive on so much freedom. As regards the quality of the work done in this subject, it is to be feared that there has been a falling off. This is due to various causes, viz.:—(1) An attempt on the part of the students to hurry through their work; (2) inadequate supervision on the part of the teachers, owing to the great amount of marking to be done; and (3) insufficient preliminary instruction in fundamental principles at the beginning of the year. If more class lessons could be given in drawing subjects for the first month or two, the quality of the work done would be much improved, and the plan could be applied as successfully to drawing as to any other subject in the curriculum."

Woodwork, Metal-work, and Clay Modelling.—"It was thought advisable to teach these subjects at definite times, as under the class system, but their very nature has made individual work a necessity. Moreover, a great deal of freedom has been allowed the students in the choice of models. Boys have been encouraged to submit original designs for models, and most of the students have been working along these free lines."

V. ATTITUDE OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS.

It has been difficult to judge the attitude of the parents to the scheme, but we conclude that it is in most cases favourable. This conclusion is based on the following facts:

1. Early in 1928 a number of interested parents visited the school at the invitation of the headmaster to see the work in progress. They were invited to question the teachers and students, so that they might learn as much about the work as possible. They came to the conclusion that the plan of individual freedom which was in operation

was superior to the class system with which they were familiar.

2. There have been extremely few cases, say, half-a-dozen, in which the parents have definitely expressed their opposition to the system. One parent transferred his son to another school, in spite of the fact that the boy was making excellent progress, and that he liked the free work.

3. Many parents have praised the plan. The father of one of the first-year students stated that his son appeared to be making splendid progress, and was thoroughly interested in his work, which he accomplished without fatigue. The boy proved to be of but average ability, and this fact made the father's testimony the more pleasing. Other parents testify that their boys now complete their share of home work voluntarily, without having to be "driven."

4. The opinion of the great majority of parents has not been learnt. This would seem to point to the fact that they are not dissatisfied with the system under which their children's education has been carried on. On the other hand, the enrolments of the school should be quoted, so far as they may have a bearing on this question. For the past four years they have been as follows:—1927, 352; 1928, 434; 1929, 491; 1930, 444. The individual methods were first put into operation for the whole school in 1928.

It has been thought unwise to question the students directly on their attitude to individual freedom, but information has been gained indirectly and unobtrusively from a number of them. Their opinions will be briefly summarised under the headings, good, average and weak students.

1. *Good Students.*—The smart boys, almost without exception, prefer their freedom to the conditions of the class system. They feel more independent, and like to feel so. One mentions the fact that "you get ordered about too much" under the class system. Another would like to see fixed lessons entirely dispensed with. The responsibilities

of freedom have been shouldered by this group of students. Most of them are eager to keep ahead with their work, and it is felt that excellent results are being achieved with them.

2. *Average Students.*—The opinions of the average boys vary. Many prefer the present methods, but some would rather work under the class system. A third group consists of those who are “not sure.” An average boy also raised the objection of being ordered about under the class system. This would seem to indicate that, even though the boys do not fully realise it, they subconsciously appreciate the freedom which is offered them. Some students of average ability are, unfortunately, not industrious, and they prefer the class system because it is easier; they argue that it is harder to find one’s own way than to be led. It has been pointed out to these boys that, although free work may be harder for them, it is better, and some of them have appreciated this fact.

3. *Weak Students.*—The great difficulty with many of the weak students is to get them to express an opinion on the matter. Some, however, are quite emphatic in stating that they prefer the fixed lessons, and wish to remain in C4 and D5 (see III, a, viii). Their trouble often lies in the fact that they are particularly weak in a single subject or in a group of subjects, which, under the free plan, prevent them from completing their assignments. The opinion has been formed that for such students the fixed class is probably better than the freedom which is enjoyed by those in the higher groups. Some boys in D5, however, are anxious to do free work, and are doing their best to secure promotion.

To sum up, it is felt that for good and average students the plan as we have developed it is most successful, but for some of the weaker boys the class system is preferable. By the establishment of the fixed class groups, these weaker boys are provided for. Effort is made to secure the best possible development of all the students by providing for them the two types of training.

VI. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

(a) *Penalties and Rewards.*

Reference has been made to the detention of boys who fell behind in their work, and to the fact that the practice of regular detention defeated its aim. It was therefore felt necessary to devise some more effective means of giving such boys a stimulus. It was suggested that there was perhaps not sufficient incentive offered to the boys to do their best work. They apparently do not believe that virtue is its own reward, but desire a more tangible recompense for their efforts. The sports period was therefore introduced, and, as has been mentioned, this measure has been very successful.

The Marks System.—It was considered that even more should be done to reward good work. This year, therefore, a system of marks has been introduced. The purpose of it has been not only to serve as an incentive to good work, but also to provide a means, apart from detention, of penalising those whose work is not up to standard.

It is believed that boys place a high value on marks, and will do their best to secure them. For every period of work that is completed to the satisfaction of the subject-teacher, so many marks out of ten are awarded to the student. In some subjects it is difficult to assign so few marks for a week's work, and the number is increased. This makes no material difference, however, as at the end of the term the marks will be expressed either as a percentage or as so many out of fifty, according as the terminal examinations are dispensed with or not.

The purpose of this device is to put a premium on both quality and quantity of work done. The more work done the more sets of marks the student can gain; also, the better the work in each period, the more marks he will obtain each time. It is felt that this measure will have beneficial effects, both on the students' rate of working and on the quality of the work they present to be marked. A disad-

vantage of the system, however, is that an additional strain is thrown on the teachers, for now they can no longer merely accept or reject a student's work (a task involving a comparatively simple judgement), but they must carefully weigh it and compare it with the standards they have chosen. This may not be as serious as at first sight it appears, because the quality of the students' exercises will in many cases be improved, and, in consequence, the work can be more easily examined.

Consideration is being given to the introduction of other devices which may encourage the boys to do their best work, not only so far as set lessons are concerned, but also in their physical development and growth of character.

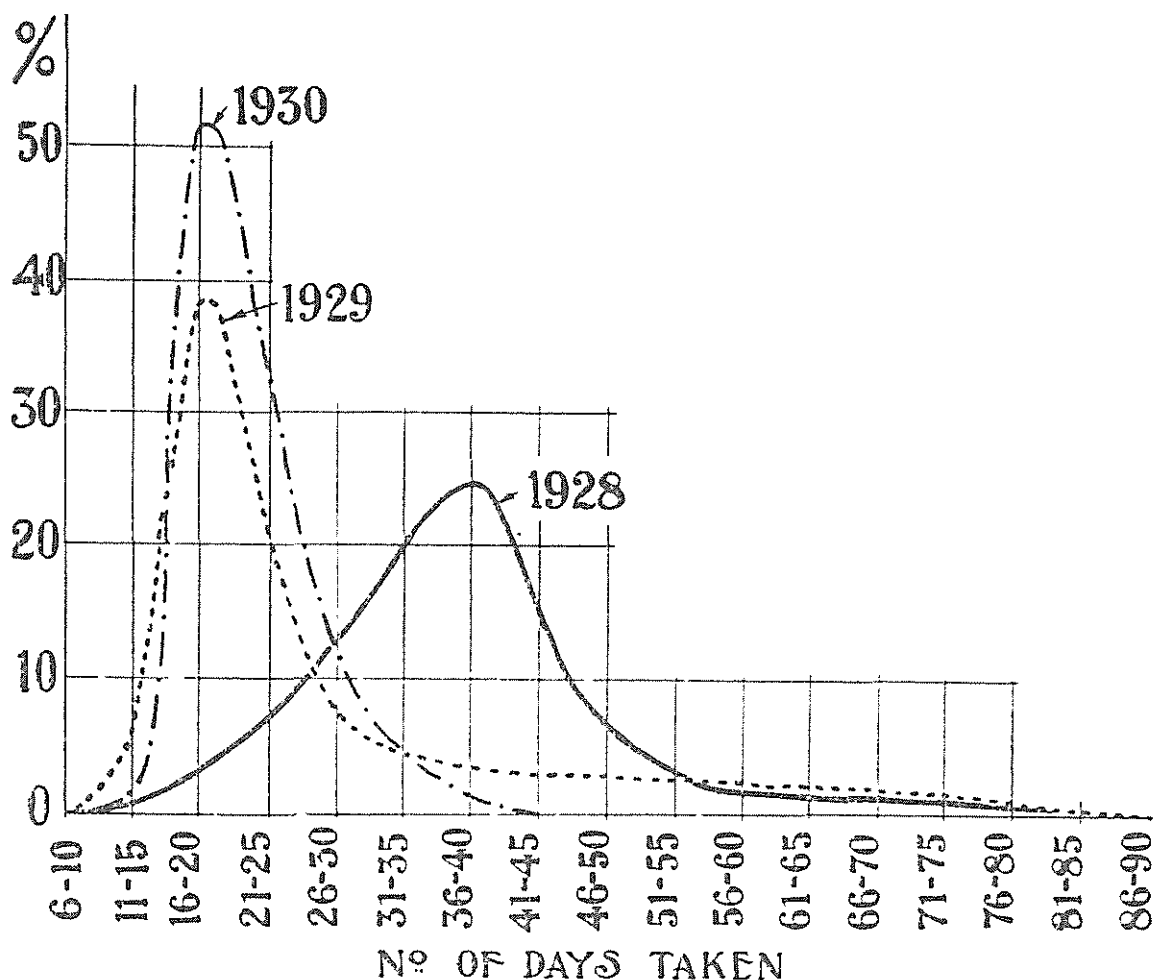


Figure 1.—Graph of distribution curves, showing the number of days taken to complete the second assignment by the first-year boys of three successive years.

(b) *Rate of Working.*—Figure I compares the number of days spent on the second assignment by first-year boys in 1928, 1929, and 1930. The second assignment was chosen for this comparison, because the first assignment this year was worked under special conditions. The first-year boys were selected because they were all new to the plan. The graph reveals the fact that there has been an improvement in the rate each year. Assuming the boys to be of about the same average ability in each group, it is reasonable to conclude that the improvement has been due to a development in technique. The record for this year (1930) is pleasing, and one conspicuous feature of it is that there is no longer the extreme flattening after, say, the fortieth day, which is observable in the curves for the two previous years. This improvement is thought to be due to the special measures which have been introduced this year.

It should be pointed out that the slowness of the majority of students in 1928 was partly due to the great amount of work that was demanded of them in the early assignments that year. It is not anticipated that any serious difficulty will be experienced in future in connection with the rate at which the students work.

(c) *Headmaster's Register.*

Since the inception of the plan, the headmaster has kept a register containing the names of all the boys in the school, and a record of the number of days taken by them on the various assignments. In this he has followed Mr. A. J. Lynch, of the West Green School, Tottenham.

During the past two years he has issued all new cards, and has set aside a daily period for this purpose. This procedure has secured the advantage of his keeping in touch with all boys, but a disadvantage of the practice has been that it has taken much of his time.

This year the class teachers have issued the cards and kept the records for their own classes. Every Friday morning they have forwarded their records to the office, and the headmaster has transferred their entries to his

own register. This has resulted in a considerable saving of time, and has also enabled the class teachers to keep a closer check on their boys' progress.

(d) *Examination Results.*

“The testing of the results of work done in school is an excellent thing in its way, but it ought to be kept in its proper place of subordination to the work being done. It is pitiful that it should be necessary to state in plain words the platitude that schools exist for the purpose of education. In actual practice, what the teacher has to keep in the foreground is the external examination. In spite of the incessant wail against them for the best part of a century, external examinations still remain in their unwarranted and hurtful position as the dominant influence in education of all grades. Nothing of vital importance can be done in the way of reforming educational methods till this incubus has been removed. Let it be admitted at once that there is need of some means of testing the results of the teacher's work in some directions that lend themselves to this form of estimating results. The highest results of a teacher's work can never be tested by any formal examination. Probably the line of development will be the gradual substitution of inspection for examination.”—John Adams, in *Modern Developments in Educational Practice*.

It is admitted by many educationists that the system of external examinations is an unsatisfactory method of testing either the students' ability or the teachers' skill. The school at Thebarton has been kept free from external examinations except in the case of the fourth-year students, most of whom sit for the Leaving Public Examination of the University of Adelaide, and of a very few third-year boys, who are permitted to take the Intermediate Public Examination.

A well-organised system of internal examinations is in operation, and Junior and Intermediate Technical Certificates are awarded by the Education Department to students who satisfactorily complete the second and third year

courses respectively. A Board of Studies has been established to consider the case of boys who have not quite covered the course, but who have done well in the work they have completed. In spite of the fact that but few boys sit for the Leaving Examination, freedom is somewhat restricted, because the school must shape its course to some extent towards that end.

On comparing the school examination results during the past two years with those obtained when the class system was in operation, it has been found that generally the results under individual freedom have been quite as good as under the class system. In some cases they have been distinctly better, and in a few, worse. It is difficult, however, to make a fair comparison owing to the varying conditions. An inspection of a great number of sets of marks, however, points to the conclusion that examination results do not suffer under the scheme.

(e) Quality v. Quantity.

When individual freedom was first introduced at Thebarton many of the boys made it their aim to complete their work as quickly as possible, and failed to pay sufficient attention to the quality of the work done. As long as they just satisfied their teachers, they themselves were satisfied, and the result was that in many cases the quality of the work suffered.

The teachers, on their part, were reluctant to reject the work that was presented, as, by doing so, they would retard the students' rate of working. The marks system already referred to has helped to solve this problem. Boys now receive credit for the quality as well as for the quantity of work done, and are thus encouraged to aim at a high standard in their exercises.

It is difficult to decide just what quality should be demanded. It has been pointed out to the students that, while neatness and accuracy are necessary, they are not sufficient. For example, a chairmaker must not only make his chairs well, but he must make enough of them to enable

him to earn a living. The boys have been urged to make it their aim to do as *much* work as they can, as *well* as they can, and to preserve a proper balance between the essentials of accuracy, finish, and speed.

(f) *Text and Reference Books.*

The scheme which was approved in 1927, whereby all the necessary text and reference books for the whole of the students are provided from a common stock, has been in operation since February, 1928. It has resulted in a saving to the students and in the addition to the school library of a number of excellent reference books. As a general rule, these reference books are not taken out of the school by the students, who, however, have free access to them during school time. A reference library which is proving to be of great service to the students is gradually being established.

It has been a comparatively easy task for the teachers to keep a check on the reference books in their rooms, but the set text books have not been so easy to control. The boys are permitted to take these books home with them in order to do the required amount of study every night. They also, on occasions, take them from room to room, and a number of the books have been lost. A special effort is being made this year to keep a stricter watch on the text books, and the teachers have devised schemes for the more effective control of the books in their respective rooms. One of the Senior Masters has charge of the class libraries, and he makes periodical inspections and checks of them in order to reduce losses to a minimum.

The book system is an important feature of the scheme, and many of the parents have praised it highly. The fact that the cost of books is greatly reduced under this system is considered to be one of its chief advantages from the parents' point of view.

(g) *Home-work.*

The boys who are in the fixed classes do set home-work as under the class system. The rest work on their assignments for a certain time every night, and the time so spent

is recorded on the backs of their progress cards. This record is signed by the parents.

It has been found in many cases that boys do extra home-work in order to retain the privilege of free work. Because they are free to do what subjects they like their home-work is perhaps not so fatiguing as it may become under the class system. If they meet a problem which is difficult, they may leave it until the next day when they can obtain help from their teacher. They turn instead to something which they can more easily manage, and are thus able to work for a long period without undue fatigue.

Some of the upper students do a great deal of work at home but have not regarded it as burdensome. It is believed that fatigue is greatest when a definite task is imposed and when part of that task is insurmountable by the student.

VII. CONCLUSION.

In his chapter on *The Dalton Plan (Modern Developments of Educational Practice)*, Sir John Adams warns teachers against static systems of education. Certain of his comments are specially pertinent to the matter here discussed, and justify extended quotation. He says: "But there is another side to all this, and fortunately we are still at a stage when a warning can be given without offence. In the development of every method there is a danger of rigidity. Very often the need for a new method arises out of the rigidity into which an old method has fallen. . . . It is hard to believe at the present moment that the Dalton Plan could possibly develop into a narrow tyranny. But this sort of thing has happened before with excellent methods, and may quite easily happen again, unless we are on our guard. Just now everything is in a state of flux; all manner of experimentation is not only permitted but encouraged. The plan is being adopted in all degrees of completeness, from the whole-hearted organisation of a huge school like the Streatham County Secondary School to the timid introduction of the Plan in the work of a couple of classes."

The system which is in operation at Thebarton is still in a plastic state, as it has been from the beginning, and it is felt that in the accompanying possibilities of development lies one of its chief merits. Continuous adjustments must be made to meet changing conditions, and we cannot picture the system we have developed as ever becoming hard and fast. It is a continuous process of "becoming":

" 'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven
The better! what's come to perfection perishes."

Since the beginning of the present century, many experiments in individual freedom in education have been made. The names of Montessori, Decroly, and Parkhurst suggest themselves as those of leaders in the movement towards freedom. Although they have experimented along very different lines, they have had a common aim, viz., to secure the full development of their pupils through self-activity based on interest. They have laid emphasis on active learning rather than on passive listening. Aldous Huxley, in his *Proper Studies* (p. 114) states that, in most schools, "too much stress is laid on teaching and too little on active learning. The child is not encouraged to discover things on his own account. He learns to rely on outside help, not on his own powers, thus losing intellectual independence and all capacity to judge for himself. The over-taught child is the father of the newspaper-reading, advertisement-believing, propaganda-swallowing, demagogue-led man—the man who makes modern democracy the farce it is."

Without being pledged to entire agreement with Mr. Huxley, we may agree with him that there are dangers in over-teaching. Merely decreasing the amount of teaching by a reduction in the number of class lessons and the substitution of free periods will not necessarily improve matters. It is felt, however, that the free time which the students at Thebarton are given is so spent that they are deriving much benefit from it. In it they not only acquire a knowledge of the subjects dealt with in their assignments, but also unconsciously learn how to study, and how to attack

and to carry out the job ("assignment") that Life sets for them to do. It is believed that they also develop a greater measure of resourcefulness and independence, and gain a fuller appreciation of the obligations implied in freedom than they would under a more rigid system of education.

One other point remains. It is this: Granted that the adoption of individual freedom in the organisation of this school has achieved satisfactory—and in some respects noteworthy—results, the question still arises: Would it be better if the free plan were applied only to pupils of proved energy and ability, while those pupils with lesser potentialities and ambitions (as decided by some form of intelligence testing, scholastic records, or previous school history) were placed under a system of schooling in which the free work is subordinate and the class-teaching dominant? This is at present no more than a question, but it is one to which special attention will be given during the coming years of the Thebarton experiment.