REPETITION OF GRADES

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A STUDY OF THE OUTCOME OF GRADE REPETITION IN THE PROTESTANT HIGH SCHOOLS OF MONTREAL

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CHAPTER I

OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

In September 1960 the Subject Promotion system was established in Mount Royal High School and Rosemount High School. The system was established in these two schools to allow the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal to make an evaluation of Subject Promotion. Following the report of the evaluating committee, made in March 1964, the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal approached the Protestant Committee of the Department of Education in the Province of Quebec, and requested that it be given permission to change the system of organization in its high schools. The Board wished to organize all of its high schools on a system of Subject Promotion, and permission to make this change was granted by the Protestant Committee. Consequently, by September 1965 all of the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal were operating on a Subject Promotion system.

Before the instigation of the Subject Promotion system, the high schools in the Province had operated with a system of Grade Promotion. Under this system students were only promoted to the next grade if they reached a satisfactory standing in a group of subjects. Students whose overall average mark for their group of subjects failed to reach a defined standard were not promoted, and neither were students who failed more than two individual subjects in their particular course. These non-promoted students had to repeat the grade and were known as "grade repeaters", or more simply as "repeaters".

The decision of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal yo change from a Grade Promotion system to a Subject Promotion system did not appear to have been taken as a result of any experimental research into the effects of the Grade Promotion system. Accordingly, it seemed to be an opportune time to make a study of some aspects of the Grade Promotion system. The research could only be of an ex post facto nature, since any experimental approach would have required a major policy decision of the Board; while the change to a system of Subject Promotion meant that, in future, no students would be called upon to repeat a grade in the former manner. Therefore, the research was made upon the records of students who had previously been called upon to repeat the work of a grade. This imposed limitations, in view of the nature of the school records that were kept, and restricted the conclusions that could be drawn from the study.

The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal designated six of its high schools from which students might be studied for the purpose of this research. Within these six schools were located approximately one-third of all the students who were known to have been repeating a grade in the Board's high schools during the school year 1963-1964. Students who had failed a grade in another school, and had then transferred to one of the six schools to repeat the grade, were excluded from the

sample. Similarly, students who had failed a grade and subsequently transferred from one of the six schools to a different school, were excluded. The largest group of repeaters was located in Grade VIII, with successively smaller numbers in Grades IX and X. The increase in the number of repeaters in Grade XI, compared with the number in Grade X, was held to be due to the value attached to passing the Quebec High School Leaving Examinations taken at the end of that grade, and the need to obtain high enough marks to gain entrance to a university.

Data were collected by first recording the final marks obtained by a student in a number of selected subjects, at the end of his first year in a particular grade. This having been done, a record was taken of the final marks obtained by the same student in the same subjects at the end of his second year in the same grade. Subject/grade groupings' were then made, and tests of significance carried out to determine whether or not there was any improvement in performance, as measured by marks, from the first year in a grade to the second. Because of the hature of the Grade Promotion system, it was possible to make the same tests upon data involving only the subject/grade groupings of students who had passed a particular subject at the end of their first year in a grade.

In essence, the question asked in this research was whether or not repetition of a subject resulted in the obtaining of a higher mark at the

end of the second year in a grade, than at the completion of the first year in the grade. In making the necessary tests of statistical s ignificance to answer this question, certain assumptions had to be made about the comparability of the data: these assumptions will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

From the tabulation and analysis of the data obtained, certain conclusions were reached. The results showed that an improvement in achievement, as measured by marks, takes place when a student repeats a grade. Students who repeat a subject that they have failed show a greater improvement than students who repeat a subject that they passed at the end of their first year in a particular grade. The amount of improvement shown varied greatly from subject to subject; generally, the improvement was largest in mathematics and science subjects, and smallest in English. However, it was concluded that the improvements shown to take place were rarely sufficiently large to justify spending an extra year in a grade. This conclusion was supported by the results of research on the varying effects of repeating done in the United States.

It would appear that, even if the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal had not decided to end the system of Grade Promotion, with its possibility of grade repeating, for the reasons given in the report of the committee evaluating Subject Promotion, an evaluation of the effects of repeating a year would have eventually raised questions

regarding the efficacy of the Grade Promotion system, and perhaps have contributed to its termination.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The Province of Quebec is at present making rapid educational changes and has been doing so ever since 1960. However, not all changes can be attributed to the efforts of the new Ministry of Education. A case in point was the institution into the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, of a system called Subject Promotion. This system was introduced to replace a system of promotion which required students to complete satisfactorily all the work of one grade before being promoted to the next higher grade. This change, which occurred in the summer of 1965, resulted from a request to the Protestant Committee of Education, made in May 1964 by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.

It might be thought that this request of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal came after controlled experimentation into the effects of promotion and non-promotion. This was not the case. The Board did not, however, arrive at its decision without some consideration of the relative merits of the two systems. It is, in fact, possible to trace the thoughts of officials of the Board as they progressed towards their recommendation for a change. As early as 1952, the Board produced a monograph entitled "Promotion Policy in the Elementary School", which gave some recognition to the problems of promotion and non-promotion. In this monograph there was a recognition that promotion policy must be flexible and that the deciding factor must be the individual child's welfare. The monograph stated that:

> "Under a flexible policy the use of promotion and non-promotion becomes, in the final analysis, an administrative device for placing a pupil where he will have the best opportunity to progress. This point of view obviously does not mean that all pupils will automatically be moved to a higher grade each year. Some will be retained in a grade for a second year, and others who may be less proficient in certain skills will move on. In other words, promotion can not be regarded as advancement or reward any more than non-promotion connotes failure...."

This monograph on promotion policy was the result of the deliberations of a committee of the Curriculum Council of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal and, while it consulted teachers in some detail, it did not initiate any research into the relative merits of promotion or non-promotion.

In 1962 there was further documented evidence that the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal was not entirely satisfied with its policy or practices on promotion. In the brief² that the Board submitted to the then sitting Royal Commission of Enquiry on Education of the

¹ <u>Promotion Policy in the Elementary School</u> (Montreal: The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, 1952), p. 11.

² Brief to the Royal Commission of Enquiry on Education of the Province of Quebec (Montreal: The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, 1962).

Province of Quebec, it drew attention to the fact that the courses of study that it offered in its high schools were not entirely satisfactory to all students. The brief then suggested that a possible solution lay in the type of high school organization known as Subject Promotion³. The brief noted that one of the distinguishing features of such a system was:

> "The wasteful process of having separate pupils repeat a whole year because of partial failures is avoided inasmuch as he is required to repeat only the subjects in which he has failed and can continue to further studies in the courses in which he has been successful."⁴

Once again there is no evidence that any research was carried out by the Board prior to the making up of the brief. It is, however, equally clear that the Board was already deeply interested in the possibility of running its schools on a Subject Promotion system, for it was then experimenting with that type of organization in two of its high schools. In February 1958 a sub-committee of the Curriculum Council of the Board had commenced a study that eventually resulted in the Subject Promotion system being established in Mount Royal High School and Rosemount High School, in September 1960. In its brief to the Royal Commission the Board stated that:

> "A careful study should be made of these experiments because the results obtained from them should go to determine the future organization of high schools." 5

- ³ Ibid., p. 33.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 34.
- 5 Ibid., p. 34

The Board was clearly questioning the efficiency of the Grade Promotion system, and its doubts regarding the efficiency of that system crystallized in March 1964 with the publication of a report on Subject Promotion by the High School Re-Organization Committee (Blueprint Committee) of the Curriculum Council⁶. The Blueprint Committee had been set up by the Curriculum Council in October 1959, and charged with guiding the Subject Promotion experiment and evaluating it.

In evaluating Subject Promotion, the Committee relied heavily upon observation of the organization in the two experimental schools. Questionnaires were given to teachers, pupils and parents in the two experimental schools, and all three groups tended to answer in a manner interpretable as being favourable to the Subject Promotion system⁷. No questionnaires were submitted to similar groups in schools then under a Grade Promotion system. It is noteworthy that the respective principals of the experimental schools came out strongly in favour of the Subject Promotion system, their comments being included in the report⁸. The Committee did, however, report on one study that it had made, namely, a comparative analysis of the number of repeaters in Subject Promotion

⁶ <u>Subject Promotion - Evaluation</u> (Montreal: The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, 1964).

7 Ibid., pp. 19-24.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 33-36

schools and Grade Promotion schools⁹. This study is important because it is the only occasion that the Board instigated actual research into the relative efficiency of the two systems as operating within its own high schools. The study found that for the school year 1962-63 there were, in the two experimental schools, a total of 889 Pupil-Subjects being repeated, which, with a total enrolment of 2269 pupils, indicated a degree of repetition in Subject Promotion schools of 390 Pupil-Subjects per 1000 pupils. Comparing this with Grade Promotion schools, and estimating six subjects per pupil per grade, the study found that there were 18,199 pupils repeating 12,264 Pupil-Subjects. Thus, the degree of repetition in Grade Promotion schools was 670 Pupil-Subjects per 1000 pupils. The Committee avoided drawing sweeping conclusions from the evidence it had assembled, but did conclude that the Subject Promotion student has an educational advantage, in that he may finish school earlier, and is able to elect additional optional subjects instead of repeating subjects that he may already have passed.¹⁰

The Blueprint Committee came out strongly in favour of a Subject Promotion system, and in a conclusion that was subsequently approved by the Curriculum Council and by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal itself, it said:

> "1...it is concluded that the organization of the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal would be improved by the general method

⁹<u>Ibid</u>., p. 25

¹⁰Ibid., p. 4

called Subject Promotion: High School Re-Organization for Better Provision for Individual Differences.

- 11. It is therefore recommended:
 - 1. That our high schools gradually be re-organized on this basis.
 - 2. That the Department of Education, the Protestant Committee, and/or other provincial education authorities be requested to approve the Subject Promotion type of high school organization for the schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.
 - 3. That the above arrangements be made as soon as feasible, and particularly so that one, two, or three schools prepared to do so may re-organize for the school year 1964-65, and the remaining schools in succession thereafter." 11

The report of the Blueprint Committee was the penultimate stage in the Board's move from a system of Grade Promotion to a system of Subject Promotion in its high schools. In April 1964 the Education Sub-Committee of the Protestant Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendations of the Blueprint Committee and asked the Department of Education to permit the change to be made. By September 1965 all the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal were organized on a system of Subject Promotion.

The situation is such, then, that the largest Protestant School Board in the Province of Quebec changed its system of education in its high schools within the space of a few years, yet it had no clear cut evidence of its own on the undesirability of the Grade Promotion system. It was the relatively sudden change, unsupported by research, that prompted the present enquiry into the effect of the former system.

Hypotheses

The problem was to study the immediate achievement, in various school subjects, of students who had been required to repeat a grade in high school. The measure of achievement was the same instrument that was used to consign them to being repeaters, namely, the marks assigned by teachers for each subject.

Two major hypotheses, tested as null hypotheses, were set up to give direction to the study. These were:

- When students are called upon to repeat the work of a grade, scores in a given subject at the completion of the second year will not be significantly higher than the scores obtained at the end of the first year.
- 2. When students are called upon to repeat the work of a grade a student who passes a subject at the end of his first year in the grade will not obtain significantly higher marks in that subject at the completion of his second year.

At the time this study was made the organization of the high

schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal was one of Grade Promotion. To pass into the next grade, an overall standard had to be reached which allowed few subject failures. If such a standard was not reached, the student was asked to repeat the grade. Standards were such that a student might pass all but one or two subjects and still be required to repeat the grade. This involved the repetition of all subjects, regardless of whether the student had passed them or not at the end of the first year in the grade. It is clear that when students were called upon to repeat a grade it was implied - and believed - that the repetition would result in higher standards of achievement in the subjects repeated. In the Board's high schools the measure of achievement was the final composite mark that the student obtained for a subject at the end of the school year. This mark was usually in the form of a percentage, and was made up of weightings from work done in class, and from any examination that had been taken during the year.

Before the hypotheses an be considered, in the light of the data that has been collected, a number of preliminary steps are necessary. The background of ^Grade Promotion in North America will be examined, as will the development of doubts regarding its efficiency and the consequent development of the Subject Promotion system. In a like manner the educational systems of some other major countries will be examined, to determine whether or not they encountered similar problems in the course of their development. Finally, it will

be necessary to describe in some detail the operation of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, its development, and its relationship to the Province of Quebec in educational matters. In particular, the manner in which the former system of Grade Promotion was operated by the Board will be examined.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

North America

The development of education prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century need not concern us at any length. The earliest settlements in the United States had, of necessity, been highly concentrated and localized, and the schools had developed accordingly. The passing of the need for people to cluster together, and the opening up of the continent during the eighteenth century, produced a more scattered population and a different educational problem. This era produced the "moving" school and the establishment of district schools within a community so that the school might be near an increasingly scattered population.

The schools of the early nineteenth century tended to be small, usually consisting of one room and one teacher, who coped as best she could with all the children, regardless of their age or level of ability. These schools were of necessity ungraded. The growth of larger communities and cities led to the establishment of graded schools. These schools became large enough for students to be divided into groups, according to their age, and to be taught as a unit. The efforts of Horace Mann (1796-1859) and of Henry Barnard (1811-1900) to consolidate the elementary schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut respectively were influential, as was their advocacy of grading in schools¹. In 1840 Horace Mann was advocating examinations as a basis for promotion from one grade to another. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century there was, in the United States, free and universal education, operating on a Grade Promotion system.² It is noteworthy that this trend towards consolidation in the United States has not ceased, indeed they are currently in the midst of much reorganization that was stimulated by Conant's recent comments on secondary education.³ The trend is also evident in Canada, where presently, and within the last twenty years, virtually every Province has taken steps to reorganize its public school system. This reorganization has inevitably involved the consolidation of small school boards into larger administrative units.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the elementary schools in the United States were organized into eight grades. At the same time a growing demand for public secondary education led to the establishment of an increasing number of secondary schools, which naturally were organized on a grade system, since they developed from the elementary system. A ladder system of education was developed in the United States with the advent of public secondary schools. That

¹ E. H. Wilds, "Common School Movement", <u>Encyclopedia of Modern</u> <u>Education</u>, H. W. Rivlin (ed.) (The Philosophical Library of New York City, 1943), pp. 156-167.

² Ibid.

³ J. B. Conant, <u>The American High School Today: A First Report to</u> <u>Interested Citizens</u>. (New York: McGraw Hill Publishing Co., 1959).

it should have been a graded system may have resulted, as Bunker⁴ has suggested, from the influence that the German system of classifying pupils had upon United States education, and from a desire to classify levels of instruction within schools.

The development of education in Canada was in some ways similar to that which occurred in the United States. Since the British North America Act of 1867, education has been a provincial or local matter, so that its development has varied from Province to Province, as it has from State to State in the United States. Compared with the United States, changes in Canada have tended to be a little slower, but the growth of a graded system of education was akin to that which occurred in its neighbour. Phillips⁵ traces the growth of the graded system and shows that by 1870 the fully graded elementary school was to be found in most cities and towns of Canada. As secondary schools developed they instigated grades, though the number of these offered in a school varied between Provinces, being dependent upon the entrance requirements of the universities in particular Provinces⁶. By the twentieth century there was, in Canada, a general system of elementary and secondary education organized on a graded, ladder system. Fhillips' comment in summing up the evolution of the graded system in Canada is equally applicable to the United States:

> "In the latter half of the nineteenth century the graded elementary school

⁴ F. F. Bunker, <u>Reorganization of the Public School System</u>, (U.S. Bureau of Educ. Bulletin, 1916) No. 8.

⁵ C. E. Phillips, <u>The Development of Education in Canada</u> (Toronto: W. J. Gage, 1957), p. 194 6 Thid p. 205

evolved and secondary schools became the second section of an educational ladder. Secondary education then increased in length and became more like an extension of the common school." 7

The schools of North America were, at the turn of the century, organized on the assumption that a student would make the normal agegrade progress through school. That is to say, in one year's attendance he would complete one unit or grade level of work. The assumption, however, was erroneous, for it became apparent that many students were not progressing at the normal rate. A small number was <u>accelerated</u>, or accomplished more than one grade in one year, while a much larger number was <u>retarded</u>, which meant they were taking, or had taken, more than one year to complete a grade satisfactorily. It was this retardation, and the consequent number of repeaters, that gave rise to concern and stimulated questions about the efficiency of the operation of schools in the United States.

Criticism of graded schools and their promotion practices arose within a short time of their being generally established. This criticism began to crystallize at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1904 W. H. Maxwell, the superintendent of New York City Schools, included in his annual report an age-grade study that put into focus the large number of over-age students there were in the various grades.⁸ The publication of age-grade

7 7 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 213.

⁸ W. H. Maxwell, <u>Sixth Annual Report of the City Superintendent</u> of Schools (New York, 1904) pp. 42-49.

tables was followed by other superintendents elsewhere, and may well have stimulated Thorndike's study⁹ made in 1907. In this study Thorndike drew attention to the number of students who were eliminated, or dropper-out, from school before graduation, and he suggested strongly that grade repetition was one of the main 10 causes of this. Ayres made similar points when he spoke of the numbers of over-age students in classes and the difficulties that their presence created.

In 1908 the United States Bureau of Education made a census of children in school and the data collected was analyzed by Strayer,¹¹ who reported in 1911. As Thorndike had done, Strayer drew attention to the fact that the various grade levels were full of students who were one, two, three or even four years over age. In his conclusion, Strayer urged the changing of the curriculum to allow each child to work to the maximum of his capacity and to secure, while in school, training that would fit him for his life's work.

The criticisms of the Grade Promotion organization made during the first decade of this century did not go unheeded in the United States. In the years that followed more adaptable curricula were

⁹**E.** L. Thorndike, <u>The Elimination of Pupils from School</u> (Washington: U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 4, 1907).

¹⁰ L. P. Ayres, <u>Laggards in our Schools</u>, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1909).

¹¹ G. D. Strayer, Age and Grade Census of Schools and Colleges (Washington: U. S. Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 5, 1911).

introduced. The increased use of standardised tests showed clearly the wide variation of ability and schievement found in students of any one grade. This led to attempts to form homogeneous groups within the grade. These changes tended to modify the evils on which Thorndike and ^Strayer had focused attention. Kline¹², reporting in 1933, was able to show, in a fellow-up of Thorndike's study, that elimination from school by the ninth grade had dropped from 81.7 per cent between 1900 and 1904 to 39.6 per cent between 1918 and 1929. Similarly, Wifencher¹³ reported a reduction in the number of students over age in the New York City elementary schools from 39.1 per cent in 1904 to 15.4 per cent in 1934.

From its early days the secondary school in the United States moved away from the package promotion system of the elementary schools to a system of promotion by subject. Curriculum development was slower in coming, and during the first two decades of this century college preparatory requirements still dominated the curriculum. Change was hastened by the First World War and in 1918

¹² E. J. Kline, "Significant Changes in the Curve of Elimination since 1900", <u>Journal of Educational Research</u>, Volume 26 (1953), pp. 608-616.

E. A. Wifencher and H. G. Campbell, Statistical reference data relating to problems of over-ageness, educational retardation, nonprometica, 1903-34, (New York: Research and Statistics Dept., Board of Education, Publication No. 28, 1937).

the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education¹⁴ recommended that free electives be taken by pupils in accordance with individual aptitudes or special interests. The Commission was thinking of the development of both vocational and non-vocational curricula.

The more enlightened school boards reacted favourably to the ¹⁵ Commission's report. Writing in the 1930's, Koos¹⁵ found that the rigid single type curriculum had largely disappeared, apart from small schools in rural areas, and that most schools offered a system of "core" subjects (normally English, and American History) plus a variety of electives.

Failure when it occurred in the secondary school was of a different nature from that in the elementary school, for the student was not failed or promoted on the general year's work, as in the elementary schools, but was judged on each subject separately. Today in the United States failure still exists in the secondary schools, but the student is able to move ahead even in the subject he failed, by taking the subject the following year

14 National Education Association Commission on Reorganizing Secondary Education, <u>Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education</u>, (Washington: U. S. Office of Education Bulletin No. 35, 1918).

¹⁵ L. V. Koos, <u>The Reorganization of Secondary Education</u>, (Washington: U. S. Office of Education Bulletin No. 17, 1932).

at a less demanding level. It is in this manner that repetition is avoided.

Repetition still exists in the elementary schools of the United States, but in the face of criticism, some of which has already been mentioned, it has for years been a declining practice. Writing in 1941, Saunders¹⁶ summarized research and comments on failure and the repetition of grades, and concluded that there was little to be said in favour of repetition. Specifically he noted that:

- 1. Non-promotion of pupils to assure mastery of subject matter is not a justifiable procedure. Many children who are not promoted learn less than they would have learned had they been advanced to the next grade.
- 2. Non-promotion does not result in homogeneity of achievement within a grade.
- 3. Non-promotion cannot be justified in terms of discipline administered to the child or to his parents.
- 4. Non-promotion usually intensifies emotional instability of children.
- 5. Non-promotion because of inadequate mentality, insufficient attendance, imperfect health, or lack of emotional stability is not based on valid causes or reasons.
- Non-promotion is an admission of inefficient teaching, inappropriate administrative practices,

¹⁶ C. M. Saunders, <u>Promotion or Failure for the Elementary</u> <u>School Pupil</u>? (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1941).

and inadequate educational planning.

7. Non-promotion has no place in a school in which children are properly motivated and work to the limit of their individual capacities. Children who do not work to such a degree show signs of maladjustment which should become a challenge to the school, to the home and to the community. 17

In the face of such criticism, the failure rate in elementary schools has continued to fall, although repetition is still permitted by most states of the United States. The general emphasis, however, is firmly upon automatic promotion, and such repetition as there is is mainly confined to the Grade 1 level. Currently there is much interest in the ungraded type of organization, especially at the primary level (Grades 1-111). Even where non-promotion is an accepted practice, greater attention is now paid to the interest and welfare of individual students. Social promotions are now frequently made to avoid seemingly endless repeating.

In Canada, changes have been slower in coming. The emphasis upon completing grade standards before promotion is found in Canada to a far greater extent than in the United States. Only in recent years has the idea of automatic promotion in the elementary schools found acceptance¹⁸. The elementary schools in most of

17 Ibid., p. 44

¹⁸ Province of Quebec, <u>Regulation I</u>, Department of Education, 1965.

Canada still operate on a rigid lock-step system, with definite requirements for promotion to the next grade, and Katz¹⁹ has noted that the question "Who is to fail?" is still asked by teachers in Canada at the end of each school year.

In marked contrast to the United States, the secondary schools in Canada have been slow to widen their curriculum. During the first quarter of the twentieth century there was little change in the academic curriculum, and secondary schools adhered closely 20 to the requirements that universities set down for admission. They also followed the elementary pattern of Grade Promotion, so that failure and drop-out rates were high. In 1924, an Alberta curricultum committee recommended promotion by subject, at the suggestion of educators who had visited the United States, but their ideas were not well received by the general populace or the more traditionally minded teachers.²¹ It was not until the 1930's that first British Columbia and then Manitoba began to operate on a promotion by subject system. Even today most of Eastern Canada still does not have Subject Promotion, while the two most populous provinces, Ontario and Quebec, have but recently introduced it. In short, the typical Canadian secondary school has only in the last decade started to become a really comprehensive school, offering

¹⁹ ¹⁹ J. Katz, <u>Elementary Education in Canada</u> (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961).

²⁰ C. E. Phillips, <u>Op. Cit</u>., p. 443
²¹ Ibid., p. 444

courses for all types of students.

England

The development of education in England was, until the end of the nineteenth century, largely a history of private and parochial endeavours. The political climate of that time did not favour government intervention in the lives of the people. Consequently, the first half of the nineteenth century saw the development of the private rather than the public sector of education. The government was content to provide monies to voluntary societies attempting to build schools. Gradually the efforts of men like Dr. Kay, the first secretary of the Committee of the Privy Council set up in 1839 to distribute the government grants for education, resulted in greater governmental involvement. In 1856 a Department of Education was created. In 1870 came an Elementary Education Act, that for the first time did not consider education as an adjunct to some other legislation, as in the earlier Factory Acts. This Education Act allowed for the creation of school boards, particularly where there were no voluntary schools, and introduced a measure of compulsion into schooling. 22

By the turn of the century, elementary education had been made free. Two years later, the Education Act of 1902 placed education in the control of the local County, or County Borough

W. H. G. Armytage, Four Hundred Years of English Education (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 113-114.

authorities; and made provision for the establishment of secondary schools.

Parallel development had taken place in the private sector of education. Traditionally the wealthy had educated their sons privately, finishing their education at Oxford or Cambridge, or at one of the European universities. The nineteenth century now saw a great expansion in private education, particularly that supported by the growing middle class. The century also saw the founding of many "public" schools, and the consequent increase in the number of private elementary schools designed to prepare boys for entry into the "public" schools.

With the rise of the Labour Party between 1900 and 1925 came an increased interest on the part of the government in education. In 1926, the Hadow report set the pattern for English publicly maintained education to the present day ²³. It urged the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen years. More important, it introduced the break, at the age of eleven years, between elementary and secondary school. This served to put increased emphasis upon secondary education, and gave recognition to the idea that public education should be for all, something more than the learning of the "Three R's".²⁴ The creation of the break at age

²³Great Britain. <u>Education 1900-1950</u>, Report of the Ministry of Education 1950 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950).

A. J. P. Taylor, <u>English History 1914-45</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 211.

eleven led in turn to the eleven-plus examinations. Depending on the results of this examination a child might, or might not, be able to secure a place in a Grammar School, the curriculum of such schools being exclusively concerned with preparation for University.

The Education Act of 1944 carried further the development of education in England. Secondary education was made free, while the eleven-plus examination and streaming to Grammar, Technical, or Secondary Modern school became a reality. Subsequently, a few local authorities developed Comprehensive Schools that included all three types of education, and under the present administration these are being encouraged.

The organization of education in England removed to a large extent the problems of failure and retardation that were present in education in the United States. Prior to the coming of secondary education for all, a child received elementary education under a philosophy that believed in moving him forward each year. Pupils first attended school at five or six years of age, and from there progressed steadily with their age group. Conditions did vary from authority to authority; in some, students lacking in ability or interest were retained in a lower grade until reaching school leaving age. The arrival of universal secondary education might have created promotional problems, but they were avoided by
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streaming pupils into different types of school. At the secondary school the pupil, once again, progressed steadily, moving up each year with his age group, and repeating only in the event of severe sickness and absence from school.

This absence of repeating in the English education system, as has been suggested, may be due in part to the particular philosophy of educators. More practically, the pressure of numbers in the elementary schools made the idea of retaining a student for an extra year virtually out of the question. To some extent the same was true of the secondary schools, particularly the Secondary Modern Schools, which the great majority of secondary pupils attended. In addition, the streaming at eleven plus, on the basis of ability and interest, and the subsequent attendance at different types of schools, encouraged the belief that in any one school the students were a homogeneous group, and could therefore all progress at the same rate.

A relatively small amount of repeating occurs in England associated with particular examinations. The establishment of the School Certificate Examination in 1917 led to some pupils repeating

²⁵ Great Britain, <u>Secondary School Examination other than</u> <u>the GCE</u>, Ministry of Education (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958), p. 5

the examination year. The examination was of a group type and a certificate was not awarded unless all the subjects in a group of subjects were passed. These examinations concerned only the Grammar and private schools, and it was only a very small number of students who on failing, repeated the whole year. The report of the Norwood Committee in 1943 was critical of the "group" nature of the School Certificate, and this led in 1951 to the creation and operation of the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.), with Ordinary and Advanced levels, as a "subject" examination. Repeating was now done by subject only. Some retaking of the examination still exists, but this does not necessarily mean that a year's work has been gone over for a second time. At present some students take subjects of the G.C.E. at Ordinary level and at Advanced level more than once. In 1963, for instance, the Joint Matriculation Board reported that 40 per cent (911) of the 'A' level candidates in 1956 had taken 'A' level examinations the previous year, and 793 of these were repeating the same subject.

In the past, private secondary school students have occasionally been held back for a year and placed in a "remove" class. In theory they had failed and were not promoted, but in fact

J. A. Petch, <u>G.C.E. and Degree</u>, Part 2 (Manchester: Joint Matriculation Board, 1963), p. 89.

such students received special attention in weak subjects, and did most merely repeat the previous year's work. Often a student was placed in such a class for social reasons, when it was felt that he required an additional year before taking university entrance examinations. This whole practice has, however, tended to be discontinued in recent years.

For England, repeating and the consequent problem of overage students has not been a major issue. In comparison with Canada or the United States, the matter has provoked little discussion and less research.

France

France, like many other countries, did not begin to develop a system of public education until the nineteenth century. Prior to the Revolution, education had been in the hands of the church, and although in 1790 church schools were confiscated, nothing was done to establish a system of public education. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Napoleon established a system of public secondary schools (lycées), supported and controlled by the national government, and soon after similar secondary schools (collèges) were established by local communities. However, the Guizot Law of 1833 is generally taken to mark the beginning of the public school system of France.²⁷

From its earliest days, public education in France has been characterized by a marked degree of centralization, and an uneasy relationship with private schools and with the church.²⁸ Just as in England public education might have advanced quicker had it not been for the prevailing laissez-faire political doctrines, so in France the development of education was hindered by recurring quarrels with the church over the privileges of private education.

²⁷ G. A. Male, <u>Education in France</u> (Washington: U. S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare, Office of Education, 1963) pp.7-9.

W. R. Fraser, <u>Education and Society in Modern France</u>, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 59-78.

The law of 1833, although it did not make education compulsory, required that each commune establish a public elementary school, and further required that larger towns make some provision for schooling beyond the basic elementary level. Teacher training schools were established, and by 1848 there were 72 such institutions. At the same date the school enrollment stood at just over three and one-half million students. Further progress was not made until the coming of the Third Republic, when, in the face of opposition from the Catholic Church and conservative elements, who were opposed to mass education organized by the state, much legislation was enacted. Fees were abolished, and compulsory schooling from six years to thirteen years of age was established, while under Jules Ferry, the Minister of Education, the government provided thousands of schools.^{29,30}

By the twentieth century the basic organization of the public education system had been established. The first half of the century was memorable for the struggles between Church and State, rather than for any development of the system, although there was some expansion in secondary education, and the school leaving age was raised to fourteen.

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G. A. Male, Op. Cit., p. 17

Institut Pédagogique Nationale, <u>L'Enseignement en</u> France, (Paris: 1964), pp. 5-6.

The student in France enters the elementary school at approximately six years of age. Prior to this he may have attended an école maternelle or nursery school. The progress through school would be normal, repeaters not being a feature of the system. During his twelfth year of age, the student may apply to enter an academic secondary school, and if successful will attend a lycée or collège. If he is unsuccessful, the student had a number of possibilities open to him. He may enter a continuation school (Cours Complémentaire) leading to the "Brevet", and possibly further study at a technical school. Alternatively, he may remain in a continuation of the elementary school leading to a Certificat d'Aptitude Professionelle at the age of fifteen years. This may in turn lead to further study at a technical school. Entrance to the lycées and collèges, although no longer by examination, is fiercely competitive. In effect, France has a tripartite system of secondary education; this, like that in England, has tended to discriminate against lower socio-economic 32 groups

In contrast to Canada, the educational system of France is such that repeating is not a common experience. As in England, a student progresses through school with his age group. Students move

³¹ L'Enseignement en France, Op. Cit., pp. 15-28
 ³² G. W. Male, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, p. 69

on each year or, particularly in rural areas, drop out of school. Even prior to 1959, when there was a formal entrance examination for entrance to a lycée, the student could not "repeat", since to spend an extra year in school would have made him too old to sit for the examination. In the lycées and collèges there is some repeating associated with local examinations. Students who fail Part I of the Baccalauréat may repeat the eleventh year and take the examination again, and the same thing can occur with Part II at the end of the twelfth year.³³ Generally speaking, however, students drop out when they fail, or transfer to some other form of schooling. Repeating also occurs among students who have completed the Baccalauréat and are attempting to enter the Grandes Ecoles. A competitive examination is involved in entering these, and there has been repetition associated with this examination.

Repeating a year of work, and the consequent presence of over-age students in classes, is not a feature of the French education system.

³³ Institut Pédagogique Nationale, <u>Information Statistiques</u>, No. 40-41 (Paris: May-June 1962), p. 201.

The Soviet Union

The Russian educational system before the 1917 Revolution was in some ways similar to the system found in other European countries at the end of the nineteenth century. Essentially, the system was designed for the few. In 1915, only seven per cent (564,000) of the school population attended secondary school, and many of the peasantry received no schooling at all. The Czarist Government and the other pillar of the establishment, the Russian Orthodox Church, were opposed to any system of mass education. Consequently, only those belonging to elite groups, and destined for the government service or professional careers, received an education.³⁴ The 1917 Revolution was so complete that the development of education in the USSR may be traced from that date.

During the 1920's, the development of education in the USSR progressed slowly, waiting for the most part upon a supply of teachers and administrators who could, and would, carry out the wishes of the government. The earliest changes were in curriculum, while the organization remained based upon the pre-revolution pattern. The number of students attending school increased enormously as the USSR attempted, in the space of thirty years, to turn a largely

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Education in the USSR (Washington: U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, No. 14, 1957).

illiterate and uneducated people into an educated and powerful nation. To accomplish this task, education was made free and there was an extensive development of secondary education, as well as the more basic primary level. By 1955 the Soviet Union was both a powerful and educated nation.

In 1958 there was a major reorganization of Soviet education following a period of criticism. This was climaxed by Khrushchev's accusation that the schools were separate from life, and tended towards abstractionism and verbalism. Henceforth there was to be a greater effort to foster a true Communist morality, and to train people for a specific job.³⁵ The reforms were designed to meet the growing demand for ordinary labour and for persons with a modicum of skill.

Under the present organization, school attendance begins at seven years of age, in one of three types of school, depending upon what is available in the area. The student may attend a complete ll-year school (Complete Secondary Labour Technical). Alternatively he may attend an 8-year school (Incomplete Secondary Labour Technical), going on from there to further schooling similar to the ll-year school. Finally, a student from a rural area may first attend a 4-year primary school and then move to one of the previously mentioned types of school. Eight years of schooling is compulsory. A small

³⁵ G. S. Counts, <u>Khrushchev and the Central Committee Speakn</u> on <u>Education</u>, Studies in <u>Education No. 2</u> (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1959).

number of students attend boarding schools, which are ll-year schools. Higher education comes either immediately after ll years of schooling, or a period of work may intervene.³⁶

Non-promotion, and the repeating of a year of work, is a feature of the Soviet education system. This was particularly true before the reorganization that began to take effect after 1958. The Soviet system was, and still is, fiercely competitive with high standards. Failure, dropping out of school, and "repeating", all occurred quite frequently.³⁷ Dropping out of school was a greater problem than "repeating", but it has been suggested that in the middle 1950's a repeater group of ten per cent of the school population was the national average, most of this occurring in the important "terminal" grades (4th, 7th and 10th)³⁸.

Since 1958 there has been an increased effort to get more students to complete eleven years of school. Involved in this effort has been a recognition that "repeating" is bad in itself and is closely associated with dropping out from school in the USSR. Thus in 1961, P. Koval'chuck noted that:

"Repeaters develop into backward children

³⁷ <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 147-150
³⁸ <u>Education in the USSR</u>, <u>Op. Cit</u>., p. 83.

³⁶ N. De Witt, <u>Education and Professional Employment in the</u> <u>USSR</u> (Washington: National Science Foundation, 1961), pp. 21-35

who later drop out of school. In 1958-59 school year about 80% of the pupils who stopped attending classes and then dropped 39 out of school were such backward children".

DeWitt, writing in 1961, thought it probable that promotion and retention rates would not increase significantly in the early 1960's as compared with the 1950's.⁴⁰ However, articles in 1962 by Korolev⁴¹ and in 1963 by Tokareva⁴², and by Momoszon⁴³, suggest that non-promotion and repeating are being attacked with some success by Soviet educators. The articles in the journal may only reflect the interest of the American translators and editors, but it would appear that the matter is of some concern in the USSR. What in North America is called Grade Promotion is in operation in Soviet primary schools, and in the lower grades of the secondary level. A student fails if his work is unacceptable in more than two subjects.

"Repeating" is a feature of the education system in the USSR. In recent years it has been recognized as a problem and the

40 N. De Witt, <u>Op. Cit</u>, p. 150.

⁴¹ F. F. Korolev, "Ways and Means of Overcoming Repeating and Drop-Outs", <u>Soviet Education</u>, Vol. 4, No. 10, pp. 51-59.

⁴² E. G. Tokareva, "Three Years Without Repeaters", <u>Soviet</u> Education, Vol. 5, No. 6, pp. 9-15

⁴³ E. Momoszon, "A Successful Experiment in Overcoming Failures and Non-Promotion", Soviet Education, Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 19-25.

number of students involved in "repeating" is falling. It is the policy of the Soviet government to eliminate non-promotion completely. In the summer of 1963, the Minister of Education, E. I. Afanasenko, addressed the plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee and called for greater efforts to improve the 44 quality of learning and to eliminate non-promotion.

⁴⁴ E. I. Afanasenko, "The decisions of the June plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee and the tasks of the Public Education Bodies", <u>Soviet Education</u>, Vol. 6, No. 5, pp. 3-13.

The Province of Quebec

Quebec, or New France as it was then known, was first settled at the beginning of the seventeenth century. From its earliest days education was firmly in the hands of the Church, which had the active support and help of the temporal authorities. The clergy was in control of, and responsible for, all levels of instruction, from the village school to rudimentary instruction in trades, and the seminaries. Education at this time was primarily designed to train the people in the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, so insuring the spiritual salvation of the individual. All was subordinated to this aim, and in this respect education was thorough and successful.⁴⁵

In 1763 New France was ceded to the English, but life in the area was slow to change. The Quebec Act of 1774 guaranteed the free exercise of the Roman Catholic religion, and there were no immediate changes in the organization of education in the area. The Church, however, ceased to receive financial support from the government and this caused some difficulties. In the years following 1787, there was a brief attempt by the government to carry out a policy of centralization and assimilation, but this failed in the face of opposition from the Roman Catholic Church and the general populace. Returning to decentralization, the Legislative Assembly in 1829 passed

45 C. E. Phillips, Op. Cit., p. 22

"An Act for the Encouragement of Elementary Education". This led to the establishment by 1835 of over one thousand governmentsubsidized elementary schools. However, many of these closed when government support ceased in 1836.

Education was developing slowky. State intervention and responsibility were becoming an accepted fact; at the same time the principles of decentralization and variety in education were evolving.⁴⁷ By 1867, the dominant characteristics of the education system were becoming evident. Local school commissions had been created and the principle of dissent realized. During the same period, the responsibilities of the State towards éducation were recognized in the creation of the Council of Public Instruction, and a willingness to share with the local populations the cost of education.

The British North America Act contained important statements on education. It gave the provinces of Canada exclusive jurisdiction in educational matters, and it guaranteed the rights and privileges recognized by existing law with regard to confessional schools.

47 <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 6-7

48 Great Britain, British North America Act (1867), Section 93

⁴⁶ Quebec, <u>Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education</u> in the Province of Quebec, Part I (1963), p. 6.

From this point, education in Quebec rapidly polarized into two separate and independent systems. Two years after the British North America Act, the Council of Public Instruction in Quebec resolved itself into two committees, Roman Catholic and Protestant. These committees became separate Councils of Public Instruction, and after a further Act in 1875 ceased to report back to the original Council, which in effect passed out of existence for the next fifty years. From 1875 on, Roman Catholics and Protestants operated independently, the separation existing at all levels and becoming more rigid with the passage of time.⁴⁹ In this manner there developed in Quebec two separate and different systems of education, which must be considered one by one.

The French language Roman Catholic system developed slowly in a conservative manner, mindful of its traditions and dominated by the thinking of the Church. In so far as development followed any model, the system was roughly patterned after that found in France; with Primaire Elémentaire (Grades I-VII), Primaire Complémentaire (Grades VIII and IX), and Primaire Supérieur (Grades X-XII).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ G. Desjardins, <u>Les Ecoles du Quebec</u> (Montreal: Collection Ma Paroisse No. 1, 1950), p. 72.

⁴⁹ <u>Report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry on Education</u> in the Province of Quebec, Op. Cit., p. 16.

Academic secondary education was very largely in the hands of the private, but government-aided, Classical Colleges. The second quarter of the twentieth century saw the development of Trade and Art Schools, but education for the majority was a matter of attending elementary school. School attendance was not made compulsory until 1943, and this did not assist the development of secondary education.

Since 1950 the Roman Catholic system has been changing and developing its organization rapidly. The organization is more in line with that found in other parts of Canada, with a primary course (Grades I-VII) and a secondary course (Grades VIII-XII).^{51, 52} The major change has been the development of secondary education and the offering of a wide variety of courses at that level.

Repeating a year's work is a feature of the French-speaking Roman Catholic system.⁵³ Approximately thirteen per cent of the students are retained for a second year in the elementary grade levels. Failing and consequent "repeating" is highest in Grade VII, which is now the last year of the elementary cycle.⁵⁴

51 G. E. Carter, <u>The Catholic Public Schools of Quebec</u>, (Montreal: Gage, 1957), p. 53.

⁵² Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, <u>A Graphic Presentation</u> of Canadian Education (1961), p. 9.

53 Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, <u>Student Progress</u> Through the Schools, (1962), pp. 26-27, 30-32.

⁵⁴ Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, <u>Survey of Elementary</u> and <u>Secondary Education 1960-61</u>, p. 54

The Protestant system of education differs markedly from the French Catholic, and resembles more the systems found in the United States. Development followed the common pattern, with little growth of secondary education until well into the twentieth century, although the High School of Montreal was opened as early as 1846. A difficulty for the Protestants was their small numbers in some areas, which made it difficult to operate small schools efficiently.⁵⁵ Consolidation of school boards, both on and off the Island of Montreal, improved matters financially and administratively. The vast majority of Protestant (non Roman Catholic) students are found within the metropolitan Montreal region, and a separate section is devoted to that area.

In the Protestant system Grades I-VII constitute the elementary grades and are usually taught in one building. Grades VIII-XI constitute the secondary school grades and are normally taught in a separate building. Students who obtain the required marks on the provincially administered Grade XI examinations may enter University, each of which is a private institution. As in the Roman Catholic system the course of study is laid down by a division of the Quebec Department of Education, in this case the Protestant section. The secondary schools of the Protestant system have, until recently,

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⁵⁵ W. P. Percival, Across the Years (Montreal: Gage, 1946), p. 74

offered only academic college preparatory courses, so that many students did not get into the secondary schools, or, once there, failed to complete the course.

Failure of a grade and the consequent "repeating" of a year's work is a feature of the Protestant system in Quebec. The policy of all school boards until recently was to insist that a student obtain a satisfactory standing in a group of subjects before he was promoted. This was the rule in both elementary and secondary schools, and the policy was, in fact, laid down by successive Protestant Committee 57, 58regulations dating back in 1861.

As early as 1902, Professor Adams noted the presence of over-age students in various grades.⁵⁹ The fast that school attendance was not compulsory in Quebec until 1945 may have kept down the number of "repeating" students, students preferring to drep out of school rather than repeat a year. The 1952 report on Promotion Policy by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal⁶⁰ gives evidence that in recent years promotion policy and "repeaters" have

⁵⁶ <u>Student Progress Through the Schools, Op. Cit.</u>, p. 28, Table III.
⁵⁷ E. Owen, personal communication.
⁵⁸ W. P. Peroival, personal communication.
⁵⁹ J. Adams, <u>The Protestant School System in the Province of Quebec</u>, (Mongreal: Remouf Publishing Co., 1902), pp. 70-74.

Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, Promotion Policy in the Elementary School (Montreal: 1952).

been cause for concern. In 1960-61, approximately tan per cent of students in the elementary grades failed to be promoted. The number of repeaters was highest in Grades I, VII and XI. ^{61, 62} The large number of repeaters in Grade VII may have existed because a satisfactory pass was required in that grade before a student could enter high school. Similarly, Grade XI was the grade from which a High School Leaving Certificate could be obtained and students might repeat the year, attempting to obtain the Certificate, or University Entrance.

⁶¹ Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, <u>Survey of Elementary</u> <u>And Secondary Education</u>, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, p. 54

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Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, <u>Student Progress</u> <u>Through the School</u>, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, pp. 30-31.

The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal

Until 1925 there existed in the central part of the Island of Montreal eleven separate Protestant School Boards of Commissioners or Trustees . Several of these boards were having difficulty in finding sufficient monies to properly maintain the Protestant schools; in contrast, other boards were having no trouble in meeting their commitments. A Commission appointed to investigate the matter recommended that the resources of the municipalities should be pooled, and allocation made according to the needs of each. Thus came into existence the Montreal Protestant Central Board.

Created to have control over revenue and to equalize the distribution of monies, the Montreal Protestant Central Board gradually found itself involved in larger questions of educational policy. The idea of a central board discharging all administrative duties became increasingly attractive to educators. In 1957 such a central board was established, with the creation of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, which discharged all the administrative duties on behalf of the constituent local Boards.⁶⁵

In 1962 the Board operated ninety-eight schools. The

⁶³ Brief to the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education,
 (Montreal: The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, 1962), p.1.
 ⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 3.
 ⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

elementary schools covered Kindergarten to Grade VII (inclusive) and the high schools Grades VIII to XI (inclusive). There were some exceptions to this plan which are unimportant here, except to note that Grade VIII was occasionally taught in the elementary schools for lack of accommodation in the appropriate high school building.

The curriculum of the elementary schools was, and still is, similar to that found in other parts of Canada and in the United States. The basic skills of Reading, Language, Spelling, Arithmetic, and Handwriting constitute the backbone of the curriculum.⁶⁶ French was emphasized, and beginning in Grade III was pursued seriously and systematically. Normally a student would enter the elementary school at the beginning of his seventh year. Promotion in the elementary school was dependent upon a satisfactory level of achievement in a particular grade. The decision to promote a student from one grade to the next depended upon a general assessment of the student's work over the year, and not on the results of one examination. In 1952 the Protestant School Board of Montreal produced a report on Promotion Policy in the Elementary School which stated:

1. The ultimate deciding factor in making promotions must be the individual child's educational welfare.

66 I<u>bid</u>., p. 15.

2. Under a flexible policy the use of promotion becomes in the final analysis an administrative device for placing a pupil where he will have the best opportunity to progress. This point of view obviously does not mean that all pupils will automatically be moved to a higher grade each year. Some will be retained in a grade for a second year....⁶⁷

The report indicates that the policy of not promoting some students, and retaining them in a grade for a second year, was an accepted feature of the Board's elementary schools; supported both by teachers and the regulations of the Protestant Committee. It is clear that the decision to have a student repeat a grade was made on the assumption that he would do better in that grade during his second, or third year.

A student entered high school and secondary education upon successfully completing Grade VII. In 1962 the courses offered in the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal were almost exclusively academic. In a few of the Board's schools a non-academic practical course was offered. This was a three-year course for students who had shown very limited ability in elementary school.⁶⁸ In one school a similar three-year course for pupils of

- 67 <u>Promotion Policy in the Elementary School</u>, Op. Cit., p.11
- 68 Brief to the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education, Op. Cit., pp. 28-29.

rather more ability was in operation.⁶⁹ Only a very small number of students were enrolled in these courses and they did not concern this study. For the great majority of students in academic streams, the course of study during the first two years of high school (Grades VIII and IX) was largely a common one.⁷⁰ To gain promotion from each of these grades, the student had to obtain an overall average of 65 per cent on the year's work. In addition, the student was allowed to fail no more than two subjects, the pass mark being 60 per cent.⁷¹ If a student failed to attain the required standard, he had to repeat the grade.

In Grades X and XI a wider choice of course was available to students, but all courses were predominantly academic in content. Promotion from Grade X was conditional upon an overall average of 60 per cent with no more than one or two failures in individual subjects, the pass mark being 50 per cent. In Grade XI, to obtain a High School Leaving Certificate, a student had to pass French, English and four other subjects, with pass mark at 50 per cent in each subject.⁷²

69 O. E. White, "Let's Salvage the Under-Achievers", <u>The</u> <u>Educational Record</u> (Vol. LXXIX, No. 2, 1963), pp. 96-110.

⁷⁰ Brief to the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education, Op. Cit., p. 20

⁽¹ Quebec, Department of Education, <u>Handbook for Teachers</u> in Protestant Schools, (1957), p. 14

72 Ibid., p. 9

Notwithstanding the passing marks just indicated, promotion, or non-promotion, at the Grade VIII, IX and X level was supposedly at the discretion of the high school principal, whose decision was governed by what he considered to be the individual student's educational welfare.⁷³ However, reports of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics^{74, 75, 76} and of the Board itself showed that many students failed to gain promotion and subsequently dropped out of school or became "repeaters". It would seem, from the number of repeaters shown in Table I, that high school principals considered repeating to be in the best interests of large numbers of students:

TABLE 177

Total number of students repeating a grade in the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.

YEAR	GRADE VIII	GRADE IX	GRADE X	GRADE XI	TOTAL
1962	816	571	404	253	2,044
1963	812	661	537	400	2,410
1964	671	614	476	492	2,253

⁷³ D. T. Trenholm (Principal, Sir Winston Churchill High School), personal communication.

⁷⁴ <u>Survey of Elementary and Secondary Education</u>, 1959-60, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, p. 70.

75 <u>Survey of Elementary and Secondary Education</u>, 1960-61, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, p. 54.

76 Student Progress Through the Schools, Op. Cit., p. 28, Table 3.

77 Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, Curriculum Department, <u>Curriculum Data</u> (Statistics), 1962, 1963, 1964.

The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal recognized that the number of "repeaters" was a problem. In 1958, two summer schools were established, and students who had failed one or two academic subjects were urged to attend, thus reducing the chance of their being required to repeat a year's work immediately or in 78 the future. Similarly, the Board's feeling that a system of Subject Promotion in the high schools would reduce the number of "repeaters", was one of the factors that led to such a system being generally adopted in 1965. ^{79,80} However, up to and including 1964, student failure and retention in a grade was a feature of the schools operated by the Board.

⁷⁸ Brief to the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education,
 Op. Cit., p. 21.
 ⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 33-36.
 ⁸⁰ Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, Curriculum Department, Subject Promotion - Evaluation (1964), p. 3.

Conclusions

The practice of failing students and demanding repetition of a year's work is at present found to a greater extent in Canada than in any other system considered here. Most education systems contain a few students who are repeating a year's work for one reason or another. However, it is only in Canada that repeaters are found in sufficient numbers to be a noticeable feature of several provincial education systems.⁸¹

Where "repeating" has been found, in systems outside Canada, it has come to be regarded as undesirable. Hence, in the United States, where the policy of repetition was common fifty years ago, it is now something of a rarity. In the Soviet Union, the abolition of non-promotion is one of the aims of the Minister of Education. In England, and to a lesser degree in France, repeating tended to be associated with external examinations and was uncommon outside those circumstances.

In Canada the presence in the schools of large numbers of "repeaters" has been accepted as normal and desirable. Of late,

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Student Progress through the Schools, Op. Cit., pp. 30-32.

there has been a growing awareness that the practice of having students repeat a grade is wasteful.⁸² But why Canadian systems of education have been slow in following the lead of the United States in reducing the incidence of repetition is not clear. Similarly, the exact reason why one system of education has large numbers of "repeaters" while another does not, is a matter for speculation.

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Quebec, Department of Education, Regulation No. 1 (1965).

CHAPTER IV

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In 1904, W. D. Maxwell, then superintendent of New York City Schools, published in his annual report a set of age-grade tables. These tables, which showed the age of students in each grade, focused attention on the fact that many students were over-age for their grade. The great majority of these students had, at some time, failed to be promoted and so had spent a second year, or more, in one grade. Maxwell's report focused attention upon the presence of these "repeaters" in the schools.

Retardation attracted the attention of researchers, who showed that, by its very frequency, it was a serious problem. In 1907, Thermdike¹ collected data from twenty-three cities in the United ^States, obtaining information from school records and reports covering the twelve previous years. Primarily concerned with elimination from school, Thormdike found that many pupils were failing grades and being held back. He attributed these failures, and consequent repetitions, to the unsatisfactory nature of curricula, and regretted that retention to a late age did not mecessarily mean retention to a late grade, or to a valuable education. Ayers², in a widely circulated book published

1 B. L. Thorndike, <u>The Elimination of Pupils from School</u>, (Washington: U. S. Burean of Education Bullstin No. 4, 1907).

2 L. P. Ayers, Leggards in our Schools (New York: Russell Sage, 1909).

in 1909, reached conclusions similar to those of Thorndike. Studying reports from fifty-eight cities he found the practice of having students fail and repeat a grade, widespread. He also discovered the number of retarded students varied from school to school within a system, indicating the absence of a consistent promotion policy. In addition, Ayers concluded from teachers' reports, that over-page students created problems in the class, requiring special attention and making work with other students more difficult.

In 1908, the United States Bureau of Education, stimulated by the work of Thorndike and Ayers, invited a large number of schools to submit data, as of December 1908, to enable the Bureau to make a census. The data so collected from 318 school boards was analyzed by Strayer³, who published his findings in 1911. Strayer found that few students were accelerated while on the other hand the grades were full of students who were one, two, three or four years over age. No area was without over-age students and the difficulties they presented:

> ...(are)"well illustrated by indicating the number of children of each age that are to be found in a single grade in one city. Take Los Angeles for example. In the first grade there are 2 boys five years of age, 1237 six years of age, 835 seven years of age, 328 eight years of age, 95 nine years of age, 49 ten years of age, 19 eleven years of age, 8 twelve years

B. D. Strayer, <u>Age and Grade Census of Schools and Colleges</u> (Washington: U. S. Bureau of Education, Bulletin No. 5, 1911).

of age, 4 thirteen years of age, 2 fourteen years of age, and 1 fifteen years of age. In the fourth grade there are 2 boys of seven years of age, 50 of eight years of age, 306 nine years of age, 569 ten years of age, 486 eleven years of age, 287 twelve years of age, 130 thirteen years of age, 54 fourteen years of age, 14 fifteen years of age, 8 sixteen years of age, 4 seventeen years of age, and 1 eighteen years of age. A condition similar to that found in Los Angeles is characteristic of our larger cities." 4

Strayer, as others had done, indicted the unrealistic curricula of the schools as a prime cuase of retardation and elimination from school. He considered it unfair to provide only a rigid college preparatory programme and thought that the problem of the over-age student would disappear to a great extent with the advent of curricula giving each student an opportunity to do that for which he was best suited.

The attention drawn to the incidence of elimination and retardation during the first decade of the twentieth century had results. The high schools were confirmed in developing with the Subject Promotion system, which largely eliminated the practice of having students repeat a whole grade of work in all subjects. Most important was the establishment of the concept that having a student repeat a year's work should be avoided if possible. This led during the next twenty-five years to an increased interest in the homo-

> 4 Ibid., p. 103.

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geneous group, semi-annual promotions, and other devices used to care for individual difference and keep down the number of "repeaters". During this time the emphasis in research tended to be on the causes of retardation, failure and elimination, while there was a parallel development in methods of preventing and remedying maladjustments in school progress⁵.

The effectiveness of repeating a year's work was also researched, but to a much lesser extent. Writing in April 1934, 6 found that there had been little research on the educational effectiveness of repeating a year, or a semester's work. He noted that:

> "In general, teachers and administrators have assumed, perhaps as a result of tradition, that non-promotion is an unavoidable evil in school administration and thus have spent their time justifying it, finding adequate excuses or reasons for failing pupils, and putting on drives to reduce the percentage of failure. ...Perhaps everyone who bears some responsibility for the failure recorded at the end of each school term believes that certain advantages will accrue for the pupil if he repeats the grade." 7

Of three research studies mentioned by Otto as dealing with the relative effectiveness of failure, that of Klene and Branson,

5 MumA. Sumption and T.A. Phillips, "School Progress", <u>Encyclopedia of Educational Research</u> (New York: 3rd edition, 1941, Munroe Ed.)

H. J. Otto, "Failure as an Administrative Device", The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 34, 1933-34. pp. 576-589.

⁷ Ibid., p. 580

V. Klene and E. Branson, "Trial Promotion Versus Failure", Educational Research Bulletin (Los Angeles City Schools, Jan. 1929), pp.6-11

done in 1929 in Los Angeles, serves to illustrate the methodology and results. In this study a group of fifty failed students, not knowing they were taking part in an experiment, were given a trial promotion. A similar group, matched for age, intelligence, and grade placement, repeated the grade. At the end of the semester the relative performance of the two groups in educational tests (Stanford Achievement, Haggerty Reading, and Cleveland Survey-Arithmetic) was noted. The results called into question the efficacy of having students repeat a grade, indicating that students given a promotion progressed more than those repeating the grade.

The greater amount of research into the effects and results of non-promotion was related to student behaviour, and subsequent development, rather than to immediate educational effectiveness. Thus it was shown that there was a relationship between non-promotion and elimination from school. Similarly, research such as that by Haggerty⁹ in 1925, and by Coleman¹⁰ in 1930, appeared to establish the relationship between non-promotion and consequent retardation, and undesirable behaviour in school. Using different methodology the two arrived at similar findings. Haggerty examined the records of 800 elementary school students and concluded that undesirable behaviour was more frequent in those who were over-age and retarded.

⁽⁹ M. E. Haggerty, "The Incidence of Undesirable Behaviour in Public School Children," <u>Review of Educational Research</u> (September 1925), pp. 102-122.

¹⁰C. T. Coleman, "The Characteristics of Disciplinary Problem Pupils in the High Schools", School Review (1930, Vol. 38), pp. 434-442.

Coleman took 125 students known to be discipline problems and, after comparing them with a control group (matched for numbers, sex, school grade and intelligence), concluded that twice as many of the problem group had been retarded in elementary school as had the control group. In addition, he found that more than five-sixths of all the failures in high school from the two groups, came from the problem group. Such findings as these tied in with those of Farley, Frey and Garland ¹¹, who made a study of factors related to the grade progress of pupils. Taking 193 students, all aged twelve years, from two Newark, N.J. schools, they concluded that, on the basis of teachers' ratings of selected character traits, there was a probability that poor character traits were both a cause and a consequence of retardation.

Evidence that retardation had a bad effect upon the student was accumulating rapidly by the mid-1930's. But although many school boards were reducing the number of students that failed, it was thought by many teachers that the threat and reality of failure had to be kept, if scholastic standards were to be maintained. In 1935, Otto and Melby¹² attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of such a threat. Their study was conducted in four typical school systems in Illinois, and involved 192 grade II and 160 grade V

E. S. Farley, A. J. Frey and G. Garland, "Factors Related to Grade Progress of Pupils", <u>Elementary School Journal</u> (Vol. 34, 1933) pp.186-193.

H. J. Otto and E. Melby, "An Attempt to Evaluate the Threat of Failure as a Factor of Achievement", <u>Elementary School Journal</u> (Vol. 35, 1935), pp. 588-596.

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students, and a total of 18 teachers. The experimental classes in both grades were informed, often informally, that there would be no failures in their classes at the end of the semester. Each teacher of a control class informed her students, in a like manner, that anyone who did not work hard and do well would have to repeat the grade. No changes were made in the teaching situation. On the basis of standardized tests (Kuhlmann-Anderson Intelligence Test and New Stanford Achievement Tests) administered at the beginning and end of the study, Otto and Melby found no difference in achievement between the two groups. Furthermore, questioning of teachers revealed that the removal of the threat of failure did not affect the attitudes or application of the students.

Over-age students still existed in the schools in large 13 numbers during the 1930's. Writing in 1935, Otto quoted figures from a study by Mort and Featherstone, covering 36 cities, which showed that at the Grade VIII level 22.5 per cent of students were over-age. Repeating a grade was still a fairly common experience in spite of the findings of researchers. Failure and the consequent repetition of a grade was still thought by teachers¹⁴ and administrators¹⁵

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H. J. Otto, <u>Promotion Policy and Practices in Elementary</u> <u>Schools</u> (Minnesota: International Test Bureau, 1935), p. 54.

> 14 <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 20-21.

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H. J. Otto,"Failure as an Administrative Device, Op. Cit., p. 581.

to be valuable as a means of obtaining mastery of subject matter, and as a means of building an academic background for work in subsequent grades. Such beliefs were unsubstantiated in a study, by Arthur⁶, of the achievement of 60 Grade I repeaters. In this study a matched group of students had been promoted and Arthur found that the average repeater in Grade I learned no more in two years than the average promoted student of the same mental age learned in one. However, Arthur noted that failure to eliminate the cause of retention, rather than the repeating experience itself, may have been the main factor in determining subsequent achievement. This valid criticism can be applied to all the research that has attempted to assess the academic performance of "repeaters".

In 1941 Saunders¹⁷, in a comprehensive review of the problem of non-promotion and the research that had been done on it, concluded that there was little evidence to support failing students and having them repeat a grade. Specifically, he summed up an extensive survey of studies into the effects of non-promotion upon

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Grace Arthur, "A Study of the Achievement of Sixty Grade I Repeaters as Compared with that of Non-Repeaters of the Same Mental Age", Journal of Experimental Education (Vol. 5, December 1936), pp. 203-205.

¹⁷ Carleton M. Saunders, <u>Promotion or Failure for the Elementary</u> <u>School Pupil</u>? (New York: Columbia University Teachers' College, 1941).

school achievement as follows:

"It may be concluded that non-promotion of pupils in elementary schools in order to assure the mastery of subject matter does not often accomplish its objective. Children do not appear to learn more by repeating a grade but experience less growth in subject matter achievement than they do when promoted. Therefore a practice of non-promotion because a pupil does not learn sufficient subject matter in the course of a school year, or for the purpose of learning subject matter, is not justified."¹⁸

Writing in the Encyclopedia of Educational Research in the same year, Otto reached similar conclusions, noting that:

> "All the evidence points to the conclusion that retardation under present practices in adapting instruction to individual differences is detrimental to children. If instruction were really adapted to individual differences there ought to be no occasion for retardation."¹⁹

In their conclusions, Otto and Saunders both echoed the words of Caswell, who studied the rate of promotion, and varying aspects of the problem, in seven States in 1933. Caswell²⁰ concluded that:

> "All things considered, it seems fair to conclude that non-promotion is more apt to be a deterrent rather than an impetus to acceptable achievement."

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H. J. Otto, "Elementary Education 11. Organization and Administration," <u>Encyclopedia of Educational Research</u> (New York: Macmillan & Co., 3rd edition (Monroe Ed.), 1941), pp. 441-2.

20 H. L. Caswell, <u>Non-promotion in Elementary Schools</u>, Field Studies No. 4 (Nashville: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1933).

²¹ <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 70.

¹⁸ <u>Ibid</u>., p. 29.
Virtually all the research into the causes and effects of repeating has been done in the United States. It has also been confined, in the main, to studies involving students in the elementary grades, since it was at this level that the practice of repeating a whole grade of work was found. As Heck pointed out in 1938, all but 15 per cent of United States high schools operated on a Subject Promotion system, so that grade failure and "repeating" were rarely a problem. These are important considerations, since the present study involves a high school populations in Canada, and the relevance of much of the literature being cited may not be immediately apparent. Two points, however, serve to emphasize the relevance of elementary school studies made in the United States. Firstly, failure, and the experience of repeating a grade, is the common element in all studies on "repeating". Thus there would appear to be something to be gained from noting the results of all researches, regardless of the level at which they were made. Secondly, the organization of elementary schools in the United States was similar to that found recently in Montreal high schools. In particular, the structure and promotion policies of American elementary schools was similar to the Grade Promotion system and organization found in Montreal high schools at the time the present

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A. O. Heck, "Contributions of Research to the Classification, Promotion, Marking and Certification of Pupils", <u>National Society for</u> the Study of Education, Year Book XXXVII, Part II (1938), p.194.

study was made. In both situations a student was failed because he had not accomplished a given amount of work satisfactorily; and he was failed on the stated or implied assumption that the "repeating" of the year's work would result in an improved performance.

Much of the research cited here is of the ex post facto variety, as is this study itself. The difficulties involved in this type of research are dealt with more fully later in the next chapter. However, the inherent weakness present when the experimenter has to manipulate and interpret data and events already in existence serves to heighten the importance of those few pieces of research which do not have this particular weakness. For this reason, the studies by Arthur and by Kline and Branson are important, since in them students who would normally have been "repeaters" were promoted for the purpose of comparison with a matched group of students who were not promoted. It has rarely been possible to use experimental designs of this type, and for this reason ex post facto research predominates among the studies done into the causes and effects of "repeating".

Research into the results of "repeating" continued during the 1940's. In 1941, Cook²³ made a fairly typical ex post facto study involving two groups of schools and Grade VII students in

²³ W. H. Cook, "Some effects of the maintenance of high standards of promotion", <u>Elementary School Journal</u>, Vol. 41, (1941), pp. 430-437.

Minnesota. The Minnesota Council of Administrators had given standardized tests to over 35,000 students and Cook utilized these results. He selected 18 schools and calculated a ratio of overageness for each (the number of years the average Grade VII student was retarded). He then divided the schools selected into a high ratio group and a low ratio group. Cook then compared the students in the two groups, using the test results that had been obtained from the previously administered Kuhlmann-Anderson test and the Unit Scales of Attainment tests. He concluded that a null hypothesis, that those students in schools with a high ratio for over-ageness would do no better than those in schools with a low ratio for over-ageness, was substantiated. Such a result tended to refute the view that repeating would, immediately or in the more distant future, improve a student's achievement.

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In the same year, Anfinson made a study into the relationship between school progress and student adjustment. He concluded on the basis of his results that non-promotion could be justified in a system such as Minneapolis. Anfinson matched, on the basis of attendance, age, sex, intelligence, and socio-economic status, white junior high school pupils who had failed a grade with those who had not. In all, Anfinson obtained 116 pairs from a total of 6,000

²⁴ R. D. Anfinson, "School Progress and Pupil Adjustment", <u>Elementary School Journal</u>, Vol. 41 (1941), pp. 507-14.

students considered. The performance of the students on the Symonds-Block Student Questionnaire and the Bell School Inventory was used to measure personality adjustment. On the basis of his results, Anfinson concluded that maladjustment was not directly associated with non-promotion, and therefore a policy of limited non-promotion (2.4 per cent in Minneapolis in 1938) was justified.

Anfinson's study is important because it serves to show that controversy over the relative merits of promotion and nonpromotion was still going on. In addition to this, it is an example of conclusions being drawn from a study that are hardly justifiable by the findings. In the course of his report, Anfinson states that most of the "repeaters" were retarded in the very early elementary grades.²⁵ It would therefore seem unreasonable to conclude, on the basis of tests conducted some five or more years later, that repeating a grade does not cause maladjustment. On the contrary, non-promotion may have caused maladjustment and emotional disturbance from which the student after a period of time recovered. Furthermore, Anfinson's sampling takes no account of those students who may have dropped out of school after repeating one or more grades, so failing to reach the junior high school level; such students might well have been those in whom "repeating" caused

> 25 Ibid., p. 510.

maladjustment. Anfinson's results <u>do not</u> disprove a hypothesis that personality maladjustment is related primarily to failure in school.

26 In 1944, Sandin used sociometrics, rating scales and check list observations and interviews to study aspects of social and personal adjustment. He found that, in general, there was a less happy adjustment among slow-progress students (those who at some time had had to repeat one or more grades) than among normal progress students. In the introduction to the study Sandin had, like others before him, concluded from a review of the research that it was generally clear that: (1) Mastery of a subject was not assured by non-promotion; (2) Slow learners were not helped; (3) Non-promotion had a poor effect upon discipline; (4) If promoted, the average student can make up the necessary work. Sandin's findings and conclusions differed from those of Anfinson. However, as he did not equate the groups of students that he studied, on factors that might have affected social and personal adjustment, it is difficult to assess the influence of the promotion factor. The need to get away from the ex post facto experiment was noted by Sandin when he said:

"It is necessary to conduct further study to

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A. A. Sandin, <u>Social and emotional adjustment of regularly</u> promoted and non promoted <u>pupils</u> (New York: Columbia University Teachers' College, Bureau of Publications, 1944).

discover to what extent children who might have been non promoted according to grade standards but who actually were promoted, show a better picture of adjustment than those who were held back." 27

The early 1950's produced two further reviews of the research on promotion and non-promotion. In a comprehensive article, the California Journal of Elementary Education reached the by now familiar conclusion that few, if any, of the alleged reasons or values given for non-promotion were justified or realized in practice. In the same year Goodlad²⁹ made a similar review and reached virtually identical conclusions. Little research had been done on promotion and non-promotion during the 1940's so that it was to be expected that both reviews would echo the conclusions that Saunders had reached eleven years earlier. Goodlad's review, however, did include a report of his own experiment into the relative social and personal adjustment of promoted and non-promoted students. Using two groups of Grade I students, equated for age, intelligence, achievement, socio-economic status, general health, and type of school attended, Goodlad administered the California

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<u>Ibid</u>., p. 136.

28 "What Research says about Non-Promotion", <u>California Journal</u> of Elementary Education, Vol. 21 (1952), pp. 117-124.

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J. I. Goodlad, "Research and Theory regarding Promotion and Non-Promotion", <u>Elementary School Journal</u>, Vol. 53 (1952), pp. 150-155. Test of Personality, the Haggerty-Olson-Wichsman Behaviour rating schedules, and sociometric questions, and rejected the two hypotheses that he had set up, namely:

- "1. There are no differences in social adjustment between school children who repeat grades and those who do not.
 - 2. There are no differences in personal adjustment between school children who repeat grades and those who do not." 30

This was further evidence that Anfinson's conclusions were suspect.

Interest in the problem of retardation in the U.S.A. was renewed in the 1950's by the growing concern with the number of school drop-outs. Examination of school drop-outs had shown that very many of them had been retarded in school, indeed it was the factor most common to this group. Concern was also felt in Canada, where Hohol³¹, reviewing the factors associated with school drop-out, concluded that retardation was a factor involved. Canada was behind the United States in applying research findings. In 1955, Alberta, with a lower drop-out and retardation rate than other provinces, had six per cent of students in elementary grades fail and repeat each year. In the same year Clarke³² in an investigation of

> 30 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 153.

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A. E. Hohol, "Factors associated with school drop-outs", Alberta Journal of Education Research, Vol. 1 (1955), pp. 7-17.

S. C. T. Clarke,"Promotion Policies and Practices in Alberta Schools", Alberta Journal of Education Research, Vol. 1 (1955) pp.24-34. promotion practices in Alberta arrived at a conclusion that pinpoints the lack of communication between educational research and the teacher in the field. Specifically he noted that:

> "In general the most frequent reasons given by teachers for failing students are associated with mastery of school subjects, and the next most frequent are associated with motivation and attitudes." 33

In 1956 Coffield and Blommers³⁴ reported on a study that they had made two years earlier, on non-promotion and achievement. One hundred and ninety Grade VII students from school boards in Iowa, which had a long history of participation in the Iowa Basic Skills Testing Program, were identified. These students had all failed and repeated a grade once since being in Grade II, while 43 of them had failed the previous year in Grade VII. The one hundred and forty-seven students who had failed in one of the Grades III to VI were divided into two groups. The students in one group (93) were each matched with a promoted classmate in the grade in which the failure occurred, on the basis of the particular achievement variable studied. The remaining students (44) had to be matched with students from other schools. Coffield and Blommers pointed out that since a student could not at the same time be both promoted and failed, the

> 33 Ibid., p. 33.

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W. Coffield and P. Blommers, "Effect of Non-Promotion upon Educational Achievement in the Elementary School", <u>Journal of</u> <u>Educational Psychology</u>, Vol. 47 (1956), pp. 235-250. use of the matching technique was essential.

Having selected their sample, Coffield and Blommers then turned to compare the performance of the various groups, on the occasions that they had taken the Iowa Tests. Scores (as grade equivalents) in the following areas were employed as criterion measures: (1) Reading Comprehension; (2) Work Study Skills; (3) Language Skills; (4) Arithmetic Skills; (5) An overall score based on the sum of the first four. The statistical data used to analyze the results were, when appropriate,"t" tests for related means, and analysis of covariance.

Coffield and Blommers concluded from their results that while a student did show some improvement in achievement after "repeating" a year, it was doubtful if it was sufficient to justify the repetition. Specifically, the found that students make only six months' educational progress during the second year in a grade while two years after failure they are still below the norm for the grade involved. In addition, the subsequent achievement of students who had failed a grade was invariably worse, or no better, than the achievements of matched pupils who had spent one year less in school.

An important point, relevant to the present study, is made in Coffield and Blommer's discussion of their results. Having shown that some progress is made when a student repeats a grade, they then raise doubts about the wisdom of repeating for such an expected gain. The conclusion that they draw strictly from their results is modified in the light of other factors, to wit, whether it is worth spending an extra year in a grade for an improvement of some six months educationally, having regard for other research findings tending to show that "repeating" may cause social and personal problems.

In 1959 Worth³⁵ reperted on an experiment that he had done on the effects of non-promotion within the Edmonton school system, two years earlier. In one of the few studies ever done in Canada on the effects of non-promotion, Worth sought to discover if the findings of research done in the United States were applicable to Canadian schools, where educational programmes, and the expectations and attitudes of teachers, pupils and parents might differ from those in the other country. Specifically, the study sought to compare the effect of promotion and non-promotion on the school achievement, and social-personal development, of matched groups of Grades III and IV students who were classified as low achievers.

³⁵ W. H. Worth, "Promotion vs. Non-Promotion: II The Edmonton Study", <u>Alberta Journal of Educational Research</u>, Vol. 5 (1959) pp. 191-203.

Late in the 1955-56 school year a battery of tests (California Achievement Test - complete battery; Gates Advanced Primary Reading Test: type 1 - word recognition, type 2 paragraph reading; California Short Form Test of Mental Maturity -Primary form.) were given to all Grade III students in Edmonton. At the end of the year 107 students failed, and of these it was possible to select a group of 66 for the experiment. The others were unsuitable because they had moved, been assigned to special schools, or spoke English as a foreign tongue. The group of 66 "repeaters" was matched, case-for-case, with students who had been promoted; the matching being done on the basis of sex, age, intelligence, and total achievement test scores. At the end of the 1956-57 school year, the battery of tests was again administered to the two groups. The effect of promotion and non-promotion on student achievement could then be ascertained by comparing the 12 scores in the achievement areas measured by the California and Gates tests.

Using "t" tests to analyze his results, Worth found that in eight of the achievement areas his hypothesis, that there was no difference between the two groups, was supported. In three other areas (Reading Vocabulary, Total Reading, and Arithmetic Fundamentals) the results favoured the promoted group. Only in Paragraph Reading did the non-promoted group do significantly better. On the basis of

his results, Worth concluded that:

"1. Continued reliance upon non-promotion, in itself, to improve school achievement is unwarranted. Low-achievers who are nonpromoted appear to make no greater, and often less gain in achievement than they do when promoted. If the practice of nonpromotion is to continue it must be justified on grounds other than improved achievement." 36

In his investigation into the effect of non-promotion on social-personal development, Worth used sociometric methods and an assessment of teachers' ratings of behaviour and character traits. He concluded, on the basis of his results, that non-promotion did not have an adverse effect upon social-personal development. This conclusion differed from that reached by Goodlad³⁷ some ten years earlier, but agreed with that of Anfinson³⁸ in 1941. The disagreement between Worth and Goodlad indicates that the effect of non-promotion upon social-personal development needs to be studied further. The design of the two experiments was similar and it may be that the differences in place, time and grade account for the different results.

Four years after Worth reported his findings, Kamii and

³⁶ Ibid., p. 201.
³⁷ J. I. Goodlad, <u>Loc. Cit</u>.
³⁸ R. D. Anfinson, Op. Cit.

Weikart³⁹ reported similar results from a study in Michigan. A group of 31 students in Grade VII, who had been retained in a grade once before Grade VI, were compared with a random sample of 31 students who had never been retained. In comparing the performance of the two groups on: (1) Marks received in five academic subjects; (2) Achievement test scores - Iowa Test of Basic Skills; (3) Intelligence test scores on the California Test of Mental Maturity, Kamii and Weikart produced predictable results. With the groups unmatched it was to be expected that the "repeaters" did significantly worse than the comparison group in academic subjects and in reading ability. The mean intelligence of the nonpromoted group was also significantly lower.

The 1960's have as yet produced little research on promotion and non-promotion. The first years of the decade saw the publication of two reviews^{40,41} on the subject. Both reviews concluded with comments and recommendations not markedly different from those made

W. H. Worth, "What research says about promotions", Canadian Education, Vol. 15 (September 1960), pp. 61-70.

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B. Boyle, "Promotion or Retention - some recent research", <u>Teachers' College Journal</u>, Vol. 34 (1962), pp. 29-30.

C. K. Kamii and O. P. Weikart, "Marks, achievement, and intelligence of seventh graders who were retained (non-promoted) once in elementary school", <u>Journal of Educational Research</u>, Vol. 56 (1963), pp. 452-459.

by Goodlad in a similar review ten years previously, or those which Saunders made in 1941.

From England in 1963 came a report of a study that involved, in part, an assessment of the performance of students repeating the General Certificate Examinations at Advanced level. Conducted 42 by the Joint Matriculation Board , the study compared the performance of 911 students who sat the examinations for the first time in 1955 and again the following year. The report noted that the students involved were a special group, who were usually attempting to obtain a sufficiently high standing to enter university, or gain a State Scholarship. The results showed that there was a significant improvement in the repeating group's achievement on the second occasion that they took the examinations. This result should not be compared with the studies previously considered here, since too many differing variables are involved. However, the result would have some relevance to the performance of repeating Grade XI students in Montreal, many of whom would be in the position of repeating external examinations with motives similar to those of the English students.

The majority of research studies have been clear in their finding that in the normal grade situation, non-promotion results in

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J. A. Petch, <u>G.C.E. Part 2</u> (Manchester: Joint Matriculation Board, 1963).

little, if any, increase in achievement. It is notable that most of the research has been ex post facto in design, and this would seem to be inevitable. With the importance that is presently attached to getting an education, it would probably be difficult to persuade superintendents of school regions to allow control group experiments to take place. Arthur's study, and that of Klene and Branson, were both done over thirty years ago. No experiments of this type, involving a group of failed students, half of whom are promoted and half retained in the grade, have been done since.

Studies that have reported favourably on retention programmes have all been concerned with small numbers of students, who were carefully selected and received special help. Thus in 1959, Steadman⁴³ reported improvement in achievement with a specially selected group of fifteen students; but even with these had to conclude that for five of the students the repeating had not been successful. Similarly, Lobell⁴⁴ in 1954, and Stringer⁴⁵ in 1960 reported on small group retention programmes, for which students

43 E. R. Steadman, "Fifteen who were not promoted", Elementary School Journal, Vol. 59 (1959), pp. 271-276.

44 L. O. Lobell, "Results of a non-promotion policy in one school district", <u>Elementary School Journal</u>, Vol. 54 (1954), pp. 233-237.

45 L. A. Stringer, "Report on a Retention Program", <u>Elementary</u> <u>School Journal</u>, Vol. 60 (1960), pp. 370-375. were carefully selected. In all of these studies the absence of a comparison group makes it difficult to weigh the importance of their findings.

The absence of research on the problem of non-promotion in Canada, apart from Worth's study in Edmonton already mentioned, cannot easily be explained. In the last ten years studies, both in Canada and in the United States, have repeatedly cited retardation as a cause of dropping out of school. At the same time the research findings of studies done in the United States have been readily available in Canada. Notwithstanding these facts, non-promotion has continued to be a feature of many Canadian school systems, especially in the Eastern Provinces. In Quebec, the regulations of the Protestant Committee regarding the maintenance of grade standards ensured that many students repeated grades, yet the Department of Education did no research on the effects of such repetition.⁴⁶ In the schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, approximately ten to twenty per cent of the students in each grade were failed each year, resulting in some twelve per cent of the enrolment in each grade being "repeaters".47

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E. Owen, Assistant Director General of Curriculum and Examinations, Department of Education, Quebec, personal communication.

Montreal, The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, Curriculum Department, <u>Curriculum</u> Data.

⁴⁸ R. Japp, Director of Education, Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, personal communication.

CHAPTER V

DESIGN OF THE EXPERIMENT

Ex Post Facto Research

No purely experimental approach has been made into the study of non-promotion. The best kind of research into the effects of nonpromotion has involved the manipulation of some variables, and the studies by Arthur¹, and that done by Klene and Branson², are in this category. Nonetheless these studies, and all others investigating the causes and effects of non-promotion, may be classified as ex post facto research, which Kerlinger³ defines as:

> "that research in which the independent variable or variables have already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable or variables. He then studies the independent variables in retrospect for their possible relations to, and effects on, the dependent variable or variables."⁴

The experimental scientist operates with a simple structure. A hypothesis is set up: if x, then y; if heated, then expansion. Having done this, some means is used to manipulate or measure x. This done, y is observed to see if there is a concomitant variation.

1
G. Arthur, <u>Op. Cit</u>.
2
V. Klene and E. Branson, <u>Op. Cit</u>.
3
F. N. Kerlinger, <u>Foundations of Behavioral Research</u> (New York:
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1964).

4 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 360. If there is such a variation it is evidence that the hypothesis, if x then y, is valid. Predicting from a controlled x, the scientist can assume that y is varying as a result of what is done to x. In ex post facto research it is y that is observed, and a search is then made for x. It is this lack of control over independent variables (x) that is the weakness of ex post facto research. As Kerlinger points out, in this type of research the investigator must take things as they are and try to disentangle them.

In research upon the causes of non-promotion, the investigator finds students who have been called upon to repeat a grade (y), and then looks back to seek for the cause (x) of this repeating. Since the independent variable (x) cannot be controlled by manipulation or randomization, to say with confidence that x causes y, once a plausible x has been found, would be wrong. With research into the effects of non-promotion, the sample of subjects select themselves - i.e. those who have failed and are repeating a grade. Subjects cannot be assigned to groups at random, nor can groups be manipulated by randomly assigned procedures. Thus a group of repeaters may be studied to determine its level of achievement during the year they are repeating, but the group is not a random one. The members have selected themselves and any one of the

characteristics they bring with them may affect their achievement in the repeating year. A statement that "repeating" a year has such-and-such an effect upon achievement should therefore only be made with extreme caution and qualification.

The Present Study

The problems involved in ex post facto research are precisely those encountered by the present study, made in Montreal, on the topic of the achievement of "repeaters" during the "repeating" year. The sample selected themselves in that they were "repeaters" by the standards imposed in the high schools of Montreal. Since the study was only concerned with whether or not an improvement in achievement in school subjects took place, no matching of students was done. The performance of the same student was studied before and after "repeating" a year. Matching would only have been possible had the high schools been prepared to designate a group of students as failures and then promote one half of them. The rigid policy of the Montreal system made this impossible. Students who had failed had to repeat the year if they intended to remain in school. The parents of failed students might have been consulted with a view to allowing a matching design or experiment, but if assignment to one of two groups (promoted or retained) depended upon parental consent, then once again the groups would have selected themselves.

When a student was called upon to repeat a grade, explicitly or implicitly he was told that this would give him better results at the end of the year. These better results, if made at the Grade IX level for example, were presumed to help the student succeed at the Grade X level. However, it was decided for the present to ignore the investigation of that presumption and to confine the research to the single problem implied by repetition - that repetition in the high schools of Montreal would lead to improved performance. Consequently the problem was considered in the form of two null hypotheses:

- 1. When students are called upon to repeat the work of a grade, scores in a given subject at the completion of the second year will not be significantly higher than the scores obtained at the end of the first year.
- 2. When students are called upon to repeat the work of a grade, a student who passes a subject at the end of his first year in the grade will not obtain significantly higher marks in that subject at the completion of the second year.

Underlying these hypotheses were a number of assumptions: 1. The Measure of achievement was the marks assigned the

student for each subject by the respective teachers. Therefore, it was assumed that there was uniformity in the marking practices and standards found in the high schools of the Montreal Board during the two years.

2. It was assumed that the conditions prevailing in the school, and for the student during the "repeating" year, were the same as for the first failing year. It was to increase the plausibility of this assumption that students who repeated the year in other high schools were excluded from the study.

3. While it was known that the basic content of the curriculum did not alter, an assumption had to be made that teaching methods would not be radically different during the two years.

4. The sample schools were selected by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal and were assumed to be representative of the population attending the Board's high schools. This assumption was made with some confidence, since a school from each of the Board's regional areas was included in the sample.

The Sample

Permission to do the present study was sought and obtained from the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal. The Board then selected six high schools from which the necessary data could be collected. The high schools selected by the Board were located in different parts of Montreal, so it was thought that the students attending the selected schools were representative of all high school students within the Board's jurisdiction. Data available from the Curriculum Department of the Board showed the number of repeaters that were enrolled in each grade and each high school as of November 1963. The information for Table II was extracted from this data.

TABLE II

NUMBER OF "REPEATING" STUDENTS REGISTERED IN THE SELECTED HIGH SCHOOLS; AND THE TOTAL NUMBER IN HIGH SCHOOLS OF THE PROTESTANT SCHOOL BOARD OF GREATER MONTREAL ON GRADE PROMOTION. BY GRADE. NOVEMBER 1963.

SCHOOL	GRADE VIII	GRADE IX	GRADE X	GRADE XI	TOTAL
A B C D E F	45 42 56 29 53 66 ★	30 35 44 37 44 56	25 34 48 19 22 23	17 51 33 48 18 19	117 162 181 133 137 164
Total fo 6 School	or .s:291	246	171	186	894
Total for all High Sch	812 wools:	661	537	400	2,410

A Grade VIII students in a separate building.

The 894 "repeating" students registered in the selected schools represented a sample of 37 per cent of the total number of repeaters in the Board's high schools. Table III shows the samples as percentages of the total, by grade.

TABLE III

THE SAMPLE OF "REPEATERS", REGISTERED IN THE SELECTED HIGH SCHOOLS, SHOWN AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL IN <u>ALL</u> SCHOOLS. BY GRADES. NOVEMBER 1963.

GRADE	TOTAL	NUMBER	SAMPLE AS
	IN ALL	IN	PERCENTAGE
	HIGH SCHOOLS	SAMPLE	OF TOTAL
VIII	812	291	36%
IX	661	246	37%
X	537	171	30%
XI	400	186	46%

Data were not collected on all the "repeating" students registered in the selected high schools as of November 1963. When the field work for the study was undertaken in February 1965, the sample size was somewhat reduced, for the following reasons:

1. Students who had failed their year in another school and then transferred to a sample school, thereby being included in the November census, were excluded from the study.

2. Some students had withdrawn from school between November 1963 and June 1964.

3. Some students had transferred to other schools between November 1963 and June 1964. 4. Some students had incomplete record cards for their first or second year in the grade, and were therefore excluded.

5. Students who in either year were registered in a Practical Course were excluded from the sample.

6. The records of some students were not obtainable from the normal sources, and it was presumed that they were mislaid, or in use elsewhere. Table IV indicates the size of the sample for which data were collected. Table V indicates the number of "repeaters" for whom no data were collected.

TABLE IV

SAMPLE SIZE: FROM WHICH DATA WERE ACTUALLY OBTAINED. THE SAMPLE AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF "REPEATERS" IN ALL SCHOOLS. BY GRADE. NOVEMBER 1963.

GRADE	NUMBER IN ACTUAL SAMPLE	SAMPLE AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL IN ALL SCHOOLS
VIII	208	26%
IX	157	24%
X	122	22%
17 7	166	zod

NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN THE SELECTED SCHOOLS "REPEATING" AS OF NOVEMBER 1963 FOR WHOM DATA WERE NOT COLLECTED. REASONS FOR NON-COLLECTION OF DATA. BY GRADES.

TABLE V

GRADE	NEW TO SAMPLE SCHOOL	left SCHOOL	TRANS- FERRED SCHOOLS	IN- COMPLETE RECORD	RECORD NOT AVAILABLE	TOTAL
VIII IX X XI	18 15 7 12	32 35 18 11	11 17 5 3	9 8 4 1	13 12 5 4	83 87 39 31
ALL GRADES	52	96	36	22	34	240

All students in a grade did not take the same course. Therefore the number making up a sample in a grade will vary from one subject to another. Similarly, only rarely will the sample for any one subject equal the sample size for the grade as a whole. These conditions were particularly true for Grades X and XI, where a greater variety of courses was taken than in Grades VIII and IX. In all grades data for a subject were only collected when there was, on the student's record, a final mark for each year.

Collection of Data

Data were collected from the record cards (Kardex) of the sample students. The researcher went into each of the designated schools in February 1965 and traced the records of students who repeated a grade during the school year 1963-64. A record was made of the final mark obtained in each subject in June 1963. On the basis of these final composite marks the student was asked to repeat the grade. The researcher therefore noted the final mark obtained for each subject in June 1964. Data were recorded for individual subjects and no record was made of general-standing mark - an average of all the final subject marks. All marks of all grades were on a 0-100 scale, with the exception of Mathematics in Grade VIII (0-200) and Science in Grade VIII (0-50), which were adjusted accordingly. The subjects in each grade for which data were collected were:

> Grade VIII - English Literature, English Language, French Oral, French Written, Mathematics, Science, History.

Grade IX - English Literature, English Language, French Oral, French Written, Algebra, Geometry, Science, History.

Grade X - English Literature, English Language, French Oral, French Written, Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, History.

Grade XI - English Literature, English Language, French Oral, French Written, Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, History. The data collected for Grades VIII, IX and X consisted of the final mark awarded in each subject at the end of each year. This mark was assigned by the subject teacher, and was made up of weighings from class work and school examinations taken at the end of each term. The data for Grade XI were different, in that they consisted of the marks obtained for each school subject in the Quebec High School Leaving Examination, taken in the June of each year the student was in the grade.

No record was made of the names of the students making up the sample.

Treatment of Data

The data collected from each school were arranged in groups: by subject and by grade, i.e. All Grade VIII English Literature data were gathered together; All Grade X French Written; and so on. In this manner a total of 35 subject groups was obtained, each consisting of two sets of marks - one for June 1963 and one for June 1964.

A "t" test for significant difference between related means was made upon the two sets of marks in each of the 35 subject groups of data obtained. The first hypothesis was considered in the light of the results from these "t" tests.

Following completion of the foregoing analysis, attention was directed to the second hypothesis. Once again 35 subject groups containing two sets of marks, for June 1963 and June 1964, were gathered. However, on this occasion the first set of marks (June 1963) in each subject group contained <u>only</u> the marks of students who had <u>passed</u> the subject at the end of their first year in the grade. Hence the second set of marks in each subject group was identically restricted. The second hypothesis was then tested by making "t" tests upon the data in each subject group.

An analysis of variance between school subjects and between grades, for Grades IX, X and XI was computed.

It was felt that the data collected might yield additional information. In particular it might indicate the number or proportion of students who, for each subject, were able to raise their mark sufficiently to pass the grade having failed it the first time. In addition, an indication of the mean improvement, by subject, of students who had failed the first year was sought.

Statement of the Results

TABLE VI

GRADE VIII. BY SUBJECT. ALL STUDENTS SAMPLED.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
Eng. Lit.	207	5.2	6.5	<pre>p < .01 p < .01</pre>
Eng. Lang.	206	4.2	5.6	
Fr. Written	202	11.7	13.4	
Fr. Oral	204	6.5	7.5	
Mathematics	202	18.7	18.2	
Science	102	9.3	7.4	
History	207	12.6	15.5	

TABLE VII

GRADE IX. BY SUBJECT. ALL STUDENTS SAMPLED.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
Eng. Lit.	156	6.9	5.8	<pre>p < .01 p < .01</pre>
Eng. Lang.	157	4.3	5.7	
Fr. Written	153	14.6	15.5	
Fr. Oral	154	7.6	8.8	
Algebra	148	28.4	22.4	
Geometry	139	21.8	15.7	
Science	97	13.6	8.9	
History	156	10.8	11.6	

TABLE VIII

GRADE X. BY SUBJECT. ALL STUDENTS SAMPLED.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
Eng. Lit. Eng. Lang. Fr. Written Fr. Oral Algebra Geometry Biology Physics Chemistry History	120 121 119 120 117 100 74 28 109 117	6.9 4.3 10.9 8.7 24.4 18.1 11.1 19.1 20.5 11.2	6.2 5.4 10.9 9.1 14.9 11.8 7.4 6.4 16.5 8.5	<pre>p < .01 p < .01</pre>

TABLE IX

GRADE XI. BY SUBJECT. ALL STUDENTS SAMPLED.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
Eng. Lit. Eng. Lang. Fr. Written Fr. Oral Algebra Geometry Biology Physics Chemistry History	114 144 143 129 152 131 53 136 73 142	6.6 4.8 8.8 8.0 13.3 13.9 6.2 15.0 14.1 11.6	6.5 6.7 11.3 9.3 13.5 10.3 3.3 11.3 6.9 10.5	<pre>p < .01 p < .01</pre>

TABLE X

GRADE VIII. BY SUBJECT. STUDENTS WHO PASSED SUBJECT(S) AT COMPLETION OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
Eng. Lit. Eng. Lang. Fr. Written Fr. Oral Math. Science History	91 103 126 29 142 69	0.7 -0.1 6.0 3.2 9.2 3.3 7.2	.75 .1 6.3 4.3 4.5 2.1 5.1	p > .20 N.S p > .20 N.S p < .01 p < .01 p < .01 p < .05 p < .01

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS.

TABLE XI

GRADE IX. BY SUBJECT. STUDENTS WHO PASSED SUBJECT(S)

AT COMPLETION OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS.

SUBJECT	NO. OF Students	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
Eng. Lit. Eng. Lang. Fr. Written Fr. Oral Geometry Algebra Science History	83 103 51 100 41 15 44 67	1.5 1.0 7.3 4.9 9.7 15.7 7.1 5.0	1.53 1.37 6.1 6.1 5.2 4.7 5.2 4.3	p > .10 N.S p > .10 N.S p < .01 p < .01

TABLE XII

GRADE X. BY SUBJECT. STUDENTS WHO PASSED SUBJECT(S)

AT COMPLETION OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t score	SIGNIFICANCE	
Eng. Lit.	92	3.7	3.4	p < .01	
Eng. Lang.	100	2.8	3.4	p < .01	
Fr. Writter	n 67	6.9	6.3	p < .01	
Fr. Oral	101	6.0	7.2	p < .01	
Algebra	43	18.0	8. 6	p < .01	
Geometry	36	9.3	4.1	p < .01	
Biology	38	5.7	3.5	p < .01	
Physics	11	6.0	1.4	p > .10	N.S.
Chemistry	4 <u>1</u>	13.9	7.5	p < .01	
History	75	5.9	4.06	p < .01	

TABLE XIII

GRADE XI. BY SUBJECT. STUDENTS WHO PASSED SUBJECT(S)

AT COMPLETION OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	t SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE	
Eng. Lit.	85	3.8	3.8	p < .01	
Eng. Lang.	105	3.1	3.9	p < .01	
Fr. Written	87	6.0	6.8	p<.01	
Fr. Oral	90	5.4	5.5	p < .01	
Algebra	91	10.1	6.8	p < .01	
Geometry	75	6.1	4.1	p < .01	
Biology	33	.2	.1	p > .20	N.S.
Chemistry	79	9.1	6.0	p < .01	
Physics	38	6.7	3.5	p < .01	
History	88	7.0	6.4	_p<.01	

TABLE XIV

GRADE VIII. BY SUBJECT. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS. SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCE (PASS/FAIL) OF STUDENTS WHO FAILED SUBJECT(S) AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	NO. STUDENTS PASSING YR.II	NO. STUDENTS FAILING YR.II
Eng. Lit.	116	8.8	66	50
Eng. Lang.	103	8.4	63	40
Fr. Written	152	13.5	69	83
Fr. Oral	78	11.8	46	32
Math.	173	20.2	98	75
Science	60	13.6	4 0	20
History	138	15.3	89	49

TABLE XV

GRADE IX. BY SUBJECT. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS. SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCE (PASS/FAIL) OF STUDENTS WHO FAILED SUBJECT(S) AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	NO. STUDENTS PASSING YR.II	NO. STUDENTS FAILING YR.II
Eng. Lit. Eng. Lang. Fr.Writter Fr. Oral Algebra Geometry Science	73 54 102 54 133 98 53	12.8 10.7 18.3 12.8 29.7 26.9 19.1	53 42 65 32 107 82 36	20 12 37 22 26 16 17
History	89	15.2	55	34
TABLE XVI

GRADE X. BY SUBJECT. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS. SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCE (PASS/FAIL) OF STUDENTS WHO FAILED SUBJECT(S) AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	NO. STUDENTS PASSING YR.II	NO. STUDENTS FAILING YR.II
Eng. Lit.	28	17.5	21	7
Eng. Lang.	22	11.1	16	6
Fr. Written	52	16.0	39	13
Fr. Oral	19	22.8	17	2
Algebra	74	28.0	61	13
Geometry	64	23.1	58	6
Chemistry	68	24.5	57	11
Biology	36	16.7	27	9
Physics	17	27.5	15	2
History	42	20.8	38	4

TABLE XVII

GRADE XI. BY SUBJECT. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEANS. SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCE (PASS/FAIL) OF STUDENTS WHO FAILED SUBJECT(S) AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR IN THE GRADE.

SUBJECT	NO. OF STUDENTS	MEANS. DIFFERENCE YR.I-YR.II	NO. STUDENTS PASSING YR.II	NO.STUDENTS FAILING YR.II
Eng. Lit.	29	14.7	25	4
Eng. Lang.	39	.9•4	29	10
Fr. Writter	1 54	13.5	37	17
Fr. Oral	39	13.8	33	6
Algebra	61	17.8	43	18
Geometry	56	24.3	40	16
Chemistry	57	23.3	39	18
Biology	20	16.3	13	7
Physics	35	22.1	26	9
History	54	19.1	34	20

TABLE XVIII

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE. BETWEEN SCHOOL SUBJECTS AND

BETWEEN GRADES, IX, X AND XI.

GROUP	SUM OF SQUARES	Degrees Freedom	MEANS OF SQUARES	F	
Between subjects	7070.9	6	1178.5	12.39	p < .01
Between grades	550.7	2	275.4	2.89	N.S.
Residual	1141.0	12	95.1		
Total:	8762.6	20			

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

A study of Tables VI, VII, VIII and IX shows that, for all school subjects in all four grades, the "t" score obtained is significant at the .01 level of confidence. There is a significant difference between the mean of the marks obtained in a subject by "repeaters" at the end of their first year in a grade, as compared with the mean of the marks obtained at the end of their second year. This difference is a positive one for all the subject/grade groupings considered. These facts must lead to a rejection of the first null hypothesis that was put forward for consideration.

A study of the next four tables of results leads to a similar conclusion regarding the second hypothesis that was put forward. Where students who passed a subject at the end of their first year in a grade are concerned, Tables X, XI, XII and XIII show that, for the vast majority of the subject/grade groupings, the "t" scores are significant at the .01 level of confidence. There is a significant difference between the mean of the marks obtained by "repeaters", in most subjects, at the end of their first year in a grade and the marks that they obtain at the end of their second year in that grade. The significant differences that occur are positive. However, for six subject/grade groupings, the probability of the mean of the difference in marks between year I and year II occurring by chance is too high for such a difference to be regarded as significant. These six are: Grade VIII English Literature and English Language; Grade IX English Literature and English Language; Grade X Physics; Grade XI Biology. Excepting these six subject/grade groupings, the results indicated in Tables X, XI, XII, XIII lead to a rejection of the second hypothesis put forward.

The results suggest that there is an improvement in the achievement of "repeaters" when they spend an additional year in a grade. Similar results have been found in previous research studies. Coffield and Blommer's¹, using scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills as a measure of achievement, found that there was an improvement in performance in the year immediately following failure. The present study shows that in the high schools of Montreal, where prombtion and failure are decided by the end-of-year marks, "repeating" a year results, in most circumstances, in an increase in marks. These are inescapable conclusions that must be drawn from the results of this study, notwithstanding the notorious unreliability of teacher-assigned marks as a means of assessing students' ability.²

W. H. Coffield and P. Blommers, Op. Cit.

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Anne Z. Smith and John E. Dobbin, "Marks and Marking Systems", Encyclopedia of Educational Research, 3rd edition, C. W. Harris, Ed. (1960), pp. 783-789.

Nor does the weakness inherebt in a study of ex post facto experimental design detract from these conclusions. Having said this, the results of the present study must be considered in more detail, to ascertain if the findings justify the practice of calling upon students to repeat a grade in high school.

Students in the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal were, until the 1965-66 school year, called upon to repeat a grade on the assumption that there would be an improvement in academic achievement. The results of this study indicate that there is indeed an improvement, but the question arises as to whether or not the improvements that may be expected are sufficiently large to justify an extra year in a grade. In short, where is the line to be drawn between what is a worthwhile improvement in achievement and what is not? Coffield and Blommers in their study on the effects of non-promotion, raised the same question in their concluding remarks. As is the case in this study, they found that when a student repeated a year there was an improvement in his achievement. Coffield and Blommers were able to measure this improvement in achievement in terms of grade equivalent scores since they used standardized tests as a measure of achievement. In addition, since they had a matched comparison group, they were able to discover that repeaters did

W. H. Coffield and P. Blommers, Op. Cit.

not, in the repeated year, improve as much as those who were promoted. Hence they concluded that little real educational gain resulted from "repeating" a grade. Because the measure of achievement used in the present study was the mark given to a student by his subject teachers, the same conclusion as reached by Coffield and Blommers, although it can be made, cannot be made with the same degree of confidence. Nevertheless, the lack of a comparison group, and the fact that the measure of achievement lacks standardization, does not prevent grave doubts being raised as to the efficacy of repeating a grade if the expected improvement in marks is to be very small. The results here show that the mean improvement that can be expected to take place when repeating Grade VIII English Language is only one of approximately five marks. The improvement that may be expected for many other subject/grade groupings is similar to that found in Grade VIII English Language. It would seem to be questionable, at the very least, that such an improvement represents an educationally worthwhile one; one that is worth studying for a year to obtain.

On the other hand, in some subjects the gain in achievement, as represented by marks obtained, appears to be more worthwhile. The expected gain in marks for many of the mathematical and scientific subjects is in the region of twenty or more marks, on a 0-100 scale. Here there would seem, superficially at least, to

be more justification in asking a student to repeat a year's work. An improvement of twenty per cent certainly seems more attractive than an expected gain of some five per cent as is found in some subjects.

These comments and questions are further emphasized when the average improvements to be expected from students who passed a subject at the end of their first year in a grade are considered. Tables X, XI, XII and XIII, show that the improvement in marks that is to be expected when a student has passed the subject in his first year, is generally very small. Indeed in six of the subject/grade groupings there is no significant improvement at all, while in another twenty-five subject/grade groupings the expected improvement is less than ten per cent. As with the earlier, more generalized tables, it is in the mathematical and scientific subjects that the expected improvement in marks is highest, averaging between ten and fifteen per cent.

Greater expected improvements in achievement are found when the performance of students who failed a subject the first year are studied. The pattern of improvement is the same as with other groupings of students, but the improvements to be expected are generally higher. Mathematical and science subjects show an expected improvement of some twenty-five per cent here, with other subjects proportionately higher.

The results indicate that there is less justification for asking a student who has passed a subject to repeat it, than there is for making the same request to a student who failed a subject at the end of the first year. In addition, it is plain that not all subjects can be treated alike. There is clearly a greater justification for repeating Algebra or Geometry than there is for repeating English Literature or English Language, if one accepts the fact that an improvement in marks is the raison d'être of the repeating. This last point is supported by the results of the analysis of variance, shown in Table XVIII, which suggests that while it makes no difference in what grade a student repeats a subject, differences do occur between subjects.

A justification for calling upon students to repeat a grade might be found in the marginal utility of any improvement to be expected. That is to say, repeating might be justified with the expectation of only a very small improvement, if it could be shown that the improvement was sufficient to raise the student to a certain desired and defined standard. Coffield and Blommers, using the grade-equivalent scores obtained from administering the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, found that the repeating of a year failed to raise achievement to the average expected level of attainment for that grade.⁴

W. H. Coffield and P. Blommers, Op. Cit., p. 242, Table 1.

In the high schools used in this study, the "passing mark" for the subject might be taken as the utility standard to be reached. Repeating a year would be justified if a large proportion of students were able to reach the defined standard at the end of the second year. Tables XIV, XV, XVI and XVII show that in the lower grades a large percentage of students fail subjects at the end of the second year in a grade, even though there is an improvement in their marks over those that they obtained at the end of the first year in the grade. In Grade VIII Mathematics, forty per cent of the students repeating the grade fail at the end of their second year, although there is an average expected improvement of eighteen per cent, for the general repeater. For Grade VIII French Written, the failure at the end of the second year is even higher, with nearly sixty per cent of those repeating the grade still failing at the completion of the second year in the grade. In the higher grades the percentage of students failing at the end of the second year is generally lower than the incidence in Grade VIII and IX, but failure still persists. It is doubtful then, that "repeating" can be justified on a theory of marginal utility, involving the raising of students' marks and achievement to a particular standard.

If it is accepted that, for many subjects, the improvement in achievement that can be expected to result from "repeating" is

small, then the results of this study do not justify repeating a year. This is particularly true when the repeating is done under a Grade Promotion system involving students repeating subjects they have already passed. It need hardly be added that if students repeat a grade this adds a year to the time it takes them to complete school. This extra time is costly to the student and to the community. The student's potential earning power is reduced by one year's earnings, and the cost to the community is raised by one pupil/year unit. In addition to these undesirable results of "repeating", recent research has shown that there is some link between the incidence of overageness in students, and dropping out of school. Further, some studies have suggested that the student who repeats a grade has a tendency to develop social-personal problems.

There is an obvious need for further research into the various aspects of the problem of "repeating". Considering what has been discussed thus far, the greatest need is for a study into what is expected of "repeaters", and what constitutes a real and valuable improvement in achievement. The differences that exist between subjects invites probing. A study of the results presented here, dealing with the different amounts by which varying subjects may be expected to improve at the end of the second year, suggests a possible hypothesis. For example, it

could be hypothesized that a larger mean improvement takes place in mathematical and scientific subjects because these subjects lend themselves to greater objectivity in the teaching of the subject. Assessment of student performance in these subjects may also be done in a more objective manner. Evidence to support such a hypothesis might be found if there were a significant difference between the improvement shown in French Written - a relatively objective subject - and that found in a subjective subject such as French Oral.

All the high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal are now operating a system of Subject Promotion. Students are now only required to repeat those subjects that they fail. It would seem that the results of this study have some relevance to the new situation. In essence, not a great deal has changed, for the student who fails is still called upon to repeat a subject with the expectation that he will show an improvement in marks, and hence in achievement. It may be postulated that the motivation of a student repeating only the subject or subjects that he has failed will be higher than that of a student repeating a whole range of subjects, as was the case under the Grade Promotion system. With increased motivation, such a student should obtain a greater improvement in marks than that shown to be obtained by students in the present study. Clearly, since it is a different

situation, further research would need to be done in the Subject Promotion systems before any final conclusions could be reached. However, the results shown in Tables XIV through XVII suggest that, the motivation factor aside, Subject Promotion as it is now practised, lacking graduated levels at which a subject may be taken, will not solve the problem of having repeaters or overage students in school. The evaluation of Subject Promotion done by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal reported that in the two schools operating Subject Promotion at the time, repeating was of the order of 390 pupil hours per 1000 pupils. This compared with a ratio of 670 pupil hours per 1000 pupils in the Grade Promotion schools.⁵ Subject Promotion, while it cuts down the amount of repeating in high schools, is a long way from eliminating it. A further point of importance is that, as the present study shows, many students, particularly in the lower grades, who fail a subject at the end of the first year continue to fail it at the end of the second year.

Although the organization of the majority of high schools in the Province has changed in recent years, elementary schools are still run on a Grade Promotion system. When research into the effects on achievement of repeating a grade was reviewed, it was suggested that the findings of research done in the elementary schools might be applicable to the high school situation. There is then

⁵ Montreal, The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, Curriculum Department, <u>Subject Promotion - Evaluation</u> (1964).

some precedent for suggesting that the results of this study may be relevant to the elementary school. The curricula in Grades VII and VIII are similar, and the increasing use of subject specialists in the elementary schools makes the conditions in them similar to those found in the high schools when this study was carried out. This would seem to be particularly true for Grades VI and VII in the elementary schools. If the results of this study are applicable to the elementary schools, it would provide some evidence to support the pronouncements made in Regulation No. 1 of the Quebec Department of Education. For in stipulating that in the future a student could spend a maximum of seven years in the six-year elementary school programme, the regulation implies a dissatisfaction with having students repeat a grade. However, the stimulus for the regulation would seem to have come from a consideration of socio-economic and political factors rather than from the findings of any research into the effects of "repeating" a grade. Weight may well have been given, however, to the findings of studies done in the United States. Even with the application of Regulation No. 1, repeating is still permitted once, and, in view of these results, the value of such a policy may be questioned.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This study has attempted to assess the effect of "repeating" a grade in high school upon the academic achievement of students taking the extra year in the grade. To facilitate the study two null hypotheses were set up:

- 1. When students are called upon to repeat the work of a grade, scores in a given subject at the completion of the second year will not be significantly higher than the scores obtained at the end of the first year.
- 2. When students are called upon to repeat the work of a grade, a student who passed a subject at the end of his first year in a grade will not obtain significantly higher marks in that subject at the completion of the second year.

The sample of students for the study was obtained from six representative high schools of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal. The measure of academic achievement was taken to be the marks, in a particular subject, that a student received at the completion of a year in a grade. Data were collected on a variety of subjects in all four high school grades. A record was made of the marks obtained by the sample of students in June 1963, which was the completion of their first year in a given grade. An additional record was then taken of the marks, in the same subjects, that the same students obtained in June 1964, which was the completion of their second year in the particular grade.

The data, having been collected, were arranged in a number of subject/grade groupings. The first hypothesis was tested by "t" tests on the mean of the difference in marks between year I and year II for all students sampled. The second hypothesis was tested in the same manner, using only the data on students who had passed a subject at the end of their first year. In addition, information on the number of students passing or failing at the end of the second year was obtained; as was an estimate of the average improvement in marks made by different groups of students in a variety of subjects.

Prior to the collecting of data, the incidence of nonpromotion and "repeating" a grade in several countries was considered, as was the development of education in the Province of Quebec, and within the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.

A review of the literature reporting research studies made into the effects of failure and non-promotion was carried out. The majority of the research was found to have been done within elementary schools in the United States. It was felt that this research, the consensus of which was that only a small improvement in achievement resulted from repeating a grade, was in part applicable to the high school situation, but not necessarily generalized to Protestant High Schools in Montreal.

Conclusions

Following tabulation of the results, and a consideration of them in the light of previous studies, the following conclusions were reached:

- 1. Both null hypotheses put forward were rejected.
- 2. Although an improvement in marks was shown to take place in the second year spent in a grade, doubt was raised as to whether this improvement justified retention in a grade.

- 3. There was considerable difference between school subjects in the amount of improvement that took place during the second year. This indicates that there may be more justification in having a student repeat one subject than another.
- 4. Spending an additional year in a grade could not be justified on marginal utility grounds. Many students failed at the end of their second year in a grade.
- 5. The results suggested that the problem of failure may continue to exist under a Subject Promotion system.
- The results were thought to have relevance to the elementary school situation, where Grade Promotion is still practised.

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