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Round Robin

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Round Robin is a forum intended for our readers' use to express or comment on any topical subject affecting the field of reading. Send your letters or comments to Dorothy E. Smith, Round Robin Editor.



Dorothy E. Smith, Editor

Dear Readers,

The "Continuous Progress" concept or ungraded elementary system, is one of the hottest issues right now in the teaching of reading. As you know many school systems have eliminated first, second, and third grades as such, and hope simply to keep each child in the ungraded primary until the child is ready for fourth grade. Some schools are contemplating enlarging the program to include the first six grades and the Chicago Board of Education plans eventually to have everything below high school on this program.

There are some real problems attendant on both sides of the issue. Is Continuous Progress a system whereby each student can learn at his own rate, or is it a "no-flunk cop-out?"

We asked several educators to give their opinion and we'd like to share their answers with you.

Dear Mrs. Smith,

I have taught 13 years at junior high, high school, and intermediate levels; but I have always taught those students with reading achievement gaps. I am very much in favor of "Continuous Progress" for the following reasons:

1) Administrators and teachers would have to think beyond the "basal

text” in providing students with materials for different sequential skills rather than “grade levels.”

- 2) The child would have more understanding of what is expected of him. Not only must he be able to demonstrate proficiency in a skills area, but he must learn to read before progressing with his peers.
- 3) Teachers would have to change their receptiveness to diagnostic teaching. Inservice training, teacher training institutions, and such periodicals as *READING HORIZONS* would reflect that change.

Thank You,
Don White
Mattoon, Illinois

Dear Mrs. Smith,

I am inclined to agree with many eminent educators that the disadvantages inherent in the program outweigh the advantages.

At present, I am a teacher of English in the middle school and find that many students are devoid of rudimentary skills so necessary for sequential progress in learning. I am all for individualized instruction: this, I believe, requires a skilled teacher, and one who is an indefatigable worker for the development of each child.

Too many students somehow are lost in mid stream and start drifting aimlessly with the current which too frequently washes them ashore as “pushouts.”

I believe all too often educators have latched onto any innovative practice and have metaphorically interwoven the skill areas with Nathaniel Hawthorne’s poem, “Happiness.”

Happiness is a butterfly,
which, when pursued, is always
just beyond your grasp, but which,
if you will sit down quietly,
may alight upon you.

I believe skills, especially in the areas of communication, (creative writing is my strong hold) must be taught with relentless vigor. But when these skills quietly alight upon a student may he take wings and soar. That is the task of the teacher; it is of the greatest magnitude.

Mrs. Charlotte S. Ehresman
Southern Middle School
Owensboro, Kentucky

Dear Mrs. Smith,

Although the continuous progress concept recognizes the democratic philosophy of the inherent worth of the individual; when the child enters the secondary grades, and the competition for grades is increased, and there are definite class distinctions, the continuous progress concept is deflated. Viable secondary programs that reflect the ungraded position will need to be initiated and researched. The continuous progress concept seems to raise more questions than answers. Does the ungraded process bring about change and in what areas? What are the affective responses of students to the ungraded process? What are the consequences in terms of self-image and motivation? Why does it have to be an "either-or" situation or graded versus ungraded? Too frequently educational change is equated with improvement. Why not start with the child, not a category or structure, and work from this aspect within any structure?

Lorri Davis
Elgin, Illinois

What do you think? Which system would you prefer for your school? Or do you agree with Lorri Davis, that it does not have to be an either-or situation?

Dorothy E. Smith
Editor

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