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A SURVEY OF CURRICULAR PRACTICES IN SELECTED ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS IN MICHIGAN THAT HAVE ADOPTED THE
NON-GRADED CONCEPT

By

Lamont Dale Dirkse

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ABSTRACT

A SURVEY OF CURRICULAR PRACTICES IN SELECTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN MICHIGAN THAT HAVE ADOPTED THE NON-GRADED CONCEPT

By

Lamont Dale Dirkse

The primary purpose of this study was to find out if changes have taken place in the curricular practices of selected elementary schools in Michigan that have adopted the non-graded concept. A secondary objective was to explore what implications these changes have for the preparation of elementary teachers and other personnel involved in the non-graded program.

This study was designed to employ the descriptive method of research using the questionnaire, the interview and observation techniques to make a broad analysis of the problem. Thirty-four schools purporting to have a non-graded program were selected as a sample for the study: thirty of the schools were listed in a study conducted by the Curriculum Commission of the Michigan Department of Elementary School Principals in 1969 and 1970, and four other selected schools in western Michigan were added to

that list. A questionnaire was designed and mailed to a contact person in each school. Twenty-six questionnaires were returned and the data were tabulated and analyzed. Results of the questionnaires indicated six schools which appeared to have the most innovative programs and these were selected for an in-depth study. A visit was made to each of the six schools to observe the program and to interview the administrator, some teachers, and some students. The data collected from the questionnaires were tabulated to indicate the number of responses to certain questions, and responses to questions dealing with definitions were presented in narration.

Conclusions

1. Some changes have taken place in the instructional, methodological and philosophical aspects of the non-graded program. In some schools students were allowed to select certain experiences in the curriculum, thus indicating schools are becoming more flexible. It was noted that there is an emphasis on the discovery approach. Teachers seemed to be more aware of children as individuals as exhibited by a child-centered approach rather than a subject-centered approach.

2. There seems to be a trend to do less grouping according to ability, achievement and interest, and more emphasis on individualizing the programs of students in the non-graded program.

3. The responses would indicate that the participants feel the non-graded programs have been successful at the primary level in their schools. This conclusion is based upon the facts that the programs have been in existence for some time, and that nine schools have now expanded their programs to include the intermediate level.

4. Few participants defined their non-graded programs specifically on the questionnaires.

5. The observations and the interviews indicated that the basic idea of non-gradedness is a program which allows students to progress at their own rate of speed.

6. Teacher aides play a valuable role in a non-graded program and these individuals as well as classroom teachers should have some pre-service training in non-graded programs.

Recommendations

1. Educators should evaluate the curriculum critically in non-graded schools to see if innovations could be introduced which would make the program truly individualized.

2. Educators should continue to experiment with new and effective teaching techniques which may be used in the non-graded program. These techniques should provide a flexible means for allowing students to progress at their own rate of speed.

3. Schools should continue to use para-professionals in the non-graded programs and these individuals should receive special training.

4. Teacher education institutions should provide leadership through pre-service and in-service training for teachers working in non-graded programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A dissertation is in reality the work of many people and it would be difficult to thank each one personally; however, special recognition should be given to certain individuals for their assistance and encouragement.

To Dr. Calhoun Collier, the Chairman of the Doctoral Committee, a warm note of thanks for his deep personal concern and for his many hours of guidance and assistance, and to the other members of the committee, Dr. Jean Le Pere, Dr. Charles Blackman, and Dr. Donald Olmsted, a sincere expression of gratitude for their advise and guidance.

Also deserving of special thanks are the administrators, the teachers and the students in the schools, which participated in the study. Without their cooperation, the results and completion of the project would never have been possible.

To the members of the Education Department of Hope College, who so willingly accepted additional department responsibilities so that this project might be completed, a special word of appreciation is given.

Finally, to my wife, Ruth, and our children, David, Susan and Nancy, my deepest love for their encouragement, understanding and patience during this endeavor.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Educators are striving to find ways to make learning relevant for young people. "Change" has appeared to be a key word in educational circles. Public school systems are studying the possibility of changing the administrative and the organizational patterns which have been in existence for some time. A great deal of interest has been shown in the open classroom concept; a flexible scheduling system, using the modular and block approach, has excited many administrators; team-teaching and individualized learning are becoming familiar terms to anyone involved in education. Within the last two decades, many communities have adopted a non-graded concept in some form. Some schools in Michigan have initiated this concept in their elementary schools in both principle and practice.

The term "non-graded" has dual implications; to some it is an organizational change, and to others it is definitely a philosophical change. The specific theme basic to either of the above approaches is the idea that a child's progress through school should be continuous from the time he enters elementary school until he leaves it. A true commitment to the non-graded concept may lead

to a revolution in education--a revolution which many individuals say must take place if education is to survive. If our educational system is going to be successful in preparing youngsters for the experiences which they will encounter in the space age, it may be necessary for educators to restructure their present programs. The content of the programs may have to be changed and new methods and procedures used to meet the objectives. It appears that an organizational program for more than administrative purposes will have to be developed. Curriculum practices and procedures for instruction which have been used in a "lock-step" graded program must be changed in order to meet the basic objective of a non-graded program which provides opportunities for a child to progress at his own speed on a continuous basis.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study was to survey selected schools in Michigan to determine if changes have in actuality taken place in the instructional program and in the instructional procedures of those who have adopted the non-graded concept.

The specific objectives of the survey were:

1. to find out if changes have taken place in the curricular practices of the elementary schools in Michigan that have adopted the non-graded concept.

2. to find out what specific changes have taken place.
3. to explore what implications these changes have for the preparation of elementary teachers and other personnel involved in the non-graded program.

The results of this survey may serve as resource information for those school systems considering the non-graded concept and also may be helpful for evaluation in those schools that have already adopted a non-graded approach. It must be remembered that the mechanics of a non-graded program are a means of achieving the ends.

Significance of the Problem

"Accountability" is a key word today in education. Parents are questioning educators about the progress or lack of progress of young people; they want to know why certain methods and practices are used; and they are concerned about the experiences which teachers are providing for their children in the schools. The State Board of Education is concerned about the quality of education our youth is receiving. The State Legislature, responsible for some funding of the programs, is also concerned about the quality of education. The public is interested in having educators take the lead in improving the total educational program.

A study of the history of the American public school reveals that our schools have until recently undergone few drastic changes since their formative days in the early 1800's. The self-contained classroom with the

"lock-step" program is still the most prevalent organizational pattern at the elementary level; however, in recent years experimentation has taken place at this level with new educational theories and practices. The significant reasons for this interest in change are two-fold: (1) to promote higher educational standards, and (2) to promote sound personality development for every child enrolled in the elementary school.¹ In the past two decades a great deal of interest has been generated in the non-graded school, particularly the non-graded elementary school. Actually the non-graded concept is not new; it has been in existence for a number of years. Since 1950 the non-graded school movement has been moving ahead at a more rapid pace, especially in larger schools.² It has been difficult to determine how many systems have actually incorporated the non-graded program because there is a lack of understanding of the exact nature of a non-graded school. Dr. Robert Anderson, in an address given at George Peabody College for Teachers on February 22, 1965, said, "Non-gradedness is two things. First, it is a philosophy, a system of values on the basis of which we build our program. It is also a set of administrative and instructional practices."³

¹John Goodlad and Robert Anderson, The Non-Graded Elementary School (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Revised Edition, 1963), p. 205.

²Ibid., p. 207.

³Robert Anderson, "Non-Graded Schools and the Culturally Deprived Child," Peabody Reflector (March-April, 1965), p. 67.

If a school system agrees with the philosophy of non-gradedness, that of providing continuous progress for a young child from the time he enters the elementary school until he leaves it, then that school system will have to re-evaluate its curriculum in light of its major objectives. The most significant aspect of any school should be its curricula or instructional program. Too frequently the administrators of non-graded schools are more concerned with the administration, the levels of organization, and the textbooks which will be used.

Studies have been made concerning pupil achievement of non-graded students compared to students in a graded system, the attitudes of teachers in a non-graded school compared with the attitudes of teachers in graded schools, and supervision and administration of non-graded schools. The study most similar in nature to this survey was one which was concerned with grouping of children for instruction in the non-graded school. No study was available noting curriculum changes in non-graded programs; therefore, this survey was implemented.

The researcher feels strongly about the effectiveness of the curriculum or instructional program of a non-graded school and he was therefore interested in discovering if changes have been made in these aspects of the program. These changes may include new programs, new instructional procedures, and new ways of involving the staff. A survey

of existing programs in the state of Michigan may prove that there has been a significant change in the curriculum and instructional procedures of the non-graded program, and in turn may serve as resource information for schools considering the non-graded concept.

If schools are changing to the non-graded concept, are they experiencing changes in curricular practice which are better for the children? What difference is there between a graded program and a non-graded program? The findings of this survey should produce some concrete answers to these questions and provide some guidelines in planning for quality in education.

Definitions of Terms

The terms that are used frequently are defined for purposes of this study as follows:

Non-Graded--a concept which provides the flexibility that permits continuous progress and attention to the individual needs of each child.

Curriculum--refers to the planned experiences the child encounters in school.

Primary Unit--a term which includes the first four years in an elementary school. Normally it would be kindergarten, first, second, and third grades.

Continuous Progress--a term which may be used interchangeably with non-graded.

Lockstep Program--the whole class moves ahead together, with each one expected to do the same thing.

Grouping--this term refers to the placing of students into small segments of the class in any number of arrangements. For example, students could be grouped according to interest areas, according to achievement, or according to ability.

Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations have been defined as follows:

1. The investigation in this study was confined to selected elementary schools in the state of Michigan.
2. The investigation was confined to the primary unit of the non-graded schools.
3. This investigation was concerned with those programs which have been in existence at least three years.
4. This investigation was concerned with instructional programs existing presently in the non-graded schools.
5. This investigation did not take into consideration, (a) size of student population in the program, (b) student-teacher ratio, and (c) the socio-economic level of the community in which the non-graded school is located.

Assumptions

Two basic assumptions underly this investigation:

1. Effective instructional programs in non-graded schools are the best means of developing the potential of all students.
2. The curriculum or instructional program is the most significant aspect of a non-graded school.

Organization of the Study

This chapter has included a statement indicating the purpose of the study, the specific objectives, the significance of the study, the definitions which will be used frequently throughout the study and the limitations and assumptions. In the following chapter, Chapter II, the literature will be reviewed. This will include an examination of related literature and studies which are pertinent to this investigation. In Chapter III the design of the study will be discussed. The method in which the investigation was conducted will be reviewed. The questionnaire will be explained; the method of selecting the sample will be reported; and the procedures used in conducting the investigation will be discussed.

A presentation of all data collected from the questionnaires and from the interviews will be given in Chapter IV in accordance with the purposes of this investigation.

The summary, the conclusions and the recommendations will be presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

The information which was gleaned from the related literature and research studies pertinent to this study will be presented under the following topics: (1) Historical Approach to a Non-Graded Program, (2) Reorganizing Curriculum from Traditional to Non-Graded, (3) Related Research Findings, and (4) Other Innovations Related to Non-Graded.

Historical Approach to A Non-Graded Program

In the early 1900's educators began to question seriously the lock-step graded program which had been popular since the middle 1800's. Frederic Burk developed a program at the San Francisco Normal School whereby children studied individualized, self-instructional material.¹ This idea led the Winnetka, Illinois, Public Schools to develop one of the first non-graded programs in our country. The non-graded philosophy maintained that each child should progress at his own rate of speed.²

¹John L. Tewksbury, Non-Grading in the Elementary School (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1967), p. 16.

²Ibid., p. 16.

Other experimental programs, similar in nature, were tried in various sections of our country. The term non-graded, or ungraded, came into usage with these programs in the 1940's. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has the longest continuous history of the non-graded program in our country. The program was started there in 1942 in one of the elementary schools and now it has expanded to include all of the elementary schools.³ Since that time many other schools throughout the country have formally adopted the non-graded concept.

Some communities in Michigan became involved with the non-graded concept during the 1950's and 1960's; however, there is not very much information available about these programs. The Bunker Elementary School Continuous Progress Plan, Muskegon, Michigan, is perhaps one program which has been of the longest existence in the state. The program is similar in nature to the program which was developed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Other programs were instituted in Grand Rapids, Flint, Birmingham, and a number of other communities in Michigan. Attempting to find out how many schools in Michigan have adopted the non-graded concept appears an impossibility. The State Department of Education does not have a list of schools organized as non-graded schools. The Elementary School

³Ibid., p. 17.

Principals of Michigan did conduct a survey in 1969 and 1970 asking schools to indicate if they had adopted new programs, different organizational patterns and new teaching techniques.

Evidently educators felt that traditional education, which was geared to the average child, was not meeting the needs of all the students. Burk and other individuals felt that the curriculum should focus on the individual child. This new approach was known by a variety of terms. The one which is most commonly known is non-graded; however, it has also been known by continuous progress, ungraded, primary cycle, and levels system. The term which was used in this study was non-graded, and has been defined in a number of ways. Dr. Robert Anderson said,

Non-gradedness is two things. First, it is a philosophy, a system of values on the basis of which we build our program. It is also a set of administrative and instructional practices.⁴

He explains this further in another source by saying that philosophically non-gradedness is designed to implement a theory of continuous pupil progress. The differences among children are great and since these differences cannot be substantially modified, the structure and practices of the school must facilitate the continuous educational progress of each child. The organizational plan, then, for the

⁴Anderson, op. cit., p. 67.

structure and the instructional practices would incorporate the administrative aspect.⁵

Another author, Lee Smith, defines non-gradedness as:

A philosophy of education which makes possible the adjusting of teaching and administrative procedures to meet differing social, mental, and physical capacities among children. It uses an organizational plan which eliminates grade labels, promotes flexible grouping and continuous progress, and permits the utilization of meaningful individualized instruction.⁶

James Lewis, Jr., begins his definition by stating the negatives. He says that non-graded is not a number of things, such as heterogenous grouping, homogeneous grouping, team teaching, etc. Many of these instructional procedures can be effectively worked in a non-graded program, but by themselves they are not non-graded. He summarized it as follows:

The non-graded technique must include processes which humanize education and relate the educational program to the interests, abilities, and values of the individual child. It must involve the transition from traditionalism to humanism in reaching and educating all children, each in his own way. Humanism, an essential part of any non-graded program, must be fostered by principal, teacher, and student at all times. THE NON-GRADED CONCEPT STRESSES INDIVIDUALIZATION OF INSTRUCTION IN THE MOST HIGHLY REFINED MANNER POSSIBLE.⁷

⁵Goodlad and Anderson, op. cit., p. 52.

⁶Lee Smith, A Practical Approach to the Non-Graded Elementary School (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Co., 1968), p. 1.

⁷James Lewis, Jr., A Contemporary Approach to Non-Graded Education (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Co., 1969), p. 31.

Almost all of the reviewed literature stressed the point that non-grading intends to do away with the graded superstructure, graded content, graded textbooks, graded standards, and graded nomenclature to which we have been accustomed. It provides the opportunity for continuous pupil progress uninhibited by grade barriers, and thus frees the teacher to be more flexible in planning, diagnosing, and prescribing programs.

In all the definitions given, one notes that the key idea is individualization, an aspect which must be upper-most in the minds of those who are seriously considering adopting a non-graded program. As all the authors indicated, it is most important that this factor be carefully weighed in order to avoid certain pitfalls. If school personnel are aware of these pitfalls before the change takes place, many problems may be eliminated.

Reorganizing Curriculum

It is interesting to note that many schools which have adopted the non-graded concept continue to use the same instructional program, curriculum guides, basal textbooks, etc., which they used previously in the graded program. Goodlad and Anderson, two authorities in the field, state that within a few years after abandoning a graded structure, need for curriculum reform is felt in at least one out of three schools.⁸ One can see that the

⁸Goodlad and Anderson, op. cit., p. 208.

greatest challenge in moving to a non-graded program is the organization of the curriculum. Smith lists some guidelines for developing a curriculum:

there are differences as well as similarities among individuals.

learning is evidenced through a change in behavior.

the most meaningful learning takes place through the process of discovery for oneself.

individuals draw relationships from their background of experience.

individuals react to a stimulus and initiate action at their own rate and depth.

learning takes place best when the individual has freedom of choice.

each child has rights and responsibilities as an individual.

each child has rights and responsibilities as a member of a group.

there is a direct relationship between meaningful learning and amount of personal involvement.

learning situations need to be provided at many levels in a variety of groupings.

the school environment must be one which encourages a feeling of belonging.

each child must have opportunities to think and work as an individual as well as a member of a group.

learning takes place best when an individual assumes responsibility for his own program of instruction.⁹

In order to implement a program, a plan of action must be followed. Many authors suggest that a good way to begin is to organize the material in the skill subjects

⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 14.

on different levels. This is known to many as the levels plan. Tewksbury and Smith refer to the levels plan frequently. Lewis follows a similar plan; however, he calls it the Skill or Concept Sequence Plan. This plan is definitely built around the skill areas of language arts (which includes reading) and mathematics. In turn these skills are most essential to other areas of the curriculum such as social studies and science.¹⁰ It would be wise to define level, or point out the difference between level and grade. The basic difference is that level represents a given number of basic skills, mastery of which is designated to be accomplished within a specific allotment of time.¹¹ The levels plan seems to be very appropriate in the non-graded elementary schools. Instead of having the youngsters cross six large grade barriers, they could take smaller steps in each of the skill areas. However, this plan seems to come under some criticism. Tewksbury lists six specific criticisms:

1. The plan is nothing more than a graded program in disguise. Levels represent hurdles, just as grading does.
2. It is nothing more than a system of inter-classroom achievement grouping.
3. It does not provide adequately for individual differences.

¹⁰ Lewis, op. cit., p. 82.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 83.

4. It is pre-planned, and therefore it reduces opportunities for learning based on emerging situations.
5. It may deter teachers from conducting a daily program in which there are opportunities for the integration of work in the skill subjects and the content areas.
6. It will result in too much attention being placed on the skill subjects and a de-emphasis of other parts of the curriculum, especially social studies and science.¹²

Another curriculum plan which is used in many non-graded schools is the Individual Study Unit Plan, sometimes known by other names, one of which is "Learning Activity Package." This plan purports to assure a child of an individualized instructional program. The unit plan is pre-arranged and can be used by a number of students. The package or unit would include tests to determine weak areas and strong areas of the student's knowledge which would serve as a pre-test; it would also include instructional materials, such as suggested reading material, slides, other audio-visual materials, and experiences which the student could carry on by himself. If the student's pre-test is satisfactory, he may confer with the teacher; and if the teacher is satisfied with the results, he may suggest that the student go on to another unit, or pursue this unit from a different approach. If the pre-test results are not satisfactory, the student

¹²Tewksbury, op. cit., pp. 52-59.

is directed to proceed with the material and activities which have been outlined. "Pupils and teachers, in working through learning activity packages, become involved in large group and small group instruction as needed, or in individual study if that seems most desirable. Each pupil, then, wherever he fits on the continuum from fast learner to slow learner, has an opportunity to learn at his own pace, in his own style."¹³

Sidney Rollins, the author of Developing Non-Graded Schools, emphasized the fact that a reorganization of the curricula in non-graded schools demands content that is different. Rather than basing the program in specific subject areas, one should consider the broad view approach. After the broad view has been identified, then it is necessary to list the skills or items which should be covered, and these items should be placed in sequential order. These items could be grouped together in units which are often called "Learning Activity Packages." This unit plan is used at the Nova School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.¹⁴

In addition to the two plans suggested, Lewis suggests a third plan known as the Multiple Phases Plan.¹⁵

¹³Sidney Rollins, Developing Non-Graded Schools (Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1968), p. 52.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁵Lewis, op. cit., p. 95.

This plan is used in the high schools and provides a great deal of flexibility in scheduling and determining of courses. The parents, teachers, and counselors must work closely with the students. Because this approach is geared more to use in the high schools, it will not be reviewed in detail.

As has been previously indicated, a non-graded program requires a great deal of flexibility. If grade lines have been forgotten, some type of arrangement must be made for grouping of students, especially for administrative purposes. The most ideal arrangement to meet the needs of individual students would be on a one-to-one basis, one student to one teacher. However, financially that is impossible. Keeping in mind that each individual is unique and that his needs are constantly changing, flexibility must be built into the program so that classroom groupings may change as individuals change. Smith again lists some guidelines for grouping which are worth reviewing:

- the grouping should provide for individual differences.

- the size of the classroom group should be reasonable and flexible.

- the structure should encourage desirable interaction among the children.

- the grouping should permit cooperative teacher-pupil planning.

- the grouping should serve to encourage selection of subject matter to meet individual needs.

the grouping should encourage the use of a variety of approaches to learning.

the grouping should make it possible for teachers to study each child, analyze his specific needs, and prescribe appropriate instructional activities.

the grouping should create a relaxed atmosphere for the teachers; it should free them from having to achieve predetermined, unrealistic standards and goals.

the grouping should encourage a creative atmosphere for children, free from unreasonable requirements not justified by their maturity level.¹⁶

The physical plant will determine to a certain degree the arrangement of the students. Many non-graded programs have been adopted in school buildings which were built for the traditional graded program. Non-graded programs can be effective in self-contained classrooms. Lewis recommends that if a program is organized around the self-contained classroom, multi-age grouping may be effective. He lists the following reasons:

1. It induces the teacher to individualize the instructional program to suit a class composed of heterogeneously grouped students.
2. Various discipline problems within the group tend to diminish.
3. There is a high degree of cooperation among all children in the class, regardless of age or ability. This is particularly true in terms of those students who may be older by approximately two years than others in the class, because what has developed in these cases is the 'big brother'/'big sister' attitude.

¹⁶Smith, op. cit., p. 33.

4. There also tends to be a greater degree of independence and individual initiative on the part of the teacher and students in the class.
5. In each classroom, group work and committees can be organized with less delay and with more efficiency because of the leadership which evolves on the part of the older students.
6. A closer to normal situation is provided where students are exposed to other students who differ in age within a two or three year age range. This is the kind of situation to which children are accustomed at home with brothers and sisters, or at play in the community with peers, and one which renders the school setting more natural.¹⁷

Goodlad and Anderson emphasize the idea that there is no established pattern in the grouping of children in non-graded schools and even go beyond that by saying there probably should not be an established pattern. They feel that the more possibilities there are for arrangements of students, the better it will be, and as teachers forget about grade levels, they will become more flexible in dealing with children.¹⁸

Related Research Findings

In most research studies dealing with the curriculum, or phases of the curriculum, a great deal of attention was given to the two skill areas--Language Arts (particularly reading), and Mathematics. DiLorenzo and Salter found that eight comparative research studies were reported between 1959 and 1965. Of six studies of comparisons in reading

¹⁷Lewis, op. cit., p. 122.

¹⁸Goodlad and Anderson, op. cit., p. 70.

achievement in grades three, four, five, and six, four studies found the performance of non-graded pupils significantly superior to that of graded pupils; one found no difference; and one found the graded control group better than the experimental group. Of five studies comparing arithmetic achievement, four found statistically significant advantages in favor of non-grading; the other study favored graded classes. Of three studies comparing spelling achievement, all three favored the non-graded pupils. All the studies compared reading, and some compared arithmetic and others compared spelling.¹⁹

Jones and Moore conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of a non-graded structure on reading performance. They found that pupils participating in a non-graded primary program achieved at a significantly higher level in measures of reading ability at the end of one and one-half academic years than did pupils enrolled in a conventional graded program. However, the results were not stable; at the end of the third academic year differences which favored the non-graded group still existed, although none of the differences were statistically significant. It was concluded that the initial superiority of the non-graded organization could have been due to transient novelty effects, to the greater suitability

¹⁹ Louis T. DiLorenzo and Ruth Salter, "Co-operative Research on the Non-graded Primary," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. LXV, No. 5 (February, 1965), pp. 269-277.

for our young and beginning students, to variables not uniquely associated with non-grading, or to some combination of these factors.²⁰

Robert Carbone, in his study "A Comparison of Graded and Non-Graded Elementary Schools" concluded that there was no evidence that pupils who attended non-graded schools at the primary level achieved at a higher level than those who attended graded schools. This comparison was made when the youngsters were in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. It might have been more conclusive if the study had been made at the end of the third year of the non-graded program and the end of the third grade of a graded program.²¹

A study was conducted in the Grand Blanc Community Schools comparing the achievements of students in a non-graded school and a graded school in the area of science, mathematics, language arts, and social studies. The results did not appear to represent a significant trend favoring one school's academic achievement in preference to the other.²²

²⁰J. Charles Jones and William Moore, "A Comparison of Pupil Achievement After One and One-half Years in Non-Graded Programs," Journal of Educational Research, Vol. LXI, No. 2 (October, 1967), pp. 75-77.

²¹Robert Carbone, "A Comparison of Graded and Non-Graded Elementary Schools," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. LXII, No. 2 (November, 1961), pp. 82-88.

²²Edwin Crandell, "A Comparison of the Effects of Non-Graded, Multi-Age, Team Teaching Versus the Modified Self-Contained Classroom at the Elementary School Level," Research Report (December, 1970), Grand Blanc Community Schools.

The Flint, Michigan, school system initiated the Primary Cycle in 1954, which is categorized as non-graded. In its first evaluation study in 1959, the results in reading and language arts were significantly higher for the students in the Primary Cycle.²³

Sister Mary Alice from Flint, commented in a study of administrating non-graded schools that subject matter was still graded according to difficulty. This in itself need not be negative; the determining factor being how that subject matter is used in the classroom. If each youngster is required to cover all the material, from beginning to end, this method might defeat the basic premise of the non-graded philosophy.²⁴

In a study by Anderson and Goodlad, "Self-Appraisal in the Non-Graded School; A Survey of Findings and Perceptions," it was found that since the non-graded concept had been adopted, there had been greater involvement in preparing materials more suitable for the slow learner, new curricula in social studies was devised, and more teachers were using the unit method of teaching. The study also indicated that the teachers individualized the programs in arithmetic and reading.²⁵

²³Vivian Ingram, "Flint Evaluates its Primary Cycle," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. LXI, No. 2 (November, 1960), pp. 76-80.

²⁴Sister Mary Alice--R.S.M., "Administration of Non-Graded Schools," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. LXI, No. 3 (1969), (December, 1960), pp. 148-151.

²⁵Anderson and Goodlad, op. cit., pp. 76-80.

The researcher had the opportunity to review evaluation studies of four western Michigan communities. Grand Rapids and Muskegon conducted their studies after a three-year trial plan, and Grand Haven and Holland schools evaluated the program after one year. The reports were most comprehensive, including comparison of test results; surveys of parents, teachers, and students; sociometric studies; and findings which were noted through observations. The fact that three of the four systems have continued the program and have expanded it to include other schools and, in one case, include the intermediate unit, speaks for itself. The schools found that academically the students did as well as, or better than, students in control groups. The students were working more independently than in the graded program, due to less tension and pressure. Fewer students had to remain in the non-graded program four years than the number of students who failed and repeated a year in a graded program. The students appeared to be more enthusiastic about school. It would be profitable to review all the comments from teachers, parents, and students; however, time and space will not permit this, so a reaction from one individual in each of the four districts will be included:

A Grand Rapids teacher said,

I think we really are thinking about the children in this program. We want every child to have the most

advantages possible. We really are beginning to find the best way to divide the children.²⁶

A parent from Muskegon states,

It is with great pleasure that we, my wife and myself, express our gratitude and appreciation to Bunker School and the Muskegon Public School system for the Primary Plan. We have four children in Bunker School at the present time. Our oldest, Carlean, did not have the advantage of the ungraded primary school. Our second child, Joanne, is finishing primary school. Our third child, Paula, is finishing her first year of primary school, and our fourth child, Esther, is finishing kindergarten.

Perhaps, it should be noted that all our children were premature at birth. Immaturity has been a problem with each of our children. Carlean, our first, repeated the first grade. We concur that this step was necessary and her work since has proved the wisdom. This would have also been true of our second and third child, but due to the primary school, they can continue along with their classmates. Our second child caught up with her class at approximately the end of the second year and is doing average work. We are hopeful this will also be true of the other children to follow.

We realize that each of our children vary in ability, however, all other things being equal, we feel that the primary school has been a blessing to our children. Indeed we are grateful to Bunker Schools, its excellent teaching staff, and to the Board of Education who allowed this trial. It is our hope that the program will be continued and expanded.²⁷

²⁶District of Grand Rapids, Board of Education, "Report of Principals Study Group on Primary Cycle," Grand Rapids, October, 1965.

²⁷District of Muskegon, Board of Education, "An Evaluation of the Continuous Progress Program in the Bunker Primary School," Muskegon, 1963.

A teacher from Grand Haven says,
although the organization expects a greater amount of work of all interested parties; we have discovered the individual child to a greater degree.²⁸

A principal from Holland, said,
At the time of our first evaluation, we polled the teachers involved in the Continuous Progress Plan, and all the teachers, 100 percent, chose to stay in the program the following year; not one asked to be transferred to another building.²⁹

An article in Education Digest, 1968, written by Louise M. Berman is entitled "New School Organization--Same Old Curriculum?" In this article she challenges the educator to look critically at these new programs to see if changes in the curriculum and procedures have been significant enough to bring about changes in the lives of young people. The author ends the article by saying that schools that have adopted the non-graded program have two choices--either to stay with the same old curriculum or to develop a sparkling new one. The latter choice can really be exciting and would permit the child to develop his personal powers to the greatest potential.³⁰

A more recent article in the February issue of the Phi Delta Kappan, entitled, "Individualization of Instruction

²⁸District of Grand Haven, Board of Education, "Non-Graded Program--One Year Evaluation," Grand Haven, April, 1966.

²⁹Interview with the principal from Holland, August 6, 1969.

³⁰Louise M. Berman, "New School Organization--Same Old Curriculum?" Education Digest (1968), pp. 11-14.

vs. Non-Grading" by William McLoughlin, claims that no substantial changes in instructional procedures accompany contemporary plans to non-grade the graded school.³¹ If this article is correct, then it appears as though we might as well forget the non-graded concept. However, more non-graded programs should incorporate the individualized approach within the program.

Other Innovative Programs

What other programs, practices or procedures are effective in the schools of the seventies? In a speech at the fourth annual conference on Individualized Instruction in New York City, November 9th, 1971, Dr. Robert Anderson indicated that we had to do more to humanize instruction for realistic learning. He stated that one key to humanizing education is to do a far better job in assessing the learning style, the life style, and the "readiness" of each child. One way to humanize a school and to make more realistic learning possible is to organize it properly. He said that certain organizational elements, such as non-graded (which is chiefly a philosophy honoring individual difference); multi-age groupings to insure heterogeneous as well as homogeneous pupil clusters; cooperative teaching; and open-space physical settings; have been found to be more effective.

³¹William McLoughlin, "Individualization of Instruction vs. Non-Grading," Phi Delta Kappan (February, 1972), p. 378.

in delivering educational service to children with different rates and styles of learning and varying levels of motivation.³² Dr. Anderson ties individual instruction to the non-graded concept because it is a procedure to meet the main objective of the non-graded concept.

Much is written about individualized instruction. Rather than ignoring individual differences among students many educators are cultivating and nurturing these differences as assets and precious resources. The question is raised, "Why individualize instruction?" and Robert E. Keuscher lists five reasons:

1. Philosophically it is consistent with the principles upon which our form of government, which spawned our education system, is based.
2. The very nature of our democratic system and the way it functions demands knowledgeable, thinking participants.
3. Assembly line methods are tending to produce mass-produced, standardized citizens at the expense of individuality.
4. As society grows increasingly complex there is a greater demand for a diversity of talents and skills.
5. It is probably the most efficient way to educate if one focuses on the product rather than just the process.³³

³²Robert Anderson, Abstract, Humanizing Instruction for Realistic Learning, November 9, 1971.

³³Virgil Howes, Individualization of Instruction (London: MacMillan Co., Collier-MacMillan Limited, 1970), p. 7.

If educators are going to strive to be more humanistic in their approach to teaching, and if they are going to be more concerned with individual needs of students rather than with the masses then we are going to have to consider new patterns of organization and new procedures to accomplish these goals.

An individualized program that is worthy of that name must be characterized by more teacher awareness of differences among pupils and a greater array of alternative or learning activities. It will demonstrate that both curriculum and organizational patterns are flexible and subject to modification when pupil needs dictate it. Such a program will allow students to make decisions about what they study, when and how they study it, and involves the student in evaluating the effectiveness of his efforts, all activities designed to gradually place the responsibility for an educational program where it rightfully belongs ultimately--in the hands of the individual himself. And in a truly individualized program individuals will be encouraged to be different, to question, to dream, and to create.³⁴

Dr. Edward Pino, Superintendent of the Cherry Creek Schools in Metropolitan Denver, Colorado, was also a speaker at the New York Conference on Individualized Instruction in November, 1971 and he, too, is an advocate of the individualized approach and the open classroom concept. Cherry Creek's philosophy of education is based on the belief that:

1. All children are basically good and have a desire to learn.
2. All children are entitled to a happy, successful school experience.

³⁴Edward Pino, Conference Report--Introduction of New Organizational Patterns in Staffing and Curriculum, New York, November, 1971.

3. All children differ in their interests and requirements.
4. All children have unique and ever-changing rates and styles of learning.
5. All children have intellectual mountains to climb.
6. Educational goals must stretch a student's capacity.³⁵

Therefore, in accordance with these beliefs, Cherry Creek accepts the responsibility of establishing these goals:

1. An environment where students can develop and maintain a positive self-image by being themselves.
2. An environment where learning can be human, free and enjoyable.
3. An environment where learning activities are based on free enterprise to allow all children to reach their full potential.
4. An environment where all children are provided a stiff curriculum based on basic and fundamental concepts, skills and values.
5. An environment where all learning experiences are based on an individualized plan for each child.³⁶

The Cherry Creek elementary schools are reorganized into family modules. Each module includes about 125 learners and a team of ten adults. Architecturally they have used the open-space concept and have replaced much of the conventional furniture with devices and material which have been adapted for this program. The team of adults responsible for each module consists of team

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

leaders, certified teachers and team aides, a differentiated staffing pattern. As far as implications for teacher training programs, Pino has this to say about his program:

This differentiated staffing pattern provides for a sound approach to teacher education. It provides a well-engineered vehicle for phasing trainees into teaching, using the Cherry Creek University of Colorado seven-year teacher education program, the Colorado State College teacher intern program and others, as the primary source for the training cadre. It provides for a careful and gradual induction of the new teacher into the profession.³⁷

How are students evaluated in an individualized instruction program? The methods vary and just as is true in many innovative programs, the method of assessing pupils' learning is often the same as it was in the traditional program. An article written by Dr. John Yeager, and Dr. Margaret Wang, in the *Elementary School Journal*, in May of 1971, has this to say about evaluation:

Scores on achievement tests, by themselves, do not describe the progress of pupils in an individualized system of instruction. The seemingly obvious alternative--to measure learning rate--also poses major problems. Even so, teachers who are working in classroom settings that permit each pupil to progress individually through a sequence of learning experiences must consider two measures of pupil progress--degree of mastery achieved on tests and the rate at which the pupil masters a given task. If one or the other of these measures is missing, there is little chance that the assessment will be meaningful.³⁸

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸John Yeager and Margaret Wang, "Evaluation Under Individualized Instruction," Elementary School Journal, Vol. 71, No. 8 (May, 1971), p. 451.

Summary

The non-graded movement as it is known today can be traced back to the early nineteen-hundreds. The main emphasis throughout this time has been that each child should progress at his own rate of speed, and this idea has been stressed by each author quoted in the section dealing with definitions. These authors also indicated that in order to meet this objective non-grading intends to do away with the graded super-structure, graded content, graded textbooks, graded standards and graded nomenclature to which we have been accustomed. The greatest challenge in moving to the non-graded program is the reorganization of the curriculum. Grades have been replaced by "Levels," "Individual Study Unit Plans," or "Learning Activity Packages", which could assure a child of an individualized instructional program; and flexibility has been built into programs so groupings may change as individuals change. A number of studies which compared achievements of students in non-graded programs with those in graded programs indicated there was no significant trend in academic achievement which would favor one program in preference to the other. Today much is written about Individualized Instruction as a way of humanizing education. Rather than ignoring individual differences among students, many educators are cultivating and nurturing these differences as assets and precious resources.

The Non-Graded Elementary School--A Contemporary Approach;³⁹ Individualization of Instruction--A Teaching Strategy;⁴⁰ and Open Education--Alternatives Within Our Tradition⁴¹ are recent publications which provide some answers to meeting the needs of students. Any one of the techniques described or a combination of them may be the key to a successful non-graded program.

³⁹ Lewis, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Howes, op. cit.

⁴¹ Joseph D. Hassett and Arlene Weisberg, Open Education--Alternatives Within our Tradition (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972).

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

The question is often asked: What is different about teaching in a non-graded school as compared to teaching in a graded school? Is the curriculum the same? Do you use the same techniques and procedures? Do you use basal textbooks? Since many of these questions are never answered directly, this survey was conducted to gain information in regard to the curricular practices of selected elementary schools in Michigan that have adopted the non-graded concept.

Design of the Study

This study was designed to employ the descriptive method of research. The major purpose of descriptive research in education is to tell "what is"; therefore this method was selected as the best means of determining the present status of the non-graded program. In reviewing literature one notes that descriptive studies serve many very important functions in education. Borg lists the following functions:

Descriptive studies:

1. are often of great value merely to make known the current state of the science when the body of knowledge is relatively small.
2. provide us with a starting point.
3. are the direct sources of valuable knowledge concerning human behavior.
4. are used widely by public school systems in their educational planning.
5. provide the school system with the means for internal evaluation and improvement.
6. give a description of current status and a source of ideas for change and improvement.¹

Some descriptive studies may be based on hypotheses, but many are not. Usually they are designed to portray facts and not to explain why the relationships exist or why certain conditions have occurred.

Individuals in education and behavioral sciences use the descriptive research approach. Many types of descriptive research are utilized. The type used in this study is the social survey, involving the use of interview, observation and questionnaire techniques to make a broad analysis of the problem.

Sample

The Curriculum Commission of the Michigan Department of Elementary School Principals conducted a survey of their

¹Walter R. Borg, Educational Research, An Introduction (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 202-203.

membership in 1969 and 1970 seeking information in regard to non-traditional elementary programs. From the schools reported in the study the researcher was able to compile a list of schools using the non-graded concept, including the name of a contact person in each school. In addition to this list, four other schools in western Michigan were added, thus bringing the total to thirty-four schools known to be using the non-graded approach. This list of thirty-four schools constituted the sample used in this study.

Procedures Employed

As was stated earlier, this survey makes use of the following techniques: questionnaire, interview and observation. The study was designed to be carried out in four steps. The first step included the review of literature related to the topic of the non-graded school. Particular attention was given to literature which pertained to the programs which were in existence in the state of Michigan. The next step was the preparation of a questionnaire used to gather data from the schools participating in this study. This instrument was refined during and after initial construction by discussion and trials with three faculty members in the Education department of Hope College. The third step was administering the questionnaire, examining the data, and tabulating the results. From the results of the questionnaire the

researcher then selected six schools which had innovative programs for an in-depth study. The schools selected were chosen on the following basis:

1. Those schools indicating unusual changes in the instructional, methodological and philosophical areas.
2. Those school using innovative procedures to meet the objectives of the non-graded program.
3. Those schools involving teachers (to the greatest degree) in the decision-making process.

The in-depth study consisted of a visitation to these particular schools observing the programs in action, and having the opportunity to confer with key people--administrators of the program, teachers in the program, and the students involved in the program. The last step was the reporting of the data which were collected, the drawing of some conclusions, and then the making of recommendations.

Data Collection Instruments (Appendix A)

The data for this survey were collected through the use of a questionnaire which was sent to the total sample. Additional information was obtained from selected schools through observation of programs and interviews with key people in these schools. The questionnaire was carefully designed to gether pertinent information to meet the

objectives of this study. It was necessary to use both the open form question and the closed form question to obtain the information needed for this study. Fellow members of the Education department at Hope College, who were former elementary school principals, were asked to review the questionnaire as though they were going to respond to it. They were then asked to make comments on how they would interpret the questions and their reactions were used to revise and refine the questionnaire prior to completion and mailing to the participants in the study. The final form was designed to cover three areas of information: (I) Basic Information, (II) Curriculum Practices, and (III) Staff Development. Each of the sections contained items designed to elicit responses related to specific areas of concern within the section.

From the results of the questionnaire, six schools which appeared to be the most innovative were selected for an in-depth study. An interview was conducted with the key person responsible for the program and with some of the teachers and students in the program. In order that some consistency was established in the interview pattern, a semi-structured interview was used. Although the information collected from the questionnaire served as a basis for the study, it was felt that a more in-depth approach should be used. Therefore, the purpose of the interview was to gain a more thorough understanding of the

program, the components of the program and the respondent's opinions and reactions to the program. The administrators and the teachers were asked to clarify their interpretation of non-gradedness, explain their programs, examine content material, and review methods and procedures used to meet the objectives of the program. The open-form question was used during the interview, with certain pre-determined questions as a basis such as the following example: "What new learning experiences have you added to the curriculum since you have adopted the non-graded program?" (see Appendix D). The responses to these questions were written down during the interview or immediately afterward. They were later recorded in categories which had been decided prior to the first visitation. Additional comments not fitting into any of the categories were also listed separately. The number of interviews per school varied with the size of the school and the extent of the program. An interview was conducted with the administrator of each school, with at least two teachers per building and in some schools with as many as six or seven, and with at least six students per building. In addition to the interviews, the researcher spent at least one-half day and in many cases one full day observing the programs in action with particular interest in the procedures being used by the teachers, the content of the programs, and the reactions of the students. The observation was not planned to be scientific in nature but

more of a casual observance. The results of the interviews and observations of each school are presented separately without identifying the particular school by name. The schools will be designated as school "A," "B," "C," "D," "E," and "F."

Analysis of Data

The data collected for this study were obtained by using the three techniques described earlier; the questionnaire, the interview, and the observation. The data from the questionnaires were tabulated, analyzed and reported separately. The data from the interviews and the observations were analyzed and reported together.

The responses to the questionnaires were tabulated with particular significance placed on each section. In analyzing the data of the responses in the section dealing with Basic Information, the position held by the person filling out the questionnaire was very important because individuals in different positions view questions from different perspectives. Emphasis was also placed on the organizational pattern and the longevity of the program. In analyzing these data one could find a clue to the effectiveness of the program from its duration and also from its expansion.

The second section of the questionnaire focused on Curriculum Practices. Some of the responses were checkmarks on a scale and these were analyzed according

to position and degree, while other responses were answers to open-ended questions. In analyzing these data, it was necessary to edit some answers and group them into certain categories. Specific categories were chosen and a modified content-analysis approach was used to determine what curriculum changes had taken place. The analysis of the procedures used in schools gave an indication that certain procedures are used more frequently than others.

The responses to the third section, Staff Development, were analyzed in a manner similar to the second section. Certain data were categorized to make the results more meaningful.

The data received from the interviews and the observations were actually an extension and clarification of the information received on the questionnaires. This was the in-depth phase of the study and certain aspects of the questionnaire were pursued, such as; clarification of the definition of non-graded, analysis of the program, the procedures and methods used to carry out the objectives of the program, review of the materials which are used, and a close look at the organizational, administrative, and the physical aspects of the program.

The analysis of the data collected in the questionnaire was presented in a number of ways. Information was presented by raw scores in tables to indicate the number of responses to certain questions, and responses to

questions dealing with definitions were presented in narration. The data received from the interviews and the observations were reported in narration. Specific classifications had been used in the gathering of the data, and the comments listed under each classification were reviewed, edited and summarized. The results of the visitations and the interviews of each school were reported separately, identifying the school by a capital letter. A summary statement evaluating the findings of the visitation was included in the analysis of the data.

Summary

This study was designed to provide information concerning the curricular practices in elementary schools in Michigan that have adopted the non-graded concept. Two specific objectives of the study were related to the changes that have taken place in the curriculum, and the third purpose was to explore implications these changes may have on the preparation of elementary teachers and other personnel involved in the non-graded program. After examining several approaches, a descriptive research survey method was chosen because it was deemed the best to carry out the objectives of the study. The sample was chosen from the population presented in a previous study conducted by the Michigan Elementary School Principals Association, with the addition of four schools in western Michigan. The

study was carried out in four steps, each step carefully planned and evaluated. The data from the questionnaires, the interviews and the observations were carefully analyzed, and the findings and the recommendations will be presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER IV

DATA FROM THE STUDY

Introduction

Questionnaires were sent to thirty-four schools which constituted the sample. Twenty-six questionnaires were returned with responses ranging from "We've dropped the program" to very complete answers. Twenty-six returns out of a possible thirty-four is a 76 percent response. The data collected for this study are intended to present a composite picture, showing the negative responses as well as the positive.

The data collected from the schools were presented as completely as possible. When it was possible to summarize, a summary was presented; other times it was necessary to present a complete list of the responses made to certain questions. Those schools selected for an in-depth study are referred to as schools A, B, C, D, E, and F. Where responses are similar in nature, the total number of schools using the particular practice was given. When a unique practice was described, that description was given separately. The purpose of the study was to focus on the practices and changes, not on the individual schools. The information from the

questionnaires was reported according to these three main sections: (1) Basic Information, (2) Curriculum Practices, and (3) Staff Development.

Basic Information

The individuals responding to the questionnaire held different positions in their respective school systems. Table 1 gives the breakdown of the individuals responding.

TABLE 1.--Positions held by Individuals Responding.

Positions	Number	Percentage
Classroom Teacher	0	0%
Principal	21	81%
Other:		
Superintendent	1	4%
Director of Instruction	1	4%
Ass't. Director of Elementary Schools	1	4%
Team Leaders	2	7%
Totals	26	100%

Twenty-four of the twenty-six responding to the questionnaire hold administrative positions in their respective schools. This is an important factor which should be kept in mind as the data from the questionnaires

are being reported and interpreted. Administrators and teachers often view questions from entirely different perspectives.

Seven individuals indicated that their schools were no longer non-graded, and gave the following reasons:

1. Considering going into family grouping.
2. Change of administration plus building was not totally non-graded; it had a block system within a traditional approach. Presently developing open classrooms in many of our self-contained rooms.
3. Presently in a state of evaluation and revision. Leaning towards a modified approach to the differentiated staffing organization. How and what our final curriculum and organizational structure will become is hard to determine at this time.
4. Lack of financial support, lack of general staff support, and loss of key teachers.
5. Enrollment increase--loss of budget money.
6. Our school is not a non-graded school.
7. One participant indicated that his school was no longer non-graded and then went on to state "We are ungraded in mathematics and reading only"; however, the remainder of the questionnaire was not completed.

From the comments listed above, it should be noted that three of the seven indicated that they are experimenting with other innovative approaches.

This study was specifically concerned with the Primary Unit programs; however, the respondents were asked to indicate in the questionnaire if the program had been expanded to include the Intermediate Unit, or any other unit. The responses to this question appear in Table 2.

TABLE 2.--Organizational Patterns of Non-Graded Schools.

Patterns	Number
Only Primary Unit	7
Only Intermediate Unit	2
Both Units	9
Other	1
Totals	19

From the table above it can be noted that sixteen participating schools have the non-graded program at the Primary level. The response listed in the "other" category was a K-4 program in a school system that is organized on the 4-4-4 pattern. Thus, adding that one to the other sixteen schools would give a total of seventeen schools having the non-graded program at the Primary level.

In question number six the participants were asked the starting date of the program in their school. It was

interesting to note that only two of the respondents indicated their program started before 1960, one at the primary level and the other at the intermediate level. To conclude that the non-graded program was non-existent in the state of Michigan before 1960 would be a mistake. There may have been many more; however, their programs were not recorded in the study conducted by the Elementary School Principals. The starting dates of the non-graded programs at the various levels are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3.--Initial Dates of Non-Graded Programs.

Year	Primary Unit	Intermediate Unit	Other
1956		1	
1957			
1958			
1959	1		
1960	2		
1961	1		
1962	3	1	
1963			
1964		1	
1965	1	3	
1966	2		
1967	4	1	1
1968	1	1	
1969	1	1	
1970		2	
1971			
	16	11	1

Curriculum Practices

The second section of the questionnaire dealt with curriculum practices. It was the intention of the researcher

to have each participant define the non-graded concept as it applied to his particular school. No definition of "non-gradedness" was given on the questionnaire or in the accompanying letter, because the researcher was interested in the responses from the participants. The question was stated as follows:

Describe what you mean by non-graded as the concept applies to your school. As a starting point, would you please indicate where your definition would fall on the following scale:

Philosophical Approach | _____ | Administrative Approach

All the participants indicated their feelings on the scale and only a few submitted definitions on the non-graded concept. The responses which were written were as follows:

1. Each child has an individual learning style, rate and capacity. Therefore, each child must be given opportunity to learn accordingly, with goals set according to his ability and with the chance to progress at his rate, utilizing methods of learning most appropriate and effective for him.

2. We adjust a child's studies from grades Kindergarten through six (we still use grades), but we have sixth graders using second grade materials and second graders using third grade materials. We evaluate a child according to his own ability.

3. All students from third through seventh are tested and placed in classes with comparable ability for reading only. Promotions are twice per year.

The responses on the scale appear in Table 4.

TABLE 4.--Non-Graded Approach.

Philosophical Approach					Administrative Approach
	3	5	6	5	

Three indicated that they were at the extreme Philosophical end and no one checked the extreme Administrative Approach. Sixteen participants indicated that their definition would fall between the two approaches, thus giving an indication that a blending of the two approaches is necessary in a non-graded program.

In the second question the participants were asked what basic instructional, methodological, and philosophical changes had accompanied the transition from the former graded program to the present non-graded program. The participants were encouraged to list as many changes as they thought appropriate to their program in each of the three areas. The responses were analyzed for each area.

A. Forty-four instructional changes were listed and then classified into the following six categories: (1) Heterogeneous Grouping, (2) Homogeneous Grouping, (3) Skill areas and Program Changes, (4) Cooperative Teaching Arrangements, (5) Multi-Age Grouping, and (6) Individualized Approach. Many of the responses were similar in nature.

1. Eight responses indicated that students were grouped heterogeneously. Respondents commented they were moving to the heterogeneous approach from the homogeneous grouping.

2. Seven responses indicated that students are placed in classrooms so teachers have workable groups according to ability--homogeneous grouping. Two of these responses were made by individuals who indicated their definition of non-graded was more philosophical than administrative.

3. Twelve responses were related to skill areas and program changes with comments ranging as follows: "Building programs on behavioral skills," "basic sequential program built on skills and concepts," "use multi-level books and materials," "use many supplement materials," and "use programmed materials in reading and mathematics."

4. Five responses indicated new cooperative-teaching arrangements such as team-teaching, open classroom and cooperative teaching.

5. Six responses indicated a movement to the multi-age grouping with much flexibility.

6. Four responses indicated more of an awareness of the individual child's ability accompanied by a more individualized approach.

B. Methodological Changes. Responses indicated a variety of methodological changes. The responses were

analyzed and grouped into five categories: (1) Lecture Method, (2) Discovery Approach, (3) Individualized Approach, (4) Cooperative Teaching Method, and (5) Variation of Methods.

1. Three participants indicated they were using the lecture method: one said his teachers were using it less today than before, one indicated it was being used by those working with older students, and the third just listed using the basic lecture approach. The later response was made by a team leader. His definition of non-gradedness tended to be more administrative.

2. Seven responses indicated a movement to the discovery approach, with students working in committees and individually to become more involved in the learning process.

3. Six responses stressed a change toward individualizing the program for each child with emphasis on diagnosing difficulties and prescribing programs to meet these needs.

4. Two responses indicated more cooperative teaching arrangements with teams of professionally-trained individuals and aides.

5. Five responses indicated the use of units, field trips, resource people and community resources to a greater degree.

Individual comments which seemed to be significant and could not be grouped under the above headings are as follows:

- a. Very much the same methods as before.
- b. Varies from teacher to teacher--several are not incorporating the informal classroom approach.
- c. Same emphasis on programming.

C. Philosophical Changes. There were fewer responses to this section of the question than to the other two sections. The answers were analyzed and classified into three categories: (1) child-centered, (2) experience-centered, and (3) subject-centered.

1. Sixteen responses, the largest number, indicated a movement to a child-centered approach. (This would tend to be in agreement with the definition of non-graded which was stated in Chapter I.)

2. Two responded that their programs are experience-centered; however, one indicated that their program is a combination of child-centered and experience-centered because certain common experiences are desirable for all children.

3. Two responses indicated that the basics are stressed and their program is subject-oriented. These two participants' definition of non-gradedness tended to be more administrative than philosophical.

In reviewing these three areas it should be noted that most of the changes suggested in the instructional area were not unique to a non-graded program. Many of the suggestions have been used in graded programs as well as other programs; however, the change may have been an innovation for that particular school. Heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping are just two types of grouping which have been used in the schools for some time. The movement toward the discovery approach in the methodological section was interesting, but this approach also could be used in a graded program just as well as in a non-graded program. The change to the child-centered approach in the philosophical section is noteworthy and supports the idea of non-graded in that a child proceeds through school determining his own rate and speed, but following a continuous progress plan.

The participants were asked in the third question how structured the curriculum of the non-graded program appeared by marking the scale which had two extreme poles, one being Very Structured and the other Very Flexible. The participants were also asked to explain their positions briefly. The explanations given will be recorded following the tabulation on the scale as indicated in Table 5. Interestingly, no one checked either extreme. Two checked the scale at mid-point and eleven checked between mid-point and Very Flexible. Six felt their programs tended to be

TABLE 5.--Degree of Flexibility of Program.

Very Structured	6	2	11	Very Flexible
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more structured than flexible. It can be noted that a majority feel their program is flexible. The written comments are as follows:

1. Organizational pattern for the building is team-teaching (twelve years). Instructional program is ungraded. Content is graded in science and social studies.

2. Structured but varying, dependent on achievement levels.

3. Curriculum is unstructured--if anything; we need some structure--improvement. Teachers tend to try new ideas and concepts; others remain quite "book-bound."

4. Innovation and experimentation is encouraged. However, the first consideration is the child and how it will affect him. This area is open-ended. Basic programs are subject to change at any time. Not rigid; teachers can supplement, enrich, etc., a program whenever needed.

5. Non-gradedness connotes flexibility. Each student is programmed individually. Where he is, depends on his readiness and capabilities.

6. Still tied to the same basic curriculum requirements as the rest of the system.

7. Too much structure at the present--this is not indigenous to the non-graded school, however.

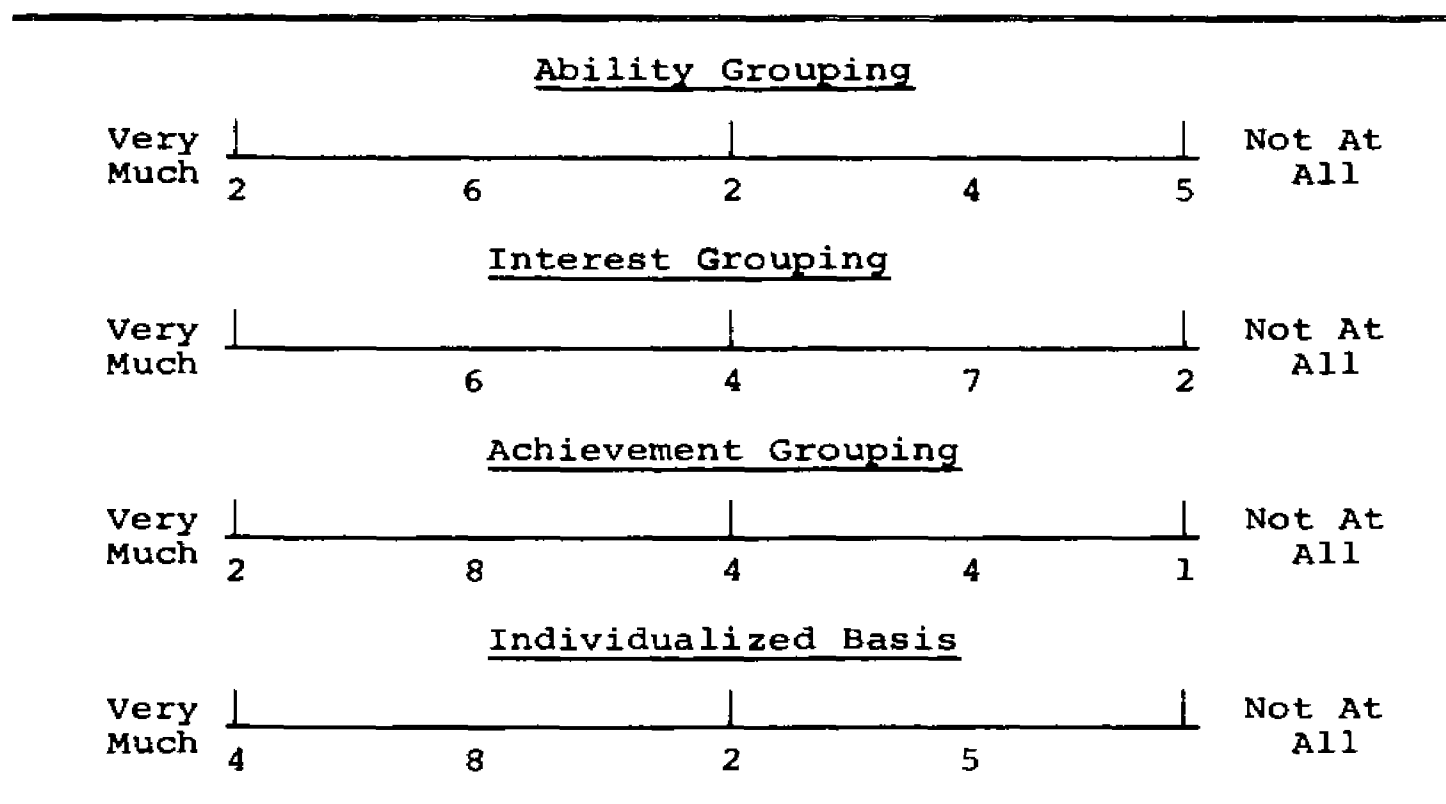
8. There are some areas, such as mathematics and science, in which financial conditions of the district have kept us from having the variety of materials necessary to make the program as flexible as we would like. In addition, a few teachers tend to follow a pattern they have been accustomed to.

No one mentioned any flexibility in the content of the curriculum, leading the researcher to infer that the curriculum is pretty much the same in the non-graded programs as it is in the graded programs. Flexibility seems to be greatly encouraged, but the excitement of the opportunity does not always produce creative innovations.

The fourth question dealt with four selected procedures or practices used to meet the objectives of the curriculum. The participants were again asked to indicate on the four scales the degree to which they used the procedure listed. The results are indicated in Table 6. The table indicates that all four procedures are used somewhat in the schools; some procedures are used more frequently than others.

The majority of the respondents have a tendency to individualize their programs to some degree. Four indicated Very Much emphasis on individualization, two checked at mid-point and no one checked Not At All. Eight checked between mid-point and Very Much which gives a

TABLE 6.--Use of Selected Procedures.



majority of twelve favoring individualization. Five checked the area between mid-point and Not At All.

More participants tend to group according to achievement. Two indicated they grouped Very Much according to achievement, four checked at the mid-point and one indicated he does not group at all in this category. Eight checked the space between Very Much and mid-point and four checked the space between mid-point and Not At All. A majority can be reported to favor more achievement grouping.

In the ability grouping procedure the scale seems to be most evenly balanced. Nine have checked the scale to the right of the mid-point, which means little or no grouping according to ability; eight have checked the

scale to the left, which means they use this procedure more or Very Much. Two checked at mid-point.

No participants checked that they group according to interest Very Much, four checked at mid-point and two checked at the extreme end--Not At All. Six checked the area between Very Much and mid-point and seven checked the space between mid-point and Not At All. This would indicate that this is perhaps the least popular procedure of the four.

In analyzing the tabulation it was difficult to understand how two participants could check the extreme end Very Much on two scales such as Use of Ability Grouping and Use of Individualized Basis. The two would appear to contradict each other to some degree; however, it all depends on how one defines the two procedures. One could group according to ability to meet the needs of an individual student.

In addition to the four categories, the participants had an opportunity to list any other procedures which they were using. Five additional suggestions which were given by individuals are as follows:

1. Grouping according to like differences.
2. Grouping according to needs.
3. Teaming students together for certain experiences.
4. Grouping according to behavior.
5. Grouping according to learning disabilities.

In each case, the participant who listed the procedure stated that it was the primary technique employed in his particular school.

Staff Development

The third section of the questionnaire dealt with Staff Development. Participants were asked to respond to questions dealing with teacher's aides, pre-service training, and the administration of the program.

The first question was concerned with certification, and the participants were asked whether all adults involved in the instructional aspect of the program were required to hold Michigan teaching certificates. This question was asked specifically because of the movement to differentiated staffing. The results are reported in Table 7. Those indicating "No" were asked to explain, and the following explanations were given:

1. Have few non-certified volunteers, but they do not instruct in the formal sense of the word.
2. Aides assist and follow instructions of the teachers.
3. Five aides are not certified; they are high school students, parents, other adults, and former professors.
4. Use one aide.

The participants were also asked if teacher aides were involved in the non-graded program. The results are reported in Table 8. It can be said that a majority of

TABLE 7.--Are Adults Required to Hold Michigan Teaching
Certificates?

	Number
Yes	15
No	4
Total	19

TABLE 8.--Teacher Aides Involved in Non-Graded Programs.

	Number
Yes	11
No	8
Total	19

those responding use teacher aides; however, eight seems to be a large number not using aides. It appears that the use of aides would be a technique to meet the needs of individual students. The participants were asked to list the titles of any other personnel working in the program. The following titles were listed: (The number after the title indicates how many respondents listed that specific title.)

1. Remedial Reading Specialist (6)
2. All Administrators (2)
3. Speech Specialist (2)
4. School Social Worker (2)
5. Special Teachers--Art, Music, and Physical Education (2)
6. Special Education--Perceptual Development (3)
7. Nurse
8. Librarian and Volunteer Library Mothers
9. Media Specialist
10. School Psychologist
11. Instructional Aide
12. Extern Teacher
13. Student Teacher
14. Student Aide
15. Diagnostician

In the second question the researcher was particularly interested to know if special training was considered

necessary for personnel working in the program, and if so what type of additional training. The participants were asked in part one of the question what special pre-service training a certified teacher should have in order to function well in a non-graded program. Many suggestions were given and they were carefully analyzed and regrouped into the following categories: (1) Philosophy of program, (2) Skills necessary for working in such programs, (3) Personal characteristics.

1. Philosophy of Program: Seven responses were related to this category indicating that the philosophical approach to the non-graded program must be thoroughly explained and the prospective teacher should be in sympathy with the same.

2. Skills necessary for working in a Non-Graded program: Nineteen responses fell in this category with emphasis placed on such suggestions as: should have knowledgeable background in skill areas as reading, should have some work in group dynamics, should know something about individualized instruction, should have a good background in child growth and development, should be familiar with record-keeping techniques, should have training in surveying programs, diagnosing problems, and prescribing programs for those students having difficulties, and should be able to adopt goals, evaluate and identify pupil needs.

3. Personal Characteristics: Teachers must be flexible on understanding.

The participants felt that a thorough understanding of the non-graded philosophy was underlying to the success of a non-graded program. A good understanding of skills was important as well as knowing something about individualized instruction; however, these would not assure one of a successful non-graded program unless teachers were truly committed to the philosophy.

The participants were asked in part two of the second question what special training the teacher aides should have in preparation for involvement in a non-graded program. These suggestions were analyzed and classified into two categories: (1) Clerical Assistance, and (2) Student Assistance.

1. Clerical Assistance: Participants felt that aides should be trained in clerical tasks, student progress reports, interpreting school programs, duties and responsibilities of individuals.

2. Student Assistance: Aides should have some training in working with Audio-Visual materials, in working with slower students in tutorial programs, in having an understanding of how children feel and work, and in giving direction.

The suggestions were somewhat different from those suggested for teachers, with more emphasis on the "doing" work than on the actual instructional aspects. In both cases, the teachers and the aides, the participants felt

it was most important that these individuals had some pre-service training and also participated in some in-service programs.

In question three of the Staff Development section of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to indicate the degree to which teachers and administrators were involved in the decision process in ten selected areas. The results of this section are presented in Table 9 by indicating the number of responses in each percentage quartile.

Some of the participants spontaneously made some comments after checking the scales. These comments are worthy of mention and are as follows:

1. Do things as a team, but teacher takes the major role.
2. 50-50 in most cases--administrator's decision to break indecision.
3. Cooperation is the key to non-graded. It must be total teacher-administrator involvement it will be doomed!
4. Mutual decision.
5. Final decision made by principal.

It can be noted from Table 9, at least according to those responding to the questionnaire, that teachers play a major role in making decisions. The majority of their responses

TABLE 9.--Decision Making Involvement of Teachers and Administrators in Ten Selected Areas.

	0%-24%	25%-49%	50%-74%	75%-100%
Course Content:				
Teacher	1		7	10
Administrator	4	2	5	7
Learning Experiences for Students:				
Teacher			1	18
Administrator	7	3	2	6
Grouping of Students:				
Teacher			4	13
Administrator	1	7	4	4
Effective Teaching Method Procedures:				
Teacher		2	4	13
Administrator	3	2	7	4
Program Goals:				
Teacher			9	10
Administrator	1	2	8	8
Evaluation Techniques:				
Teacher		1	5	13
Administrator	1	5	5	7
Performance Objectives:				
Teacher			7	11
Administrator		4	6	6
Effectiveness of the Non-Graded Program:				
Teacher		1	8	10
Administrator		1	10	6
Schedule of Classroom Activities:				
Teacher			2	17
Administrator	7	4	2	4
Placement of Students:				
Teacher	1	1	5	12
Administrator		4	6	6

indicated that teachers play a greater role in decision making in the ten selected areas than administrators.

Selected Schools

Six schools were selected for an in-depth study, and each school was visited for at least one-half day or one complete day depending upon the size of the school and the program. The researcher had an opportunity to visit with the administrator of the building, to visit with teachers and students, and to observe the program in action. A summary of the findings is given for each school. The schools are identified by a capital letter.

School A

School "A" was a Primary School which housed students from the Kindergarten level through the second level, plus a room for special education students. The program is considered a continuous progress plan in which the administration and the teaching procedures are adjusted to meet the differing social, emotional, physical, and mental capacities among the children. Also, much consideration is given to the wide individual differences in the rate of growth. Grade levels and grade standards have been removed; however, parents still continue to use the terms "first grade" and "second grade." Each child progresses at his own rate of growth, thus providing for continuity of learning for each child. The skill program is very

important to the people of this community, and the children must master skills on a sequential basis. Basic textbooks plus supplementary books are provided for the teachers and each teacher uses the material the way he or she sees most beneficial. The administrator emphasized the fact that flexibility is built into their program and each teacher sets his own objectives for the year according to the needs of the children in the room. The administrator provides tremendous leadership in this school and has established a relaxed atmosphere in the building. The researcher had the opportunity to visit with five teachers in the building and gathered from the conversations that all five enjoyed the working conditions, were very much in agreement with the philosophy of the program, and enjoyed the fact that they were able to plan their own programs using a variety of available materials.

The content of the program was very much like that of a typical graded school--special emphasis on the skill areas of reading and mathematics; however, it was noticed that more emphasis is placed on oral communication than in the traditional graded programs. The program also included some activities in social studies, science, fine arts and physical education. The approach in handling these areas of the curriculum was the significant feature. In most of the rooms much stress was placed on the needs of the individual student. The students were planning their

programs with the teacher and then in turn were carrying out their responsibilities in meeting the objectives. The students in these rooms appeared to be very happy in this situation. When the researcher entered the rooms, the greeting was enthusiastic and the students immediately wanted to show off the things they were doing and wanted to share their experiences. The students in one of the rooms had just finished writing their own songs and they sang their own songs with a great deal of gusto. Some of the students reading independently shared their stories orally with other students. This sort of response was noted in all the rooms except one. That one room appeared to be very traditional--the program was of such a nature that all the students were required to do the same things and in the conversation with the teacher she indicated a few children would be "repeating" this grade next year.

The school had a fine materials center and was upgrading it each year. The teachers had access to a variety of visual aids and audio aids and were, in turn, making good use of this material in the classroom. The classroom teachers also had the help of specialists such as a music teacher, an art teacher and a physical education teacher. These individuals had schedules to keep; however, they tried to be flexible enough to work into the planned programs of the teachers.

It was encouraging to see some of the teachers individualizing the programs of the students and to see the students enjoy the experiences in the classrooms. The conversation with the students had to be on an informal basis because of the age. The responses given by the students were very positive and as was mentioned earlier, their enthusiasm was very evident when entering the rooms.

School B

School "B" has had the Continuous Progress program in operation for six years and at the present time the principal is concerned about the future of the program. There seems to be much unrest in the community and the people are very critical of the schools. One object of their criticism seems to be the Continuous Progress program. The philosophy, the intent of the program, and an analysis of it is beautiful on paper; however, observation revealed many difficulties in putting the program into action. Essentially this school has an organizational arrangement where instruction is individualized and each child is permitted and encouraged to progress at a rate suited to him. Therefore flexibility is built into the program to meet the needs of the better student as well as the needs of the slower students. The principal indicated that the program facilitates growth, organizes subject matter sequentially around fundamental skills, concepts, principles

and generalizations and deploys instructional materials according to the task at hand and student readiness for those materials. The principal also indicated that students are encouraged individually to pursue a realistic program of learning in a realistic amount of time. The observer had a difficult time seeing students plan realistic programs; most of them tended to be doing the same work. Students in the school are grouped according to their rate of learning and also their learning style. After a trial period in the initial group, the staff evaluates the placement and then makes changes if needed. This school's Continuous Progress method for working with students in the program incorporates the following steps:

1. Diagnose the pupil's strengths and weaknesses--this can be done by using diagnostic tests, pretests of objectives, and tests of general background knowledge.
2. Make a decision as to the material the child is to use and the method in which he will learn the material.
3. Analyze his program as he moves through the skill for any adjustment he will need.
4. Give guidance and direction through group interaction, peer tutoring, oral instruction, and teacher tutoring.

5. Analyze results, utilizing post tests, observation and performance ability.
6. Return to step one to continue through the same procedure for the next set of skills.

In following the above plan, the teacher must organize himself and the classroom so the maximum amount of professional time is spent with each child. This school had a well-organized resource center which provided the teachers and the children with many materials to enrich the curriculum. As stated earlier, this school has organized the skill subjects sequentially and has guidelines available for all teachers indicating the skills which should be learned at different levels during the Continuous Progress Program. These guidelines are so specific and rigid that it would be difficult to be flexible in the program and it would be extremely difficult to allow students the opportunity to build realistic programs. The students are grouped in homeroom areas for the skill subjects and then are regrouped for experiences in other areas. Basic texts are used in the skill areas; however, more than one basal approach is available with many supplementary books.

It was possible for the researcher to visit with two teachers and the Director of the Materials Center. The teachers were firm believers in the program; however, at this time their morale was low because of the reactions of the community. They felt that by this time the program

should have proved itself, which they believed it had done. The students in the two rooms visited seemed most relaxed in learning situations and appeared to be very happy. The things they were doing seemed to be very appealing to them. Although the design of the program was exciting, there was a break-down somewhere which was evidenced in a lack of genuine enthusiasm on the part of the staff.

School C

School "C" has had a team teaching, non-graded program since 1960, and one that seems to be very successful. The administrator felt that team teaching provides the impetus for a highly individualized instructional program whereby children are in competition only with themselves. The child is working without frustration, and he may progress at his own rate as he gains the necessary skills. It was interesting to note that this school has a pre-school program for four-year old youngsters. After a child has completed a pre-school program, he is screened by a perceptual development specialist. The results are studied carefully and the child is assigned a place in one of the classes where an instructional program is designed to meet his needs. This is the starting point for an ungraded program in which students are involved in studies in an environment which they perceive to be conducive to successful achievement. Students are evaluated constantly and their programs are reappraised to make

certain that the child is gaining in the skill areas. Even though it was indicated that a child's eagerness is a factor in determining the progress he or she makes, the emphasis seems to be on skill development. This may still be perceived by some to be a form of ability grouping.

School "C", physically speaking, was one of the best designed schools that the researcher visited. The team units or pods were arranged so that large group instruction could take place, small group sessions could be handled nicely, and there was space provided for individual work. The school had a Learning Center which definitely was the "hub" of the school. It was an extremely well-equipped center, material wise and staff wise. Because of its accessibility and great supply of resources it was always used by students of all ages, all ability levels and of various interest backgrounds working on individual units.

The students were assigned to one of five teams. Team "K" included the four and five year olds; Team "I" included six and seven year olds; Team "II" included seven and eight year olds; Team "III" included eight, nine and ten year olds; and Team "IV" included ten, eleven, and twelve year olds. Being mainly interested in the Primary Unit, the majority of the researcher's time was spent visiting Team I and Team II. Six teachers in these two teams shared their opinions in a conference and two other

teachers from other levels commented on a casual basis. Of the six teachers in the two lower teams, four were most positive in their evaluations of the program, and the other two waivered between apprehension and outright negativism. The two who were more negative indicated that discipline problems took up too much of the teacher's time and teachers were bound by the clock because of the team arrangement. One indicated she felt more comfortable in a traditional room. Flexibility was obvious in some of the rooms. The teams were left on their own to accomplish their own goals, and teachers felt very free to make suggestions. Much emphasis was placed on the basic skills, reading and mathematics. In one particular room there was much individual work being done by the boys and girls, and they handled themselves beautifully in this situation. The children were enjoying what they were doing and seemed very responsible, appearing to know what to do when certain activities had been accomplished.

As indicated earlier, a great deal of emphasis was placed on individualizing the programs for the students. In addition, the teachers were doing some group work and team work. Students were encouraged to work together, a better student helping a slower student. Some of the group activities were based on needs and some on interests. The results of the individualized programs were very evident in the older students. While in the Learning Center, a

few of the older students in the building chatted with the researcher and spoke very enthusiastically about the flexibility of their school day and about the responsibilities which they eagerly assumed. In addition to the normal experiences in the curriculum the students were encountering enriching activities such as sewing, creative dramatics, and exchange programs. On the day of the visitation the students in Team III were preparing to leave for an exchange program with students in some other section of the state. The students were eagerly looking forward to staying in the homes in this new community and to become involved in their school program.

Available materials, available resource people, the enthusiasm of the administrator, and the dedication of the teachers all contribute to the success of this program.

School D

School "D" is a new school which was built within the last three years, and it also is organized with a team-teaching non-graded approach. The school was part of a system which has had the non-graded program since 1962. There are four teams in the building with different age level children in each team. Again the researcher focused his attention on the two lower level teams. The one team consisted of three certified teachers and mother

helpers, and the other team consisted of four certified teachers and mother helpers. Usually the teams have two mothers working all day and they serve for a six-week period. However, the teachers indicated that you cannot always depend on the mothers being present. The administrator of the building was a dynamic person who inspires her teachers in a flexible and relaxed atmosphere. The administrator was a firm believer in a child-centered program, and in turn, encourages her teachers to be the same.

Emphasis is placed on the two skill areas, language arts and mathematics. The children are usually grouped in these areas according to achievement or skill needs, and then work is individually assigned for each child. In mathematics the children work on a contract basis. Each child plans a program for the week, and a contract is signed between the child and the teacher. The child is then responsible to fulfill this contract during the allotted time. If a child, or a group of children, have a particular need in mathematics, then a special skill session is planned for those students. Other activities in social studies, science and the fine arts are planned on an interest basis. In fact, the school has a unique arrangement in that one afternoon a week children may choose from a variety of activities. Such activities as debate, typing, guitar playing, macrame, knitting, and photography, are appealing

to elementary children, or they may work on an individual project under the direction of a teacher. This freedom is permitted as long as the children accept the responsibility that goes with it. The students are also involved with decision-making policies in this school.

Each team center, or pod, had its own learning center. These centers were just being equipped, and much more resource material should be made available for the students. The teachers were working together to prepare mathematics programs which could be housed in the center for student use. The teachers were aware of the fact that they are sadly lacking in materials in the centers.

All seven teachers in the lower two teams were most positive in their statements and reactions to the program. They enjoyed the flexibility, the relaxed atmosphere, and the opportunity to be so involved in decision-making within the school. They felt they were just beginning to move in making curricular changes and hoped within the next year to be making some real innovations. One idea that was stressed was outdoor education. The school is located near a small wooded area and they felt they could be making extensive use of this natural resource. The children responded very positively during the visitation. It did not seem to bother them to have a visitor present and they felt very free to chat candidly.

The day of the visit it was noted that three other visitors were present in the same classrooms.

School E

School "E" was most exciting and provided a very unusual experience. It is a Primary School and has had the non-graded program since 1959. The administrator indicated that they are now moving from the non-graded to a totally individualized program. However, in our discussion, it was agreed that the individualized approach was one method of meeting the goals of a non-graded program. The entire school was alive; excitement seemed to be contagious throughout the building. Upon the researcher's arrival, a group of boys and girls from one room was going out to feed their livestock and an invitation was extended to join them. The school has a courtyard that houses chickens, rabbits, ducks, and other animal life. Each week a different group of students must assume the responsibility of caring for them. The students must measure out the food, clean the pens, put in fresh bedding and respond to any other needs of the animals. Needless to say, this is a very enjoyable part of the day.

Students are assigned to certain groups at the beginning of each year and are allowed to move to other groups as the need arises. Movement from one group to another can take place at any time. The school has adopted basic textbooks in reading and mathematics; however,

teachers may use these as they see fit. Activity cards have been prepared in both of these areas and the students have the opportunity to work on these at their own rate of speed. The activity cards are so organized that each one presents a certain concept and when a youngster has mastered that concept he moves on to the next. In addition to the basic skill area, the students participate in activities in science and social studies, but in a more unstructured manner. One group of students had a garden project just outside their classroom, and another group of students were working on a playground project. The school has developed a very effective outdoor education program. Since it is located on a beautiful site with nature trails, wooded areas, and an outdoor classroom area, the students make use of these in their regular classroom activities as well. While visiting the school, a number of students from different rooms were studying outside their classroom reading under a tree, and working on a number unit together in the shade.

The staff has done a great job of making the atmosphere within the classroom's very stimulating. Each room was a learning center, with all sorts of activities going on. There was little opportunity for boredom in this situation. Basic skills were being covered in each room, well integrated with other experiences. Many of the students were working individually on their different

contracts--some working on mathematic contracts, and others working on science projects or social studies projects. Mother tutors and other aides were working with individual students, either in the special areas in the classroom or in the hallways.

Because of the informality of the building, the conferences with the individual teachers were very casual. Visits with the teachers were conducted briefly while the researcher was observing the program. A more extensive interview was held with three teachers later in the day. The teachers are most positive about the program. They indicated they felt this was the most rewarding experience they have had thus far in their teaching careers. They were free to plan activities which they thought would be profitable for the students. The students were truly enjoying school; this was evident from the time of entry into the building. Children felt important because they were given all sorts of responsibilities. They wanted to show the projects they had completed and were proud of their accomplishments.

School F

School "F" was truly a non-graded school. The program is based on a team-teaching approach with clusters of students grouped heterogeneously. The building is relatively new and it was architecturally designed for

this type of program. Each pod could house four self-contained classrooms, if necessary; however, in most pods that were visited it was noted that three of the areas were open forming one large section and the fourth was used for those students who had difficulty adjusting to this type of system and needed a more controlled atmosphere. In addition to these areas, the pod also had a work area in the center adjoined by small rooms which could be used by small groups or individuals. The program was definitely child-centered. The teachers were serving as resource people in the classroom instead of presenting information in a formal way. Programs were designed for individual students with some of the work done individually and some of it done in group situations. Some of the group arrangements were based on needs, therefore providing much flexibility. Some of the grouping was done according to interests, and here it was noted that some students were working on a wood working project. This was especially true in phases of the curriculum which did not stress the basic skills. Philosophically, this program was probably the most non-graded of all observed; however, one group was focusing its attention on a new skill in phonics, which appears to be inconsistent with the practices described above. At some interviews reported criticism of the program from a vocal group within the community. For example, comments have been made about the lack of discipline, because

students aren't told to stay in their seats; about the messy conditions in the rooms, because the seats aren't neatly arranged in rows or groups; and about the lack of a skill program because the students aren't covering the same material.

Most of the observation time was spent visiting two lower or primary teams and one of the intermediate teams. The teachers were paired into good working teams--the relationships appeared to be most positive, conducive to drawing out the strengths of each team member. They felt very positive about their program, constantly talking about the strong points. Nine of the teachers in the program were questioned about the program and no negative responses were received. Some were much more enthusiastic than others. The students were very congenial and responsive to each other, and were willing to share their creative stories with me as well as their building projects which were made in the wood-working area or their sewing projects. Again, there were so many interest areas in the room that the children had no opportunity to become bored. In the intermediate level the researcher had the opportunity to visit with students about their experiences and they appeared to be very enthusiastic. It was thrilling to hear a nine-year old talk about his independent project and be able to defend his reasoning. It was exciting to see a curriculum that included not only the basic skill

areas, but also such experiences as woodworking, crafts, sewing and knitting, kite-building, gardening, fine arts, conservation of wild life, and a strong physical education program.

All six schools which were visited could be classified as non-graded according to the definition which was established in Chapter I and the definitions taken from literature which were listed in Chapter II. In the case of school "B," the definition was beautiful on paper; however, it was not implemented very effectively. The other schools had their programs clearly defined and had established very logical procedures. Schools "D," "E," and "F," had revised their curriculum to a certain degree to allow for some flexibility and choices on the part of students. Schools "C," "D," "E," and "F," were individualizing their programs more than schools "A" and "B." All schools were using a variety of approaches to meet the needs of the students. Schools "A," "B," and "C," group according to ability to some degree, while schools "D," "E," and "F," do not group according to ability at all. Schools "B," "C," and "E" have excellent instructional materials centers which are adequately staffed and serve as resource centers for students. Schools "C," "D," "E," and "F" provide the most flexibility in their curriculum, and provide an opportunity for students to select certain experiences. All the

schools stress the basics; however, the degree of stress and method of approach varies much from one school to the other. From the stand-point of the researcher, School "E"'s program appears to be the most non-graded.

Summary

This chapter contains the findings of the questionnaires, the observations, and the interviews. The analysis of the data were presented in tabulated form when possible, with no conclusions drawn at this time. The findings from the observations and the interviews were presented in narrative form. The researcher tried to be unbiased in his reporting. From these findings certain conclusions and recommendations are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The general purpose of this study was to conduct a survey of curricular practices in selected elementary schools in Michigan that have adopted the non-graded program. The conclusions regarding changes which have taken place and the recommendations are presented in this chapter. The conclusions, which are based on the data submitted by the respondents to the questionnaires, and the visitations, are presented first. The recommendations are based on the conclusions as presented and are also influenced by the experiences and the observations of the researcher.

Conclusions

1. The movement toward non-graded in the state of Michigan has been rather slow in getting started and at present there are not many programs identified as such. This became evident when a sample was being established. It was difficult to obtain a list, or any information, of schools definitely labeled as non-graded.

2. It was interesting to note that, in all cases but one, an administrator was the person who responded to

the questionnaire. In the one exception two team leaders responded. The reason this seems worthy of mentioning is that in the latter part of the questionnaire dealing with decision-making most participants indicated that teachers have a major role to play in making decisions. Evidently many administrators feel that teachers are given a voice within the system; however, when information was requested in any official manner, it was generally done by a representative of the system who holds an administrative position.

3. Data from the questionnaire would give evidence that the participating schools feel the non-graded programs have been successful at the primary level. Nine schools which now have both units non-graded started with the Primary Unit and later added the non-graded program at the Intermediate level. Two of the schools which were visited and have only the Primary Unit do so because their building can only house the Primary level. Both of these schools are part of a school system that has a non-graded program at the Intermediate level in other buildings. Seventeen schools have the non-graded program at the Primary level and eleven have the program at the Intermediate level. Two schools have the non-graded program just at the Intermediate level.

4. Few participants defined their non-graded programs with a description on the questionnaire. The

six schools visited did so, stating that a non-graded program provides the flexibility for students to progress at their own rate, utilizing methods of learning most appropriate and effective for them. On the scale which was provided sixteen participants indicated their definition would be somewhere between the two approaches, Philosophical and Administrative. This would tend to confirm Anderson's comment which was quoted in Chapter II. Tabulating the questionnaires revealed an ambiguity of terminology. Even in educational circles a definition of non-graded is not clear. Many programs that fall under the category of non-graded are quite different from each other.

5. From the data collected it can be concluded that there are only a few changes which have taken place in the instructional, methodological and philosophical aspects of the program which may be unique in the non-graded program. Most of the changes which were listed under the instructional phase of the program could be used in a graded program as well. Responses such as grouping heterogeneously and homogeneously can be applied in both programs. Many of the schools indicated that they stress the basics, reading and mathematics; five of the six schools which were visited showed evidence of this. Few responses indicated a change in the curriculum with the addition of experiences in woodworking, sewing, nature study and such. Again, these could be provided in a

graded program; however, the fact that some schools are beginning to offer some choices and to provide for flexibility was encouraging. The one unique change was the multi-age grouping of students. The methodological changes which were suggested could be used in either program, the graded or the non-graded. The emphasis on the discovery approach and the movement toward individualizing programs was encouraging, but is not unique just to the non-graded program. The cooperative teaching arrangements, such as team-teaching would be very effective in the non-graded program. The greatest change is in the philosophical aspect; teachers are becoming more aware of children as individuals and their programs are becoming more child-centered rather than subject-centered.

6. Data from the questionnaires and comments from the interviews pointed out the fact that flexibility is the key word in order to insure success in the non-graded program. The teacher must be flexible with the content of the curriculum, with the grouping and regrouping of the students, and with the methods of approach. The lecture approach is being used less today in the non-graded program and the role of the classroom teacher is changing from that of a person giving information to one who is serving more as a resource person. The students are using the discovery approach much more today than ever before. In three of the six schools observed the students are no

longer being told how to do something one specific way, rather they were being made aware of a number of ways of approaching a problem.

7. There appears to be a trend to do less grouping according to ability in the non-graded programs and more emphasis on individualizing the programs of students. Many of the respondents stressed the fact that they were individualizing their programs, especially in reading and mathematics. Achievement grouping is used more than Interest grouping in the schools which responded to the questionnaire. However, the schools which were visited were using Interest grouping to a great extent in certain areas of their curriculum.

8. The majority of those responding feel that teacher aides are valuable in a non-graded program. In addition to teacher aides, other personnel such as specialists, librarians, school social workers and intern teachers play a very important role in meeting the objectives of the program.

9. The respondents also indicated that prospective teachers should have some specific training in working in a non-graded program. It was evident from the responses to the questionnaires and interviews that the following concerns should be stressed in the pre-service program:

a. Teachers should be aware of the philosophical approach to the non-graded program and should be in sympathy with it.

b. Teachers should have some experience in group dynamics.

c. Teachers should know something about Individualized instruction.

d. Teachers should be aware of the importance of flexibility in all areas of this program.

e. Teachers should have an opportunity to see a non-graded program in action.

f. Teachers should be familiar with record keeping processes, with techniques in diagnosing problems, and then prescribing programs for those students having difficulties.

10. From table 9 in Chapter IV dealing with the roles of the teacher and the administrator in decision-making responsibilities, it can be concluded that the teacher plays an important role. All participants indicated that teachers should be actively involved in making decisions in all of the areas which were listed in the questionnaire.

11. From the visitations it was observed that a large majority of the teachers teaching in non-graded programs are excited about their experiences. The relaxed atmosphere provides an opportunity for flexibility. However, the leadership and enthusiasm of the administrator is a key factor in producing excitement in the teachers.

12. The visitations to the six schools established this conclusion: graded superstructure, graded content,

graded textbooks, graded standards, and graded nomenclature are being replaced with levels, groups, multi-texts, planned programs, and experiences for individual student growth.

13. It can be concluded from the observations and interviews that some schools had a tendency to accept the means of reaching the non-graded objective as the ends in themselves, therefore, losing sight of the overall objective of a non-graded program.

Recommendations

The recommendations given in this section are based upon the data presented in the findings, and the observations of the researcher and the review of the related literature. The recommendations are as follows:

1. The term non-graded seems to be ambiguous, from the responses to the questionnaire and interviews. Therefore it is recommended that educators define their terminology more specifically.

2. The conclusions from the questionnaires and the visitations verify the fact that very few changes have taken place in the curriculum of non-graded programs. Some schools have broadened the curriculum to include a variety of experiences and to provide a choice for students. It is recommended that educators take a critical look at the curriculum, particularly the content

areas, to see if innovations could be introduced which would make the non-graded program truly unique.

3. Methods of teaching vary in non-graded programs, with some schools using specific techniques and others using a combination of different procedures. The responses to the questionnaire and the observations indicated that there is an emphasis placed on individualizing instruction for the child. This approach would appear to be in line with the definition of non-graded which was used in this study: "a concept which provides the flexibility that permits continuous progress and attention to the needs of each child."

4. Educators should continue to experiment with new teaching techniques which may be unique to the non-graded program. Most of the techniques used presently have been used and are being used in many graded programs. Discovery of new and effective techniques and a willingness to experiment with them should be a challenge for those involved in the field of education.

5. Schools adopting the non-graded concept should be encouraged to use multi-texts, visual and audio aids, units, and any other materials which will provide a flexible means of allowing children to progress at their own rate.

6. Those schools using teacher-aides have found them to be most effective and a contributing factor to the

success of their program. Therefore it is recommended that schools continue to pursue the possibility of using para-professionals in the non-graded program.

7. Participants in the study were asked to give suggestions for pre-service and in-service training for personnel, both certified teachers and teacher-aides, working in a non-graded program. The next few recommendations, which are based on the responses, of the participants have particular significance for representatives of teacher-education institutions.

a. Teacher-education institutions should acquaint the teachers with innovative programs such as the non-graded program. Students should be challenged to look at these programs carefully, studying every phase and aspect. Students should understand the program, the methods used in teaching in such a program, the materials which are used and the manner of evaluations.

b. Educators must become more concerned about children, their needs, interests and capabilities. They must strengthen their efforts to assist prospective teachers to see children as individuals, rather than as groups of twenty-five or thirty.

c. Teacher-education institutions should develop special programs to prepare individuals who wish to participate as teacher aides in para-professional.

d. Teacher-education institutions should provide some experiences within the student teaching program in which the students are involved in "decision-making roles." The responsibilities of teachers now go far beyond their own classrooms. They are involved in determining goals, in suggesting ways to group students, and in evaluating the total program.

e. Teacher-education institutions could and should be providing leadership through pre-service and in-service training for teachers who are experimenting with new programs in the field.

8. This study was limited to the extent that it was a survey of curricular practices in selected elementary schools in Michigan that have adopted the non-graded concept. The researcher feels that further studies could be made using this as a basis. Continuing research on related topics such as the following are recommended:

a. An in-depth study could be done in any specific area of the curriculum, or a specific procedure or method of teaching in the non-graded program.

b. A study of the learning behavior patterns shown in later years by a group of students who were part of an individualized program in the Primary Unit could be very revealing.

c. A comparison might also be made between non-graded programs and the open-classroom programs which are becoming popular on the educational scene today.

These few suggestions are not all-inclusive; there are many ideas which could generate from this study.

Summary

This study was designed as a descriptive survey to determine the extent and nature of changes that have taken place in the curricular practices in selected elementary schools in Michigan and to further determine what implications these changes might have on the preparation of elementary teachers and other personnel involved in the non-graded programs. The few changes in curriculum practices that have taken place have been reported. Recommendations to the schools that have adopted the non-graded program and to those who are considering adopting the program have been made. Recommendations have also been made to teacher-education institutions as a result of the conclusions of this study.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

BASIC INFORMATION:

1. Name of Elementary School _____
2. Name of School System _____
3. Name of Person Responding _____

Position: (please check) ☐ Classroom Teacher
 ☐ Principal
 ☐ Elementary Coordinator
 ☐ Other (indicate what position)

4. If your school is no longer non-graded, please check and briefly explain why is no longer non-graded. [

(If you answered number 4, it is not necessary to complete the questionnaire however, please return the questionnaire.)

5. Organizational pattern of non-graded school (please check)

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Primary Unit	Intermediate Unit	Both Units	Other

If you checked "other" please explain:

6. Please indicate when you started the non-graded program:

Primary Unit; _____ Year

Intermediate Unit; _____ Year

Other _____ Year

CURRICULUM PRACTICES:

1. Describe what you mean by non-graded as the concept applies to your school. As a starting point, would you please indicate where your definition would fall on the following scale:

Philosophical Approach	----- ----- ----- -----	Administrative Approach
---------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------------

2. What basic instructional, methodological, and philosophical changes have occurred from your former graded program to the present non-graded program? Please list. (Respondents are not limited to the example provided and are encouraged to describe the program as they see it.)

a. Instructional (example - ability grouping, content of program, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

b. Methodological (example - discovery approach, lecture, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

c. Philosophical (example - child centered, experience centered, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

3. How structured is the curriculum of the non-graded school? Indicate on the scale and explain briefly.

Very
Structured |-----| Very
Flexible

4. Indicate on the scales below the degree to which you use each of the following procedures:

Ability Grouping:	Very Much	----- ----- ----- -----	Not at All
Interest Grouping:	Very Much	----- ----- ----- -----	Not at All
Achievement Grouping:	Very Much	----- ----- ----- -----	Not at All
Individualized Basis:	Very Much	----- ----- ----- -----	Not at All
Other: (indicate)			
_____	Very Much	----- ----- ----- -----	Not at All
_____	Very Much	----- ----- ----- -----	Not at All
_____	Very Much	----- ----- ----- -----	Not at All

STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

1a. Are all adults involved in the instructional aspect of your program required to hold a Michigan teaching certificate:

____ Yes
____ No

If the answer is no, please explain.

1b. Are teacher aides involved in your non-graded program:

☐ Yes
☐ No

1c. Please list the titles of any other personnel you might have working in the program:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

2a. What special pre-service training should a certified teacher have to teach in a non-graded program? (please list)

1.

2.

3.

4.

2b. If teacher aides are involved in your program, what special training should they have? (please list)

1.

2.

3.

4.

3. To what degree are teachers and administrators involved in the decision making process in the following areas:

a. determining course content:

Teacher: 0% |-----| 100%

Administrator: 0% |-----| 100%

b. determining learning experiences for students:

Teacher: 0% |-----| 100%

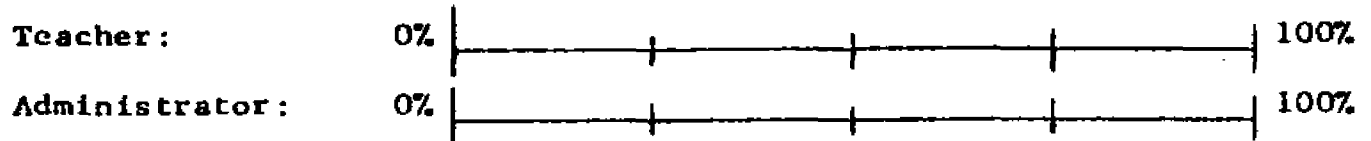
Administrator: 0% |-----| 100%

c. determining grouping of students:

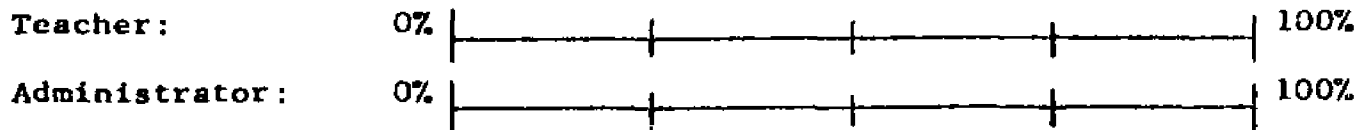
Teacher: 0% |-----| 100%

Administrator: 0% |-----| 100%

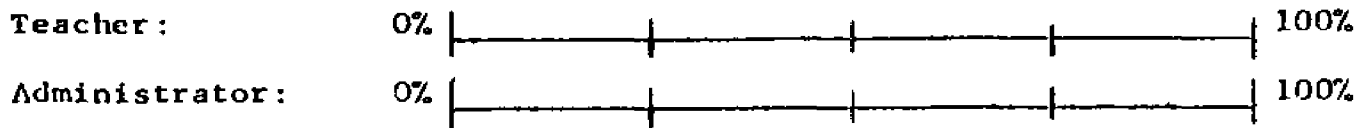
d. determining effective teaching method procedure:



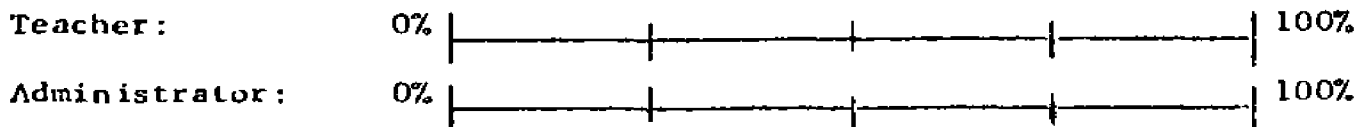
e. determining program goals:



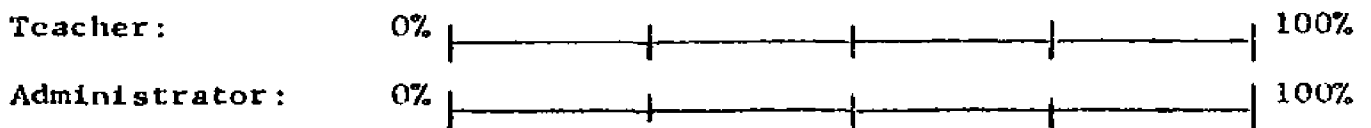
f. determining evaluation techniques:



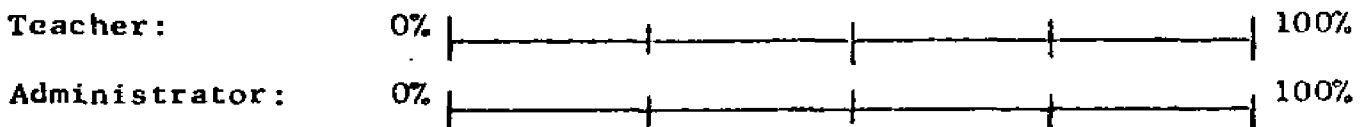
g. determining performance objectives:



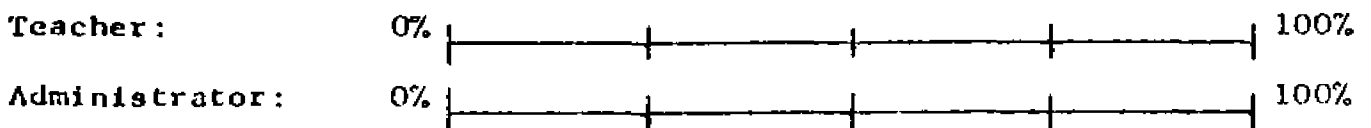
h. determining the effectiveness of the non-graded program:



i. determining the schedule of classroom activities:



j. determining the placement of students:



Thank you for responding, please return the questionnaire immediately in the envelope enclosed.

Lamont Dirkse

APPENDIX B

LETTER WITH QUESTIONNAIRE

1365 Heather Drive
Holland, Michigan 49423
March 17, 1972

Dear Sir:

"Change" has been a key word with educators for some time, particularly as school systems adopt new organizational patterns. Within the last two decades many schools in Michigan have adopted the non-graded concept. I should like to invite you to participate in a study, on the state level, which focuses on changes in curriculum practices for the non-graded schools.

I am conducting this study as partial fulfillment of my requirement for the Ed.D. degree at Michigan State University. As Chairman of the Department of Education at Hope College, in Holland, Michigan, I am very much concerned about programs in the schools, especially those which are non-traditional. I am also aware of the responsibility placed upon us as teacher educators to train prospective teachers to work effectively in these programs. Therefore, the findings of this study will be used as a basis for recommendation of needed changes in teacher education programs.

Time is of the essence, and I realize how busy you are; however, I sincerely hope that you will respond to the enclosed questionnaire which in turn will contribute to the improvement of education.

If you should like to have a summary of the findings of this study, I would be happy to send you the information.

Please accept my sincere thanks for your cooperation and I eagerly look forward to receiving your questionnaire within a few days.

Sincerely,

Lamont Dirkse,

Enclosure

APPENDIX C

SECOND LETTER WITH QUESTIONNAIRE

1365 Heather Drive
Holland, Michigan 49423
April 5, 1972

Dear Sir:

Many returns have been received to date; however, I would appreciate having your response included in my survey. Perhaps this has been an oversight on your part because of your busy schedule, or the original questionnaire may have been misplaced. If you would be willing to participate, I would be extremely grateful.

Sincerely yours,


Lamont Dirkse

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE INTERVIEWS

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWS

A. Administrators:

1. What type of a written statement do you have identifying your program? Is it available to review for this study?

How much emphasis is placed on individualization in your program?

3. What new learning experiences have you added to the curriculum since you have adopted the non-graded program?
4. How is flexibility built into the program?
5. What materials are available for the teachers to use to help meet the needs of the students?
6. What are the reactions of parents to this program?

B. Teachers:

1. How has your role as a teacher changed since you've adopted the non-graded program?
2. How flexible can you be in your planning?
3. Do you have adequate materials available to carry out such a program effectively? What are some of the materials you use?
4. How are you involved in the decision making role?
5. Did you have adequate training to work effectively in this program?

C. Students:

1. What do you like about school?
2. What are some of the things you are doing in school?