

## Perspectives on Nongradedness, Multi-age Grouping and Team Teaching

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What follows in this paper is a summary of changes that have been made over several centuries in operational dimensions of public schooling. In this review I draw upon work that I have done within the several major roles that I occupied over many years, and also my experiences in working professionally in all 50 of the American states as well as American-oriented schools in 29 countries. In 20 countries I also worked occasionally with government officials and local educators. Most of the work that I did, in all of these roles, was related to matters of administration, especially as related to organizational practices, and also to helping with dimensions of curriculum.

Nongradedness, team teaching, deliberate use of multiage classroom instruction and organization, and other deviations from the literally graded patterns that prevailed in American schools (and doubtless schools in other countries, notably European) for more than 100 years after the influential Quincy Grammar School was founded in Boston in 1848 are the focus of this brief essay. The Quincy pattern was rigidly graded, and it was based upon the then-accepted (although inaccurate) belief that children of approximately the same age (within a 12-month period) could efficiently be offered the same curriculum. Also very unfortunately, there were related assumptions about the probable resistance of virtually all children to productive and compliant school behaviors. Therefore it took many years before an atmosphere encouraging healthy, productive and noncompetitive interaction began to be observable in classrooms. It also took a long time before practices such as extensive whole-class instruction, the use of rigidly-defined measurement and evaluation systems, and other examples of austerity began to be modified.

Much educational history in America, and probably in Europe (etc.) as well, actually began centuries ago, and probably on both continents the original goal was not particularly related to mass publicly-supported schooling. In America, in what were called Dame Schools in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and in the so-called District Schools of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as was also the case in most medical practice, there were few if any theoretical underpinnings. Instruction was nearly always provided by untrained and often less-than-effective teachers. The teaching pattern was, of necessity, apparently individualized, but the primitive, even crude, features of these early schools reflected an almost total absence of respect for or confidence in the learners.

For well over a hundred years in early America, the universal provision of schooling opportunities to children emerged as a major objective. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a long-persistent pattern of gradedness evolved that was much influenced by both architectural structure (featuring self-contained classrooms) and age-oriented teaching strategies such as those that were used in the Quincy Grammar School in Boston, which was founded in 1848. The original Quincy building, incidentally, still existed until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, although in the late stages it served mostly as a storage building for used furniture. ( I visited that school shortly before it was torn down in 1959 and shed no tears in the process.)

## **The Graded School and Self-Contained Teaching**

When the Quincy Grammar School came into being, the need for a manageable system greatly stimulated the development, over a good many years, of what ultimately became the nearly-universal American pattern of graded elementary-school organization. Usually this separated the pupils into age groups whose literal age span was about 365 days, and therefore in each class there were in fact many significant differences in pupil "readiness". These differences were stubbornly ignored as a standard (and, as we are obliged to note, a thin and moralistic ) "curriculum" became official. Teachers, all of whom were females with very limited preparation, were apparently not allowed to work, or even talk, together. Their male supervisors, whose knowledge about child growth and development must also have been extremely limited, maintained tight supervisory control.

The primary-school movement that had been launched in Boston became influential as a model for age-graded groupings, and in some ways led over the next several decades to an enormous nationwide growth of graded elementary schools. Almost all of them featured classrooms of a size intended to accommodate 25-35 pupils who were all expected to function academically within the same "grade" level. In the original Boston school, and probably in most of the schools that came to exist over the ensuing century or more, there continued to be literal self-containment. Nearly all the teachers in the early days of gradedness were young, very poorly educated, and subject to strict supervision. That this rigid situation persisted for a very long time helps to explain why it took the better part of a century for more appropriate patterns to emerge.

Inasmuch as the earliest public schools in The United States were small, and most of which were (and are, even now, in smaller communities), a primitive although not necessarily intentional version of what is now identified as multiage schooling has in fact existed for a long time. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, however, many communities had blossomed into cities with substantial populations, and soon there had emerged buildings large enough to accommodate aggregates of children who could be packaged into classrooms designated for First Grade, Second Grade, and so on. The teachers, nearly all women and nearly all, as noted, with a very rudimentary education, were assigned in each case to one of the graded classes and over time there evolved a sequential curriculum of sorts.

Of interest to 21st-Century educators is that the Quincy architectural layout, a series of similarly sized "boxes" called classrooms, became "fixed" over the next hundred or more years. The pattern of teacher self-containment was universally maintained, despite its severe limitations, and not only elementary-level teacher preparation programs but supervisory models almost always assumed that each teacher was operationally, and probably psychologically, almost totally independent of colleagues, even those in physically adjoining classrooms.

The management arrangements of gradedness, as noted, included the assembling in conventionally-sized classroom spaces of children whose ages were claimed to be appropriate for each successive grade level. The relative progress of the children was measured through tests and observations, and patterns of retention-in-grade tended to be inflexible and mechanistic. Awareness of the rigidity of the system led, over many decades, to a significant outpouring of theories and proposals for alternative arrangements, which at least during those decades dominated the educational literature,

received significant attention of various kinds, and stimulated a great many architectural and organizational adaptations.

There were several reasons, all regrettable when viewed a century or more later, for the fixation that supported the pattern of classroom self-containment and the accompanying suspicion of the motives and the intellectual capabilities of children. Not only teachers but physicians, health-care workers and others entrusted with the well-being and development of future adults also had lower status many years ago than they have in today's (i.e., 21st century) world. However, of the groups mentioned, only school workers have remained at the financial mercy of their clients, probably because the financial support of excellent and currently up-to-date schooling (for all children, in every stratum of the society) would in many respects be significantly unaffordable from the taxpayers' viewpoint. Also, it seems important to note at this point, definitions of acceptable professional practice and the sufficiency of training of school workers have lagged very, very far behind the levels that obtain in comparable work settings. The enormous size and the universality of public education have complicated the problem of updating professional education. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems almost embarrassing to admit, there are few training programs for educators that are even a fraction as demanding and efficacious as those required for other categories of workers for whom the adjective "professional" seems appropriate. The situation is worsened by the calamitous shortage of appropriate candidates for teaching positions.

An accompanying phenomenon has been the powerfully-influential system of "standardized" curriculum tests, which by the recent onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century had become much entrenched in practice and also legally, so that in effect the schools and school leadership were becoming highly structured and the flexibility that nongraded practices had been seeking to provide was rapidly disappearing. Goodlad and I our 1959 book entitled *The Nongraded Elementary School*, acknowledged that gradedness never had any operational validity, although the notion of arbitrarily selecting progressively-more-advanced materials for each successive graded class did, over time, influence curriculum (and teaching) decisions.

### **Team Teaching**

Among the extremely promising changes that were being made in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, or at least receiving widespread attention, was and probably remains the concept and practice of team teaching. However, in this early decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, children in American schools (more than those in Europe and elsewhere) are suffering from an achievement-testing mania and from a breakdown within the American culture of multi-aged and individually-determined progress programs that derive from a commitment to nongradedness. The challenge to educational leaders everywhere, as well as to their overseas counterparts, is to at least soften the influence of the aforementioned mania and to regain and strengthen those attitudes and behaviors that recognize both the existence and the legitimacy of variety in the learning styles and (over the long run) in the personal career goals of children. One style, one learning pattern, and one way of defining child growth and development can no longer be accepted in the schools, and in fact in the societies of the world.

Teaming was introduced and soon became, at least in several hundreds of venturesome school districts, a valued alternative to self-containment. As noted above,

the latter was (and, over the years, has unfortunately continued to be) an arrangement inherited from centuries-old architectural and operational patterns. These were geared to mostly indefensible assumptions about children's learning needs, motivations, and capabilities. Also deeply entrenched, even though most of them are anomalous given what is now known about human potential, are the prevailing instructional and administrative arrangements. Even though there are full-fledged team teaching practices in many places, and even though the literally self-contained classroom is now less predominant given some of the ways that teachers find to exchange pupils and share in teaching activities, teacher-preparation programs in nearly all universities continue to assume that their students will mostly be employed to work within the obsolescent pattern of self containment.

Although in many situations throughout educational history there have been some admirable efforts by teachers to work together and share responsibilities, self-containment was long regarded as a desideratum within teaching. When in the mid-1950s proposals to facilitate teamwork and collegiality were first announced and then pursued, there was mostly a huge outcry from many educational workers but also a great deal of enthusiasm expressed by those teachers and administrators who elected to become involved in teaming efforts. Unfortunately, the original publications about teaming were mostly geared not only to the virtues of partnership but also to the concept, which soon met with almost unanimous rejection, especially by teacher unions, of hierarchical staffing patterns. One healthy consequence of the early experimentation with teaming was that it became common for (usually 4-to-6) teachers to work with multi-age (or multigrade) groups of children. This facilitated, or at least stimulated, experimentation with deliberate multi-age pupil groups, and consequently stimulated the abandonment or softening of literal gradedness. Another "bonus" was that, within the larger pupil membership, it became easier (or at least more likely) to implement what in parts of Europe was already known as "family grouping."

Team teaching, which term refers to the deliberate formation of arrangements that enable and encourage teachers to work together and to share responsibilities, has taken many forms over the years. It might interest readers to know that over at least a century there had been many examples of teachers helping and working with each other, for example in developing new curriculum approaches and sometimes through joining the children in their separate classes for a program or equivalent activity. However, until about fifty or so years ago there were few if any instances of literal team arrangements. One-room schools, of course, almost always served pupils of mixed ages, and graded structure dominated the atmosphere even though many if not most teachers worked out lesson plans, etc. that called for, or permitted, pupils of adjoining ages to work together at least part of the time on topics that enabled mixed-age groups to function .

In the early years of experimentation with patterns of team teaching, Harvard's Dean Francis Keppel, who with Francis Chase of Chicago envisioned the original arrangement, conceptualized teaming as an hierarchical arrangement. In this plan a typical team would consist of: one teacher of outstanding talent who could become the team leader and receive a substantially large salary supplement, another excellent teacher who could function as an assistant leader at perhaps 40-50% of the leader's salary supplement, one or more "regularly reimbursed" teachers, and several nonprofessionals. The latter were

not certified nor necessarily college graduates, but they usually had good credentials and could be employed at salary levels that were respectable but a significant notch below those of certified teachers. For a typically-sized team, therefore, it was expected that the overall salary cost would be essentially equal to the cost of having the same number of adults at “regular” teachers’ salaries. Among the arguments for such an arrangement were that fewer credentialed teachers (who at the time were in rather short supply) would be required, it would become possible to reward truly outstanding teachers in ways that could enable them to remain working with children, and it would reduce a painstaking workload from teachers (to be handled by the nonprofessionals) and therefore enable teachers to have a more challenging and rewarding life.

Several major discoveries or at least serious proposals about better ways to organize elementary and middle schools were made in the U.S.A. beginning in approximately the middle of the Twentieth Century. These led, over several decades, to a significant outpouring of theories and trial arrangements, which at least during those decades dominated the educational literature, received significant attention of various kinds, and stimulated a great many architectural and organizational adaptations.

Team teaching, at least in the introductory period, grew rapidly in acceptance and popularity. It did not take long, however, for arguments to erupt in defense of self-contained classrooms. Yet, thanks to generous financial support from a number of foundations, along with architectural inventiveness, collaborative arrangements continued to develop and prosper. Furthermore, supported by positive involvement on the part of participating teacher groups, enthusiastic administrators with the enlightened support of their school boards soon created considerable support for and, significantly, sufficient research justification for teaming, which emerged as such arrangements came to be better understood and valued. By the beginning of the next century, however, the almost-universal adoption of teaming that had been predicted had not materialized. Nonetheless, in many schools it was possible to find that literally self-contained classroom situations no longer existed. Some of the changes that could be detected were architectural (e.g. in connected spaces), but most were found in the multiplicity of collaborative activities that helped teachers and students to expand their contacts beyond the standard classroom.

When the concept of teacher teaming was first explored and developed, in the 1950’s, some experienced teachers were resistant, even fearful, because of a presumed loss of privacy and/or independence. In addition, it now seems safe to discuss, such teachers perceived that they would be far less able to function idiosyncratically, even eccentrically, and to skip over, or ignore, parts of the curriculum that were not easy for them to teach.. Even more significantly, it is probably not unfair to note that some teachers find that it is difficult, if not impossible, to deal effectively (and fairly) with all kinds or types of pupils. Many are therefore fearful that working with a much larger group of pupils might expose them to criticism. What came as almost a surprise to many resolutely self-contained teachers was that they had failed to understand or believe that working with several colleagues could and would, almost always, result in the elimination of negatively-intended criticism.

Reviewing the impact of forces in American as well as European education, it seems that there is a strong realization that teachers, not separately but as hardworking and talented groups of specialists, must have both an opportunity and an obligation to blend their special talents and interests so that children in their charge can be both better served

and more productive of skills and attitudes that will benefit them throughout their working and personal lives. In contrast to the once-accepted roles of teachers as primarily didactic disseminators and pupils as passive beneficiaries, this emerging pair of role definitions should be far more attractive to both the adult staff and their students. The visible and valued aspects of the emerging context would include:

- (1) the deliberate provision of many opportunities for multi-aged and heterogeneous pupil learning experiences;
- (2) the assembling of teams (or whatever label they might prefer) of teachers whose unique backgrounds and specialized skills are valuable not only to the pupils they serve but also to their adult colleagues/partners;
- (3) the provision of opportunities, to the extent that it is possible, for parents and community members to become significantly involved in the life of the school; and
- (4) the making of connections, in a variety of ways, with children and teachers from other schools, especially in other countries.

The “professionals” who work in schools almost never have been beneficiaries of professional-quality initial preparation and in-service stimulation. This has always been true; but as many more and better opportunities for well-salaried employment in other jobs became available to those men and (mostly) women who in the past had fewer employment options and therefore became teachers, the job market has changed rather radically. By the year 2006-07 it had become virtually impossible for administrators, even in relatively well-financed districts to staff their schools with significantly-well-prepared workers. Placing newly-hired “teachers” into groups or clusters influenced in each case by the advice and example of relatively skillful colleagues (in other words, by seeking to encourage a version of teaming within which operational knowledge could at least be shared), sometimes became a helpful approach.

A fair amount of “research” was conducted during the first decade or so of teaming, but in retrospect the research focused too much upon academic progress (which almost always confirmed that at least by well-defined and familiar measures of academic progress the pupils were doing well) and not enough upon the many social and personal-development advantages inherent in team participation. Suffice to say that in the numerous doctoral studies and faculty inquiries that were made, it had become obvious that the alleged advantages of the self-contained classroom were mostly non-existent – both for the pupils and for the teachers. Only the fact that many self-contained teachers are and were happy when left alone, plus the regrettable fact that most schools have been (and continue to be) designed with equal-sized classroom boxes, can explain why teaming has not significantly replaced non-collaborative and limited sharing arrangements. Teachers therefore remain the only so-called professionals the majority of whom work mostly by themselves.

By the beginning of the next century, however, the almost-universal adoption of teaming that had been predicted had not materialized. Teaming projects did, nonetheless, exist in many places, and what might be described as an architectural revolution was well underway throughout the country. Also, in a great many schools that did not actually adopt full-fledged teaming practices it was possible to find that literal self-containment no longer existed. Some of the changes that could be detected were architectural (e.g. in connected spaces), but most were found in the multiplicity of collaborative activities that help teachers and students to expand their contacts beyond the standard classroom.

## **Nongradedness and Multi-age Groupings**

The second most significant change from “the old days” was symbolized by the increasing use of multi-aged, multitalented, and deliberately heterogeneous pupil groupings. This came about largely because the old and familiar age-oriented pattern of classroom organization was increasingly recognized as both ill-advised and unworkable. Hardly ever was acknowledged the absurdity of dealing with groups of so-called six-year-olds in first grade as if they were all equally ready for “first grade instruction” as their first school year began. For some teachers (and administrators, no doubt), such assumptions provided welcome stability and required hardly any creative and imaginative staff behavior. Even more doubts and suspicions about changing the atmosphere and activities within schools were raised by many parents, who themselves had attended and apparently accepted the aforementioned patterns. Ironically, almost 100% of adults want their doctors, dentists, and other health-oriented workers to be oriented to fully updated medical information. Sadly, to bring schooling equally up-to-date has been regarded as economically unfeasible, and being at the mercy of taxpayers, school budgets and practices are very rarely, if ever, funded at sufficient levels.

John I. Goodlad and I were the first Americans, and probably the first in the world, to write extensively about nongraded (originally called ungraded) elementary schools. Nongradedness was at that time a fairly new topic that had been written about only within the several (mostly Wisconsin and New York) communities that had been “experimenting” prior to 1959 or so, with the abandonment or serious modification of the almost universally-prevalent graded school structure. Goodlad and I, who had become friends while working toward Ph.D. degrees at the University of Chicago discovered that both of us were enthusiastic about the modification of literal gradedness and were also preparing manuscripts that would eventually become stimuli for our co-involvement in a book.

There were a great many efforts at least to soften, if not destroy, the graded school pattern; and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, doubtless stimulated by our writings and those of many others, the nongraded pattern of organizing elementary schools came to be quite common, although not universal. Notable was the fact that in the decade prior to the Great Depression, in the 1920s, it was common for American elementary teachers, especially those working in German-oriented cities (such as Milwaukee), to spend their summers studying what it seems appropriate nowadays to label as nongradedness, under famous professors such as Peter Peterson in Germany. (Note the seminal 1965 book by Peterson and his wife Else, *Die Paedagogische Tatsachenforschung*, which unfortunately is available only in German).

Four manuscripts (two by each of us) were published early on. I remember an inquiry from the editor of *Education Index* who had never before encountered articles with Nongradedness in their titles and who was wondering whether this would become a lively enough publishing corpus so that they should establish a regular category for it in their index. As he soon discovered, the category rapidly become literally overloaded.

Goodlad was the organizer of our effort, and he took the responsibility of seeking a publisher who would be interested in the topic. I remember that it took almost two frustrating years before Harcourt Brace, whose senior editor was Paul Brandwein, agreed to a contract with us. The book appeared in 1959. By then a particularly important and

relevant 1957 study examining and advocating deliberate multi-age grouping had come to our attention. We noted the multi-age concept in our book, but it was too late to pay enough attention to it and we regretted that fact so much that we almost literally forced Harcourt Brace to let us re-write especially pp. 68-78 and issue a “Revised Edition” in 1963 with what we regarded as a significant strengthening. Some readers might be interested in reading the Introduction to the 1963 edition (pp. vii and viii) to understand what we did. The publisher was eventually, we think, happy about the revisions that we made; and the unexpected success of our material over the years led to some gratifying national and international recognition.

The very word “grade” is a bit mischievous because it can mean several things: (1) an annually defined administrative level (First Grade, or Fifth Grade, for example), (2) a judgmental indication of the relative skill or quality of a pupil’s work when contrasted with the work of others (e.g. higher than most, somewhat the same as others, or lower than most), (3) a position on a scale of generally-defined merit or worth, or (4) a symbol of reaching a standard of some sort, e.g. to reach a certain level of accomplishment.

The term nongraded can therefore confuse some persons because, unlike the examples just cited, it usually means that there exists a rejection, in the minds of teaching personnel and the parents with whom they connect, of procedures and vocabularies that seek to define the quality of each child’s academic (and other) performance in the school as well as the child’s status within the school community. While it is in fact appropriate for words, and even symbols, to be used that help to indicate both the level and the quality of a child’s academic performance, it is not acceptable to approach this function in ways that seek to view the child primarily within a competitive context. By use of terms such as nongradedness in their inter-faculty conversations and in their contacts with parents, if and when appropriate to the question being examined, teachers can (at least over time) develop or invent other vocabularies for use in discussing and even evaluating pupils and the progress they are making toward fulfilling their potential.

Nongradedness is both a mindset and an organizational pattern, and although the term is a bit awkward it seeks to announce that the pupils within the educational environment are living and working under conditions that minimize their sense of competitiveness and that enable them to concentrate almost entirely upon activities that seem both manageable and challenging to them. A corollary consideration is that although each pupil is comfortably dealing with his/her own strengths and limitations, he/she is, within the same environment, able to connect intellectually (and socially, no doubt) with the full range of other pupils as opportunity is made available. Stated in operational terms, although each pupil’s special and central responsibility is to make steady progress within his/her own focused academic agenda, each child is privileged to interact intellectually and personally with other pupils whose individual strengths and interests might at this moment be at a higher or lower level but who nevertheless can contribute understandings and interests that “enrich” the learning atmosphere or that invite the reexamination of ideas, skills and attitudes

It seems altogether reasonable to argue that deliberately heterogeneous multi-age grouping practices are by far more productive of pupil learning, and of overall well-being, than are/were age-based or ability-based arrangements. For countless decades the validity of the latter arrangements has been unproven. Beginning with Kindergarten, where at the outset some children are almost one-year older (or younger) than their

classmates, there is also an almost astonishing range within each pupil group of experiences, talents, and backgrounds. This reality continues to be present in ensuing years, when among other factors promotion and/or non-promotion policies cause the range of ages and experiences to become even greater. In fact, it is nearly impossible to assemble groups of children whose members are actually “homogeneous” in any relevant dimension of their daily school experience. Yet in nearly all schools almost every classroom group, e.g. for reading or mathematics instruction, is usually organized in terms of supposedly shared histories, talents, interests, and accomplishments.

On the other hand, the great majority of pupils, presented with an opportunity to associate academically with a larger number of other children, proved to be enthusiastic. They also welcomed the opportunity to connect with a number of teachers, each with his or her unique talents and interests, and especially to appreciate working alongside a larger, and therefore more versatile group of fellow students. In conventional classroom situations, there are usually some strong pupils who tend to enjoy more teacher approbation and to become, almost habitually, the “leaders” in the group. In the same room, on the other hand, there are usually one or more kids with problems or histories of non-success. One of the great discoveries during the early years of team teaching was that within the larger population of pupils, it became more possible for the non-success kids to discover and connect with each other and at the same time it was easier to discover and utilize the one (or more!) teacher(s) who found excitement and pleasure in working with them.

The Goodlad/Anderson volume was re-issued in 1987, and it is likely that this final version is available. One of my doctoral students at Harvard, who eventually became a close friend and partner, was Barbara Pavan. Dr. Pavan and I prepared and published (in 1993) a volume entitled *Nongradedness: Helping it to Happen*. I suspect that now, in 2006, the Anderson/Pavan book, published in 1992 by Technomic Publishing Co. Inc. deserves recognition for the recency as well as the thoroughness of its material. Its usefulness is enhanced by the extensive bibliographic material that is included in each chapter.

Before educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century hasten to negative conclusions about the motivations and assumptions of teachers and other educational practitioners in the 19<sup>th</sup>, and even during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it should be noted that the educational patterns and habits that grew in size and significance after 1848 were more-or-less accurately attuned to the prevailing mindset(s) of what might well have been the majority of adult citizens about children and what can or might be assumed about their potential, both academically and in dimensions of meritorious living. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by the way, it is possible to find at least some classrooms and even schools where these negative mindsets and correlated practices tend to exist and even, sad to say, to prevail. Much more probable, it seems possible to say, is that most teachers and the schools in which they work, are well aware, and very appreciative, of the positive climate within which they are privileged to work. Even more wonderful, of course, would be that most pupils also function, cheerfully and productively, within a positive and supportive environment.

There were several reasons, all regrettable when viewed a century or more later, for the fixation that supported the pattern of classroom self-containment and the accompanying suspicion of the motives and the intellectual capabilities of children. As

noted earlier, not only teachers but physicians, health-care workers and others entrusted with the well-being and development of future adults also had lower status many years ago than they have in today's (i.e., 21st century) world. However, of the groups mentioned only school workers have remained at the financial mercy of their clients, probably because the financial support of excellent and currently up-to-date schooling (for all children, in every stratum of the society) would in many respects be significantly unaffordable from the taxpayers' viewpoint. Also, it seems important to note at this point, definitions of acceptable professional practice and the sufficiency of training of school workers have lagged very, very far behind the levels that obtain in comparable work settings. The enormous size and the universality of public education has complicated the problem of updating professional education. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems almost embarrassing to admit, there are no training programs for educators that are even a fraction as demanding and efficacious as those available to other categories of workers for whom the adjective "professional" seems appropriate. The situation is worsened by the calamitous shortage of appropriate candidates for teaching positions.

### **In Summary**

When John Goodlad and I first published our book on Nongraded Education about 50 years ago, the first edition said almost nothing about the virtues of multi-aging. Almost immediately, however, there emerged an interest in deliberately mixed age grouping; and within two years we successfully urged our publisher to let us revise at least ten of the pages so that multiaging could be both advocated and praised. The initial supporters of the idea were Walter Rehwoldt and Warren Hamilton, who as a team wrote a joint doctoral dissertation on the topic. In a way it was almost astonishing that multi-aging had long been regarded as something of a necessary evil, given that so many schools were small and their students were inescapably multiply-aged; but with the incentive provided by Rehwoldt and Hamilton the educational and social desirability of mixed-age classrooms came to be greatly valued.

Perhaps what is needed now is a summary statement. In the world that children richly deserve and almost desperately need, having many connections with each other and also many relationships with talented and caring adults can offer a much-to-be-desired atmosphere. Productive and stimulating connections with many "others" can make life far more stimulating, and therefore more motivating, for both the adults and the children than life in more conventional settings. It is greatly to be hoped that even small steps in the direction of these ideas can be very productive as well as rewarding. May each of these small steps encourage us to "think large" in the process.

The preceding paragraph may seem, and probably is, extreme in its implications for school practice. Schooling, even in the wealthiest and/or most enlightened communities and in most if not all highly-reputed public as well as private schools, rarely reflects a sufficient and dedicated awareness of what might be labeled as the "musts" of excellent schooling. Alas, even in colleges and universities those "musts" are usually not pursued with passion and skill. However, mentioning these flaws in the existing system is not intended to scold, and it is especially important for us not to abandon hope for significant progress and improvement. The goal should be for all of us to think more creatively about how to move from not-yet-close-enough, to making-substantial-progress –in-a-good-direction.