

TEACHER THOUGHTS

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

One of the most important questions that the educator has to consider today is whether to follow the same general plan with all children or a special plan for each child. It is agreed that all have a large proportion of similar acquirements, but that the individuality of each person should be preserved.

Individuals of the same age differ greatly in every trait that has been measured or estimated. In height, weight, and strength; in susceptibility to disease, nervous stability and mental balance; in intellect, character, and skill; and in aptitudes for special subjects.

Some of the factors producing the greatest individual differences are heredity, experience, training, teaching, natural and social influences. Measurements and tests show greater individual differences for young children and for those just entering their teens, than for other ages. This is largely accounted for by the fact that rapid changes are occurring at these ages, and by the fact that such changes begin earlier in some children than in others.

Every classroom teacher realizes that mass instruction does not meet the needs of all the children. She recognizes the need for diagnostic work and remedial instruction. Series of reasoning problems, graded according to difficulty, may be usefully employed to ascertain the level which the reasoning abilities of children have attained at various ages. Such problems may be utilized as a scale with which classroom materials may be compared. They may also be employed to evaluate individual abilities, and to discover appropriate methods of reasoning.

When a child has little or no chance to compare himself with others of his own capacity, he is guided even more than ordinarily in his judgment of what he can do by what his parents or teacher believes and expects of

him. She must know what the child's limitations are, but she must manifest that knowledge to the child as little as possible. Even if the child is wholly deaf, it is better to talk to him just as if he could hear. Those truths are now generally recognized by the best superintendents of institutions for the blind, the deaf and the feeble minded.

The fact of individual differences in learning-capacity has, of course, been always known to teachers. Some children are "bright," others are "slow," "dull," or "stupid;" and a large number are recognized as "average."

The teacher should form the attitude of being interested in the in-born characteristics of each of her pupils, those who are mentally deficient, the geniuses, and twins of ordinary ability, as furnishing the fundamental starting point for her treatment of him. If the pupil is naturally very weak in arithmetic but very talented in art, she will be satisfied when he has mastered the fundamentals in the former, and will not deny his promotion for his deficiency. On the other hand, in art, she will endeavor to stimulate him to the richest possible development, so that he may use his talent for the great benefit of himself and others. The wise teacher will treat each pupil sympathetically according to his talents and deficiencies.

Leaving out the idiots, morons, and morally incompetent children, we may say that practically every child is good for something, meaning that he can be made a useful citizen in general, and at least a fairly skilled worker in some special line. It is each teacher's business in the elementary school to help each child to keep moving toward general social usefulness. In order to do this it is important for the teacher to realize the great variety of human capacities and the opportunities for each to be of service in the world.

Mrs. Beatrice Martin Flythe
