

R E P O R T R E S U M E S

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ACCELERATION FOR THE OVERAGE POTENTIAL DROPOUT.

BY- CHAMBERLIN, GORDON L. CATTERALL, CALVIN D.

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A GROUP OF 25 OVERAGE UNDERACHIEVING PUPILS WHO HAD REPEATED A GRADE AT LEAST ONCE COMPLETED BOTH THE SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE DURING AN EXPERIMENTAL 1 YEAR PROGRAM. RESULTS FROM THE METROPOLITAN ACHIEVEMENT TESTS (MAT) ADMINISTERED IN FEBRUARY AND JUNE OF THE EXPERIMENTAL YEAR REVEALED INCREASED MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN ALL BASIC SUBJECTS. HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS GAVE A "SATISFACTORY, GOOD, OR VERY GOOD" RATING TO 76 PERCENT OF THESE STUDENTS IN THEIR FRESHMAN YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL. SIXTY PERCENT RECEIVED THIS RATING IN THEIR JUNIOR YEAR. THREE STUDENTS EITHER FAILED OR DID POORLY IN THE NINTH GRADE. THESE THREE FAILURES MIGHT HAVE BEEN PREDICTED ON THE BASIS OF THE MAT SCORES. THE RESULTS INDICATED THAT A MOTIVATING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND PLACEMENT WITH SIMILARLY OVERAGE PUPILS BENEFITED MOST STUDENTS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP. SUCH A PROGRAM ALSO SAVED THE SCHOOL THE COST OF THESE YEARS OF SCHOOLING. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "PHI DELTA KAPPAN," VOLUME 45, NUMBER 2, NOVEMBER 1963. (LB)

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# PHI DELTA KAPPAN

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## *Acceleration for the Overage Potential Dropout?*

By GORDON L. CHAMBERLIN, with CALVIN D. CATTERALL

**A**MERICA's schools use an effective system for retaining youngsters who need grade repetition. But, regardless of need, there is usually no chance to make up that lost time. Years after he has been retained in a grade, a discouraged 17- or 18-year-old high-school sophomore is likely to slip into the ranks of the dropouts.

Here's the story of an action research project aimed partly at preventing dropouts *through acceleration* at the seventh grade level. The promising results suggest another look at the case for some students of normal ability (not just the gifted) skipping a grade.

Greenfield Junior High School in the school year of 1959-1960 was new and staffed with earnest, open-minded professionals. Its more than 800 seventh and eighth grade students flowed from the growing rows of tract homes in the El Cajon Valley, California. Most of the parents commuted the few freeway miles to shrinking aircraft factories, booming missile and electronics plants, or military installations around San Diego.

Each new September, Greenfield's staff expected a sprinkling of overage seventh graders—mostly boys we *thought* of as "dull" and "tough."

What we found in the records of the oldest twenty-one boys and thirteen girls in the seventh grade shattered our self-fulfilling hypothesis. Their IQ's averaged 96, only a few points below the entire school. Since these "big ones" were a year and a half older than the rest of the seventh graders, their mental age was above Greenfield's mean in this grade. But in achievement test scores, the overage group lagged more than a year behind the rest of the seventh grade.

Was this underachievement related to the difference in age between the overage group and their peers?

Thirty-three of the thirty-four older children had repeated a grade at least once. The boys and girls displayed a common pattern. One after an-

other squirmed, fidgeted, and rationalized when the subject came up: "Why are you older than most seventh-graders?" Many blurted their feelings of being "not as smart as the others." They shored up weak self-images by denying the value of schools, by behavior patterns we felt were overly aggressive or overly withdrawn. Illness caused the retention of eleven children; time lost from school because of frequent moving was blamed in nearly half the cases. Their families were usually less well-off and more mobile, with breadwinners in unskilled or semi-skilled work.

We went to the children themselves, and they told knowingly or at times unwittingly of their low self-esteem and marginal school adjustment.

Could these boys and girls, 14 years old or more at the end of the seventh grade, hope to stick it out through the five years needed to finish high school?

Could these children jack up their lagging achievement levels?

Would these "big ones" find a better school adjustment in a peer group their own age?

Could we help these youngsters? And, incidentally, could we help them while saving a substantial sum badly needed in other educational areas?

Late in January of 1960, with deliberate drama, we dropped our bombshell in an announcement to this group:

Years ago, you LOST a year of your lives. We school people kept you in one grade for two years. For various reasons it was best for you at that time.

Now, the school wants to give you a chance to EARN back that year. Would you work as hard as you could, if it meant going to high school next September?

Their answer was a jubilant "Yes!"

For them, the conditions were simple. Each volunteer had to get parental consent, work up to his ability, and be a satisfactory citizen.

For us, the larger problem loomed—to induce *esprit de corps*, a motivating atmosphere that would tear away inhibitions, that would set these kids free to pursue the goal they said they wanted so much.

We devised an environment for a "Hawthorne effect"<sup>1</sup> with separate grouping and frequent visits

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of observers. Early in February, all thirty-four youngsters transferred to the "experimental group, Core 87." Greenfield's other pupils were grouped by a grade number and a letter, such as 8B or 7E. The number 87 stood for the "guinea pigs" who were trying to cover both the seventh and eighth grades at once. Ronald Dunham, their new core teacher and counselor, drummed out the message day by day to make these "big ones" feel there was something special, something dramatic about their group. Word flew over the peer grapevine that Core 87 was part of a scientific experiment. Daily, visiting firemen—the principal (Norman Esser), the authors, various teachers, and any available district office visitors—dropped into the class.

In succeeding months the original thirty-four children shrank to twenty-five. Two moved away. Two asked to return to their old classes because they "couldn't do the work." Five others were dropped for failure either to work or to behave.

The curriculum generally followed the eighth grade pattern. All possible materials were gathered for individualizing work into a personal contract basis, reminiscent of the Frederic Burk method.<sup>2</sup>

Core 87 youngsters submitted to a complete battery of the Metropolitan Achievement Test in February as a pre-test. They were post-tested in June with another form. These achievement tests measured a part of the increased motivation we had induced. The results are given as Table I.

**Table I. A Comparison of Scores on Metropolitan Achievement Tests Administered .4 Years Apart**

Sub-test	Form R Feb. 17, 1960 Group Median (Grade Equiv.)	Form S June 9, 1960 Group Median (Grade Equiv.)	Median Growth in Years	Percentage of Expected Growth
Reading	6.4	7.1	.7	175
Vocabulary	7.0	8.5	1.5	375
Arithmetic				
Fundamentals	7.0	7.6	.6	150
Arithmetic Problems	6.3	6.8	.5	125
English	6.1	6.8	.5	175
Literature	7.4	8.5	.7	225
History	6.8	8.9	2.1	525
Geography	7.3	7.7	.4	100 (at norm)
Science	8.8	9.2	.4	100 (at norm)
Spelling	6.1	7.0	.9	225

In writing assignments about "What happened to you in Core 87?" the children revealed an im-

<sup>1</sup> See George Caspar Homans, "Group Factors in Worker Productivity," in *Readings in Social Psychology*, Theodore M. Newcomb and Eugene L. Hartley, editors. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947. pp. 448-52.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961. pp. 295-96.

proved attitude toward school.

But what happened to them in high school?

High-school counselors evaluated them in comparison with other students of the same grade and ability in the spring of their freshman year and again in the autumn of their junior year. Table II shows the raw results of the study.

**Table II. High School Counselors' Evaluations of Core 87**

	March, 1961 Freshman Year	Nov., 1962 Junior Year
No response	3	5
Poor adjustment	3	3
Poor adjustment and dropped out	0	1
Satisfactory adjustment and dropped out	0	1
Satisfactory, good, or very good	19	15
	—	—
	25	25

Of the twenty students still traceable two and one-half years after leaving Greenfield, eighteen were still in school. Two girls had dropped out. This dropout rate of ten per cent was only slightly higher than is typical in these high schools.

We studied the five students who had failed, dropped out, or done poorly. Could this have been predicted? Yes. In the clarity of hindsight, our data revealed an answer, at least as it applied to success in the freshman year. Three students had failed or done poorly in the ninth grade. The Metropolitan Achievement Test scores for these three unsuccessful pupils were unique in two characteristics: 1) each had pre-tested more than a year below his actual grade placement (but so did several others), and 2) each had post-tested less than the norm-group progress from the beginning point. In short, these three were alone in starting with low achievement and in showing no measurable extra surge attributable to increased motivation. If we had known, the three could have remained at Greenfield another year. All the students who succeeded in the ninth grade either responded with extraordinary growth in achievement, started with above average achievement, or both. We found no predictive pattern for tenth grade performance.

Certain implications are unavoidable. The over-age students who received *and responded to* the encouraging attention and the chance to gain acceleration did as well or better than typical high-school students.

This supports the notion that achievement and

adjustment to school are likely to improve if youngsters are placed in a group of their own age level. Secondly, by comparison with a better-achieving norm group, average underachieving pupils can clearly sprint ahead under the effect of a contrived motivating environment. Last, skipping a year's schooling seemed to have a beneficial effect upon at least a major portion of the group (seventeen). As a by-product, the cost of these years of schooling was saved for other educational uses.

A broader study, including a control group,

would produce facts to confirm or deny the inferences drawn here. It ought to be made to answer the question: Should older elementary students be screened for acceleration to increase their chances of completing high school successfully?

How many thousands of youngsters are a year and a half older than their peers in America's elementary and junior high schools? If accelerating the *right* ones will help these children, will reduce the high-school dropout rate, and will save money, shouldn't we bend every effort to the task?

### Tax Deductions for Teacher Travel

► A teacher of foreign languages may deduct European travel expenses on his income tax return, a federal judge has ruled. The *New York Times* reported the ruling on October 10, 1963, citing the judge as follows:

"The teacher of foreign languages may well be in a unique situation. It is not necessary to visit Europe in order to maintain or improve many other 'skills,' but it is certainly necessary in the case of a teacher of European languages.

"It is not without significance that the Congress has recognized that a wide speaking knowledge of modern foreign languages is essential to the national welfare and defense.

"This kind of visit to foreign countries would seem to be necessary even where the teacher was born in a foreign country whose language he teaches. Where, as here, the language teacher has been born in the United States and educated here it is all the more necessary for him from time to time to hear the language spoken in its own country.

"No living language remains static; the fact that it is living means that it constantly changes."

The Modern Language Association of America reports that 26 per cent of its members, or about 1000, typically go abroad in a single year.

► Three top-ranked teachers who retired last year have been engaged by the Salt Lake City Board of Education to serve as part-time troubleshooters, assigned to assisting beginning teachers who encounter difficulties. They will work two or three days a week, as required.

### 'Shared-Time' Working in Detroit

► The largest "shared-time" program in the nation is operating this fall in the Detroit area. The 182 seventh and eighth graders at St. Norbert's parish school attend Cherry Hill Junior-Senior High School half of each day for mathematics, science, art, music, shop, and homemaking courses. They take language

arts and religion at the parish school. The pastor of St. Norbert's reported his school would have needed four new teachers and two additional classrooms this year except for the shared-time program. Administrators of both systems say the program is working smoothly.

► The parents of 616 Utah school dropouts were polled on their reaction. Parents of only 269 were opposed to their children dropping out of school; 167 were moderately opposed and 102 definitely opposed.

► Administrators generally want to expand the use of audio-visual materials and try new media, according to a U.S. Office of Education survey, while teachers are generally satisfied with the present arrangements.

► Ten colleges in the New York City area are planning a television network to share course offerings in areas of limited enrollment and in subjects where one institution has developed a highly specialized program.

### Innovations in New York City Schools

► Innovations in the New York City schools this year include large-scale expansion of team-teaching, lengthening the school day for first-graders from four hours to five hours, and teaching math and science in Spanish to 3,000 Spanish-speaking pupils. Programmed textbooks have been introduced in a pilot project for twenty-seven fifth-grade spelling classes and in forty-seven junior high school classes for slow readers. In high school the laboratory work in chemistry and physics has been increased from five to six periods a week, and work-study programs have been expanded.

► A Pasadena teacher was recently suspended from his classroom and reassigned to home tutoring because he refused to remove his beard.