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# AN EXPERIMENT IN ARRANGING HIGH-SCHOOL SECTIONS ON THE BASIS OF GENERAL ABILITY

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In October and November, 1919, some nine hundred pupils in the eighth grades of the Long Beach, California schools were tested with the Otis Group Intelligence Scale. Since half of these pupils were to enter high school the following February, it was decided to select in advance two classes in high-school English partly on the basis of the test scores. These two high-school sections will be known as Sections A and D. Section A was composed of those younger pupils whose Otis scores were high. Section D was composed of those older pupils whose Otis scores were low. The average age in Section A was 13.6 years; in Section D, 14.7 years. The average score in Section A was 143.5; in Section D, 93.5.

Both sections were given to the same teacher without any hint as to difference in ability. In less than a week the teacher had noticed it and had reported it to the head of the department and to the vocational adviser. Since we had previously agreed to wait until the teacher showed that she was aware of the difference before revealing that an experiment was in progress; it was now time to take the teacher into our confidence. At the end of the second week in the high school each of the two groups was tested with the Holley Sentence Vocabulary Scale, Series 3B. The teacher was told to proceed with the work of the term, adapting it to the capacity of each section according to her judgment.

At the end of the term the same test was given again without announcement in advance. The test is one of general language ability and correlates well with general intelligence. It consists of the words embodied in incomplete sentences, which are to be filled out by the choice of one of four suggested words.

In the teacher's opinion the groups were better social groups because of the similarity of ability. Instruction was easier than it would have been if the groups had been mixed. Indeed the only difficulty in instruction lay with the poorer class; and this was largely because the teacher lacked definite knowledge as to how much she could change the course of study and yet make it

possible for these pupils to take regular work in later terms. The effect on individuals was good, some in the better section making their first apparent effort. The teacher could judge on this point as she had previously been the departmental English teacher of a number of them. The brighter ones when matched with their equals apparently found effort worth while. It may be pointed out here that the usual class contains enough average and dull pupils to quench the fire of some who possess unusual ability.

In Section D, fourteen pupils were present throughout the experiment. All of these had been assigned in accordance with the teacher's judgment. In Section A, twenty-two pupils were present for the entire period. The teacher felt that three of them had not been satisfactorily assigned. One was a somewhat retarded pupil; the other two were suspected of being temperamentally unfitted for successful school work. The test results confirm the suspicion. Each section contained other misfit pupils who were assigned to these sections by the exigency of crowded rooms, not as part of the experiment.

The assignments on the basis of test results were more satisfactory in the case of the poorer section, despite the fact that a poor score may be due to an accidental factor such as illness or fatigue. The assignments to the better section were not quite as satisfactory to the teacher, though the high scores of pupils in this section could hardly be due to an accidental factor.

But why did these pupils of apparently superior ability fail to take hold of the work as well as the rest of the section? This question is related to one that appears when the results of the first and second vocabulary tests are compared. The losses in the scores of individuals are most noticeable in the case of those who made very high scores the first time. It seems that the superior pupils were less dependable in school routine. The first test was a novelty; and they did their best. The second time a little less effort lowered the scores a bit. The Pearson coefficients of correlation confirm this view. The correlation between the first and second tests was 0.85 for Section D and 0.67 for Section A.

While rating presented no problem in Section A, in Section D grades were given as follows: 1 student received A; 3 students received C; 10 students received C—; 5 students received D. "C—" means credit granted on condition. The condition for these

RESULTS AS SHOWN BY THE HOLLEY SENTENCE  
VOCABULARY SCALE

SECTION	MEDIAN		LOWEST SCORE		HIGHEST SCORE		CORRELATIONS	
	First Test	Second Test	First Test	Second Test	First Test	Second Test	First and Second Vocab- ulary Test	Otis and First Vo- cabulary Test
D	48	49.5	33	38	66	64	0.85	0.30
A	63	66.5	47	55	79	79	0.67	0.41

pupils was that they enroll in a designated section for the next semester, Section D being held together in this way. This solution of the granting of credit for the necessarily inferior work done and this method of holding the class together is not wholly satisfactory, but it is the best upon which the teacher, head of the department, vocational adviser, and registrar found themselves in agreement. The principal of the high school humanely insists that it is wrong to put the C—stigma on the efforts of these pupils. They should be saved that sense of failure.

Any estimate of the results of this experiment is a happy one compared with what must have happened to these pupils if scattered throughout the school. All the weaker pupils must surely have failed; discouragement would have caused them to leave school in most cases, for that is the history of poor ability—quick elimination from opportunity. As for Section A, the intellectual leadership of the next generation depends on giving the widest opportunity for development to those best fitted to lead.

Two thoughts occur to us as a result of our experience with these classes. First, the course of study should be examined with the needs of weak classes in mind. Definite modifications in subject matter and method should be made in order to fit a course of study to the needs and capacities of this group. Second, the granting of credits and the system of credit bookkeeping and program planning should be made as elastic as possible in order to aid these pupils to remain in school without the sense of failure. To do one's best is not failure.