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Azeb Desta*

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INTRODUCTION

Grouping students on the basis of their ability levels (as Fast, Average, Slow) for certain learning goals and skills is an approach in teaching any teacher employs or must employ to realize quality of educational opportunity at the classroom level. It is often done overtly (i.e. students are identified and labeled as Fast, Average, Slow) or covertly (i.e. teachers make mental notation of such students and assist them or facilitate their learning without labeling them). While the former exhibits an obvious side-effect on the self-concept of the learners, the later is associated with a healthier outcome.

The problem of being concerned with our students' self-concept is compatible with socialist realities and with our country's aspiration to "create the new man". This is shown in the description of the most salient attributes of the "New Socialist Man" indicated as follows:-

The "new socialist man" is new in all respects including "nature" and attitude..... Has self-confidence resulting from developing his potentialities to their utmost. Has faith and confidence in the limitlessness of the capability of man... He knows that inequality of opportunity more than differences brought about by man's "nature" curb his advancement and development.¹

¹ Azeb Desta, Elements of General Methods of Teaching (A Teaching Material) (Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, Addis Ababa University, 1984), pp. 4-5.

In Ethiopian schools, the application or the practice is somewhat restricted to the teaching - learning processes concerning mathematics, science and the language skills. Its misuse or neglect can not be detached from those conditions or practices that are jeopardising quality education in our country, to day. The quensequence is so obvious. It has gone to the extent of letting loose youngsters with very wide ability levels and gaps, who are thwarted, threatened and hopelessly discouraged with a gloomy view of themselves and of others. Many such inadequate students are neglected, ridiculed and ill-treated by even those who can and must do their shares of duty to remedy the situation. Many such youngsters are inadequate because of faults largely contributed by external forces or factors. By and large, the wide gap is aggravated, among others, by the imbalance in their educational background and lack of adequate as well as proper followup.

That ability differences exist between and among students at all levels is an irrefutable fact. At the same time, that average and slow learners are entitled to equality of educational opportunity at the classroom level to be realised by the teacher, can not be underscored enough. As many educational researchers have revealed, ability to see differences among students and to diagnose their learning difficulties in order to follow-them up and to assist them according to their needs are two of the important competencies of the effective teachers. Today more than ever, the concern for effective teaching and learning is none of us can ever be justified to put aside. This pressing need must be given genuine attention.

As indicated by Ethiopian teachers taking professional education courses such as General Methods of Teaching, etc. in the Faculty of Education as part of their inservice programme, and fulltime education students who have had 5 to 15 or more years of teaching experiences, they have found the approach

very useful in facilitating the task and responsibility of the teacher to reach each student. According to these reports, our school teachers who have applied the approach did so without even being threatened by large class size. In fact, they have used it to make a large class more manageable, and to reach those students who needed their assistances and follow-ups, the most.

Be it as it may, since, of the two types of ability groupings the overt type is used in our school system a great deal, the aim of the writer of this article is to bring to the attention of all teachers, who employ or will employ this type of grouping, how it can be a threat to our youngsters' healthy self-concept. Unless practised and applied with caution and understanding of the side-effects it entails, it could easily undermine our effort to facilitate and realise the principle of equality of educational opportunity at the classroom level by assisting our students according to their needs.

Needless to say, this is one of the most important socialist principles which, unless it is to remain simply a lip service, is the prerogative of all members of the socialist society, rather than a favour done to them. Hence it also makes the appropriate and free from threat realisation of the principle and the approach it governs the duty and obligation as well as the service a socialist teacher should render to the society.

The Purpose of Ability Grouping

Ability grouping has been used for both horizontal (interclass grouping) and vertical (grouping for classroom classification) classroom organization purposes. In both cases the aim is:

An attempt to form instructional groups composed of pupils who near enough alike in respect of one or more traits to justify teaching than as a group, and to reduce the task of adapting instruction to individual differences.²

A similar purpose is given thus:

The purpose of ability grouping is an attempt to reduce the range of achievement within the group so that the teacher can come closer to the individual pupil.³

The fallacy in the purpose of ability grouping according to the comments given above is dual. First, how can individual need be met when a group of pupils are treated together? For, one pupil's problem and difficulty can't be the same for every child in one group. Second, of what significance is grouping if for the sake of making the teacher's work easier it is allowed to deter individual growth and improvement? Unless an alert and watchful teacher observes each child's progress every time and makes his grouping flexible or less static, a progressing child will have to wait for his group and stay where he is. This surely neglects and hinders individual progress and achievement.

²William B. Ragan, Modern Elementary curriculum (3rd ed., New York: Holt, Rinehat & Winston, 1966), p. 149.

³Nelson L. Gage (ed.), Handbook of Research on Teaching (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), p. 909.

Many researches have been conducted to reveal the virtues and vices of ability grouping, however, the modern, trend seems to be a complete departure from the practice. The following are some of the weaknesses of ability grouping:

1. The plan violates the pupils rights to be different; when he is labeled slow, average or bright, he begins to think of himself in these terms and begins to try to be like others in his group.
2. The plan pays little attention to any characteristics of pupils other than the trait used for grouping: there is evidence that pupils with similar scores on intelligence tests may differ widely in respect to other characteristics.⁴

Therefore, these and other shortcomings of ability grouping could easily undermine some virtues that the practice (which will be discussed later) can yield if carried out properly. Bearing this in mind educators suggest the first rule of thumb, and this is, avoiding grouping that is static, and that does not make provisions for children's mental, emotional and social growth and development.

The next step is defining what is referred to as "pupil's self-concept." According to Earl C. Kelley's description, the self is an accumulation of unique experiences, unique purposes and unique biological structures. The self can never be developed in the absence of others. A person's relationship with others determines the way the person looks at himself. Kelley calls the self "fully functioning" so does Carl Rogers. The self to be functioning rather than remaining static, needs rich experiences. He needs to experi-

ence success so that his self-concept will be healthy⁵. As many psychologists believe, unless one has a healthy concept of oneself, it is unlikely that one will have a healthy concept of others.

How the individual sees himself and others, as has already been mentioned, depends on what he has experienced with others. The building of self-concept can be guided by lively events and worthwhile experience that are significant to the goals and purposes set by the individual. In addition, providing a feeling of acceptance, understanding, love and encouragement could help him grow and develop wholly.

So much for the purpose of ability grouping and the meaning of "self-concept." Let us now see the relationship of the development of a healthy self-concept with the role of counseling. Leona E. Tyler's definition of counseling signifies the said relationship:

The process through which individuals are enabled to make good choices, helped to improve their emotional health and well-being and thus improve their relationships to the world and to their fellow men as they set their pattern for their own unique patterns of development.⁶

⁵ASCD 1962 Yearbook Committee, Perceiving Behaving, Becoming (Washington 6, D.C.: A department of the National Education Association, 1201 sixteenth street, N.W., 1962), pp. 9-20.

⁶Leona E. Tyler, The Work of the Counselor (2nd edition, New York: Appletion-Century Crofts, Inc., 1961), p. 13.

The role of counseling, whether played by the counselor or by the teacher (with knowledge of and skill in counseling), is to create conditions and to facilitate the establishment of a healthy self-image that is in harmony with the individual himself and with others. Thus the discovery of the self by the individual himself will smoothen the task of adjustment to the changing environment confronted during development.

Another relationship of the problem to counseling is expressed thus:

How many students fail to complete their education: curriculum was inappropriate and teaching methods were ineffective ... Does the counselor have any responsibility for the prevention of problems such as this? Counselors will need to have some policy-making role in the establishment of grading systems... will need a soundly based knowledge of the consequences of alternative educational practices.⁷

Counselor's understanding of the impact of school practices on the over-all development of the student and suggesting better alternatives are indicated as his responsibility. As will be seen in the later section of the paper, the unhealthy experiences that pupils are exposed to under unhealthy classroom practices continue to affect them in life.

Therefore, the effect of the classroom environment (and practice) on pupil's self is a crucial problem that counselors and educators should analyze and evaluate carefully. For, it is the people (i.e. Classmates with whom the pupil carries his daily activities and teachers who, according to students, know many things and whatever they say is true) that are significant in shaping up the child's image of himself. As put by Kelley:

⁷ John D. Krumboltz (ed.), Revolution in Counselling (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 12.

For the development of the fully functioning self, a person needs to have opportunity to live life good to live. This life, or his world, needs to be populated by people whom he can view as facilitating. It is almost entirely a matter of people, not of things.⁸

The people with whom the individual associates could make it possible for him to be active and to distinguish himself. Or, they could easily be obstacles that hamper the establishment of successful and healthy self. A pupil who is given freedom to act and express his feelings in an environment which is supportive and free from threats could be creative, confident, and could grow a man of integrity and courage. These are some of the attributes of a healthy and successful self. The teacher is the one who could set the classroom atmosphere that enables the individual to develop self-direction, self-correction, broadmindedness and determination that could not be easily affected by unfavourable circumstances, in the course of his life.

There needs to be an assurance in the classroom that encourages the individual, and makes him feel that he is not threatened but accepted as one who can learn, try and improve. This is true with proper guidance and assistance. An assurance and security should prevail to make the learner feel that making mistakes is not an irrevocable act, rather a tangible proof that one is trying. It also provides the learner a practical situation to go back and evaluate his steps and procedures, as well as to change and try out other techniques that lead to success.

⁸ASCD 1962 Yearbook Committee, Loc.cit., p. 83.

The pupil, as any human being, has emotions and feelings through which he learns about his world: he observes understands "facts, as well as has feelings for them and about them. He is affected by favourable and unfavourable circumstances. This is inevitable whether acknowledged by adults or not. What is more, the resulting state he is subjected to can exert strong influence on his learning and behaving. It will be a futile exercise, therefore:

to be afraid of permitting feeling to the classroom situation. In many classroom situations the attitude is "what you feel is not important; we are here to deal with hard facts. Let us keep our feelings out of it."⁹

The classroom atmosphere should give a feeling of belongingness and hope. Let every pupil feel that differences are accepted. The learning situation, teacher's behaviour and attitude, and children's reactions should popularize the fact that there is room for improvement. In such an environment of tolerance and encouragement, there could be a possibility of helping the individual build-up a self that could face both the bright and dark sides of life, and remain unaffected or less affected after the experience.

What Research and Literature Reveal Regarding the Side-Effect of Ability Grouping

In addition to what has already been referred to, the following are some of the results of studies and experiments conducted:

⁹Ibid., p. 122

A study by Lazarus (1955) compared interest grouping with ability grouping by selecting special English classes on the basis of high ability or superior interest. The interest-selected group made high scores on a standardized test, read more books, and did more creative writing.¹⁰

A study carried out by Wrightstone (1957) reveals the child's social adjustment in a grouped and ungrouped classes. His findings showed that:

Most pupils in ungrouped program were better adjusted socially and academically than their peers in grouped classes; and that at the end of the three years ungrouped period there is likely to be less retardation among these children than in a group situation.¹¹

One of the conclusions of a study based on a review of the related research, and on carefully assessed criteria of ability grouping is that, "the slow learner's self-concept is a major concern of a majority of those teachers who group pupils for arithmetic instruction."¹²

An article, by John Eales, that appeared in the Californian Journal of Education stated that a system of ability grouping was not truly democratic. It tended to contribute to a feeling of segregation, like an individual thinking that he is not as smart as students in groups one and two.¹³

¹⁰Gage (ed.) op.cit., p. 913

¹²Anon, "A Survey of Arithmetic Interclass Grouping Practice", The Arithmetic Teacher, v.13, No. 4 (April 1966), p. 312.

In the British Journal of Educational Psychology, there is a report of a study conducted to find out the psychological effects of grouping by attainment. It was found out that the transfer of the individual into pre-existing groups intensifies the emotional difficulties accompanying such transfers.¹⁴ Finding of a similar nature is also mentioned in the Journal of Educational Research. According to this report, in response to the request to list disadvantages of ability grouping, the one more frequently mentioned was "social maladjustments especially of the older children."¹⁵

A very strong comment is reported to have been made by Stanley J. Urevich on the undemocraticness of ability grouping:

Ability grouping, its very nature, is undemocratic. It sets certain students not only apart from each other but either above or below each other. This artificial stratification based on questionable test score results, classifies students as either fast or slow...when we search our conscience we can only conclude that

¹⁴ Anon, "The Self-Picture as a Factor in the classroom" The British Journal of Educational Psychology, XXVII, No.7 p.99.

¹⁵ Anon, Journal of Educational Research, XXXIX, No. 6 (1946), pp. 104-9.

ability grouping stands on very shaky ground. Are we willing to risk its far-reaching side effects on the future of our notion?¹⁶

The side-effects, referred to, of ability grouping clearly show how they can be threats to the pupil's self-concept. They emanate from the weaknesses of the practice. Therefore, in the few pages which follow, it will be seen that, ability grouping, as an approach to facilitating teaching and learning, is not as such devoid of merit. Effective flexible grouping practices used with the side effects in mind, and with an effort put to eliminate them, could produce worthwhile results.

Faculty Practices Relation to Grouping on the Basis of Ability

Prior to identifying the specific side-effects of ability grouping similar to the ones already mentioned, a short discussion of how the process is carried out in the classroom is in order. As one of the results of the studies already mentioned signified, children are grouped, in most cases, at the beginning of the year, and on the basis of one test result only. Then the groups are labeled as, Fast and Slow or Bright, Average and Dull. This is not all, many a times teachers have been heard as saying, so and so, you, in the slow group, aren't you ashamed of yourself; when are you going to improve; you are all useless; you are old enough, etc. etc.

¹⁶ Stanley J. Urevich, Anon, The Clearing House, Vol. 39, No. 9
9 (May 1965), p. 532.

In response to teachers faulty use of the situation and hence degrading the self-esteem, many a times children, on their part, have been heard as saying; so and so is smarter than me. I am in the dumb group; I cannot learn, etc. etc. Now, does this make for the kind of positive self-image children need if they are to meet the demands of a society which requires them to live and work interdependently and constructively with people of varying abilities and interests?

A fundamental idea advanced by each of the invited authors is that children learn their self-concepts from experience. As children grouped and classified, assigned learning tasks, tested and evaluated, praised and blamed, they are developing self definitions. Schools must, therefore, be concerned about the kinds of labels pinned on children.¹⁷

Let us now see how the so labeled "Fast Learners" react to the situation and to the teachers' inconsiderately thrown comments. A child from a bright or fast group hears the teacher making distinction between groups. He hears the teacher calling him bright, and his classmate, dull. The first idea that comes to his mind is likely to be that he is intelligent and is better than, or in fact superior to his classmates who are labeled "dull or slow". He may start to brag about his position and look down upon others who are less intelligent (as so classified by teachers and by classmates). This undemocratic attitude extends outside the classroom and the school. Therefore, he not only becomes unfair to others but also to himself. He begins to entertain the idea that he is brilliant and always right. Even when he makes mistakes he does not accept them. Thus he blindly refuses to accept himself or reality.

By accepting early definitions of superiority, they may find it impossible to profit from the mistakes which are an important part of learning. These to be correct, to measure up to adult expectations and to the right standard they set for themselves leaves no room for explanation, no zest for trying the untried, no daring to test their ability when success is not assured. praise, like censure, can be damaging when it closes the doors to self discovery.¹⁸

Worse still, it is not hard to see children, in order to maintain the high standard, try out unhealthy means, if normal acts (studying, etc.) don't work. In other words, since the child is reinforced for maintaining this standard, and adult pressure presses hard on him, this could easily force him to practise abnormal behaviour like cheating and asking others to do assignments for him.

In the fast sections, the students' objective is to see how well they can do, not because they want to do well but because home pressure demands it. Grades become more important and motivation is strictly to excel (many times at any cost even cheating).¹⁹

Besides, as cautioned by educationalists, achievement attained through fear and tension is not as profitable as that attained through interest and intrinsic motivation. As any

¹⁸ASCD 1962 Yearbook Committee, Ibid., p. 134

¹⁹The Clearning House, Loc.cit., p. 531

external and negative motivation, the effect produced by fear has short lasting value to the person. It is not for the inherent value to know or to be able to accomplish that it is done. Moreover, to get out of such an unfavourable state, many erratic and unhealthy outlets may be taken. Isn't it true, as the famous observation of Wiles indicates: "that fear eats away a person's sense of personal worth, and decreases his self-confidence as well as his trust in others"?²⁰

As indicated earlier and as our experiences reveal, the feeling of superiority persists in the individual and as a parent he may demand it from his children. May be expecting high standards from one's children is not that bad but the manner in which it is enforced in the child is unhealthy and burdensome to the child. Urevich has given an illustration, in his article already referred to, of a parent who is a graduate of a fast section. He keeps on telling his child that he belonged in the super - fast section where he could learn the things that would give him the key to the future, and that he knew what kind of people were in these retarded sections.

The same and even worse things happen to those labeled as "slow learners". Whether consciously or unconsciously, teachers not only give unforgettable stigmas attached to children, but also make damaging comments that shatter the self-image, and develop inferiority complex in the individual. How else could the individual act, if he is continuously reminded of his role of an inferior person? this is not all, he is not only called "slow" but he is also given slow education that keeps him there. Consequently, when he sees everyday that

²⁰ Wiles, in Azeb Desta, Elements of General Methods of Teaching, Loc. cit., p. 61.

things are as they are, especially for him, he is likely to feel indifferent, hopeless and despair. A very probable philosophy he is going to have will be, do it if you can, if you can't, don't worry; you're a dummy any way. Then gradually he becomes bored of his acceptance of failure and tries to identify himself by attracting attention and creating discipline problem.

A 'slow learner' feels that he isn't as good as the 'fast learner.' This feeling of inferiority leads to a defeatist attitude. He's stuck where he is, so he orients his philosophy around the acceptance of a secondary role in the school. Eventually he rebels.²¹

It is neither fair nor democratic for a teacher, for lack of patience and as an outlet to her/his anger and bad mood, to call a growing child stupid and ruin his self-concept. Of course, unless another constructive teacher helps the child change this poor concept of himself, he is likely to keep on behaving as though he were one. To make it worse, parents and the society blame him wrongly or for the capacity he alone is not responsible in the making or developing and actualizing. It is very difficult to expect success after such treatments.

By way of combating such threats, an alternative is suggested by Urevich who sees a way of improving the practice of grouping. This is, in a way, the use of mixed ability grouping. He argues that students learn from each other no matter how "slow" some students are. They could contribute

21

The Clearing House, Loc. cit., p. 531

something to the growth of "fast learners" even if it isn't more than a feeling of compassion for the person who may not be able to do well. On the other hand, the "slow student" could be motivated and try to compete. If he is put in a homogeneous group, he will be with "slow learners" and in which case each member will have very little or no interest to excel. Whereas in a heterogeneous group, every body is motivated to contribute something.²² Of course this argument has some weaknesses too, but it sounds as though it is better than the side-effects brought about by the misuse of ability grouping.

What could be done in order that the wrong
practices in the Use of Ability Grouping
would not destroy its good side?

Eventhough many experienced teachers who have used the practice and psychologists speak bitterly against ability grouping used for the purpose of segmentation of learners and for making the teachers' work easier, interest grouping, flexible grouping and self-invited or chosen grouping could, if effectively used, facilitate teaching and learning as well as interdependence. To begin with, what necessitates grouping? A rationale for grouping students can justify why it is necessary:

Because of the increasing range of student difference as the group gets larger, the difficulty of providing effective instruction also increases. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of any group is that it is composed of individuals whose differences are enormous. These differences are apparent in developmental level, in perfor-

mance capability, in past learning, and in past history of social and emotional experiences.²³

Likewise, regarding the desirability of ability grouping and its effective practice, Terman is referred to as making a conclusion which he claims is based on his studies, psychological theory and available evidence: "Ability grouping combined with individually determined acceleration where warranted, is the most desirable procedure."²⁴

Citing American studies, which they believe provide evidences on the relationship between grouping and achievement, Bennett and McNamara report data presented by Soar (1973), Stallings and Kaskowitz (1974) indicating "at infant level, teacher-supervised large groups are the best organization for achievement". Furthermore, specifying the learning outcomes to be gained resulting from the application of grouping in general, the authors have indicated that "there may be benefits to be gained in social and communication skills." They recommend that to substantiate this, research needs to be conducted on group management skills. They also suggest that the learning outcomes must be empirically demonstrated.²⁵

²³William D. Rohower, Jr. et al, Educational Psychology: Teaching for student diversity (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p. 325.

²⁴Charles E. Skinner (ed.), Educational Psychology (4th edition, New Delhi - 11000: Prentice - Hall of India, Private Ltd., 1984), p. 732.

²⁵Nevill Bennett and David McNamara, Focus on Teaching: Readings in the observation and conceptualisation of teaching London: Longman Group Limited, 1979), p. 224.

On the appropriate way that grouping should be practised, Dunkin and Biddle report:

Findings support the idea that small groups should be encouraged in the classroom, although their activities should be supervised by the teacher so as to keep them on target.²⁶

Similar improved techniques in practising grouping are also suggested by Rohwer et al, who also see the probable advisability of breaking the class into small groups in order to be able to work with one group at a time. Elaborating their suggestion they indicate:

Even here, sub-grouping should be kept as flexible as possible. Students who are alike with respect to one kind of lesson may be very different in another. You should therefore avoid any kind of permanent grouping of students, but rather regroup constantly as the situation demands.²⁷

The gist of the preceding discussion is that as the mark of the true professional teacher is "to know why" he is doing what he is doing, before applying any teaching approach, the teacher must, first of all, determine the educational value to be gained. In other words, will it contribute to pupils' development and success, and will it affect their human element which is very sensitive and easy to damage? This means,

²⁶Michael J. Dunkin, Bruce J. Biddle, The Study of Teaching (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974), p. 388.

²⁷William D. Rohwer, Jr. Loc. cit., p. 326.

unless one is sure of how to use it effectively, one is better off without it. However, in order to employ grouping effectively, it is very essential to bear in mind that:

Grouping children for instructional purposes means more than assignment on the basis of level of achievement. In order to place each child where he will find the environment most conducive to his development, it is necessary to consider also his physical and social maturity and his degree of emotional stability.²⁸

In addition, the following guiding principles²⁹ which are denoted by quotation marks and their relevant explanations are suggested to help teachers to evaluate their use of any type of grouping in order to facilitate effective teaching and learning:

1. "Harmonious adjustment of each in all phases of his development."

Conditions need to be provided by teachers that enable the learner to get along with himself and with others. Such conditions should free him from depression, feeling of insecurity, etc. that may make him feel inferior, and miserable, thus affecting his progress in all respect. Instead, the conditions must enable him to face reality with

²⁸ Anon, ASCD Educational Leadership, IV, No. VI (M¹47), p. 354.

²⁹ Ibid.

appropriate attitude, face personal problems realistically as challenges that can be surmounted.

2. "Sufficient differences in groups to insure group complexities."

Employing mixed-ability grouping composed of members with different outlooks, experiences, skills, talents etc. for richer sharing and enrichment of views. This type of grouping facilitates interdependence; stimulates and encourages cooperative competition, and fosters tolerance for diversity.

3. "Enough likeness to have similarity in need."

Grouping students with common interests in the learning experiences ensures the existence of compatible members who can be more cooperative, initiative, and less quarrelsome.

4. "Opportunity to live in mutual satisfaction with his neighbours and to live happily with himself."

This is an environment that is accepting, non threatening assuring, tolerating and encouraging.

5. "Success on the part of every child and yet opportunities to be excellent."

The ability to accomplish a task is satisfying; for success breeds success. The

learners must be stimulated and encouraged to aspire for excellence, originality, resourcefulness and creativity.

6. "Opportunities for academic and mental development."

By and large this kind of development is gradual and slow. As such, if the learner is slow in mental and academic development it does not mean he is mentally inferior. Appropriate conditions and conducive environment can facilitate such developments by enhancing the contribution of factors such as patterns of child's development, social and psychological forces, the types of teacher's personality trait, teaching behavior, learning experiences, and type of examination etc.

7. "Similarities in chronological age, physical development and social maturity."

The social environment (and maturity), the physical capabilities of the individual, the demands and expectations of other children approximately his own age - the peer group - a socializing agent exert strong influence on his experience, his aspirations, actualization of his potentialities, the scope and depth of his knowledge, satisfaction of his needs, and his self-esteem.

8. "Discouragement of the idea of 'high' or 'low' ability ratings."

Such ratings are extreme and do not show existing diversity between two or more

individuals. also, the ratings overlook the fact that the achievements thus rated are subject to the influences of changeable conditions and situations. They are labels that can remain permanent stigmas by persisting even when they do not apply or reflect reality. They force teachers to be static in their approaches making them insensitive to any changes exhibited by the learners. By producing negative and unrealistic effect on those thus rated, they work counter to the aim and purpose one uses grouping students: to facilitate learning, highlight improvement and encourage positive and enhanced development of the learner.

9. "Flexibility to permit needed changes."

Grouping needs to be used with learning activities and tasks of varying degree of difficulty which students do according to their capabilities and pace. Situations allowing failure must be immediately changed. It does not work if no additional assistance, encouragement and assurance are not provided. Each member must know why he is doing what he is doing and what he must accomplish before he can be released or allowed to work on what the other students are doing.

C O N C L U S I O N

In few pages, the paper attempted to discuss the significance of realizing ability variations as one of the many in-

dividual differences our students exhibit in our classrooms. The speed at which our students learn, the scope of their understanding, and the standard (level) of their academic achievement are aspects of these differences. The type of methods or approaches the teacher uses to determine teaching processes and manners of learning, to direct and guide learners' activities and the kind of environment (both physical and social or psychological) he creates can either facilitate or hamper the provision for learning opportunities in the classroom. Wrong or faulty practices in the application of the approaches and techniques the teacher uses can have many repercussions and side-effects on the learner's healthy development of the self-image which in turn can affect his stamina and confidence in his capability to actualize and develop his potentialities. This feeling of inadequacy, resulting from the damaged selfimage of the learner, may persist throughout life thus indangering his capability to be a fitting and productive member of his society.

Today, Ethiopia is in a state of flux, one of which is cultural. In this line, the country has made it its goal to mould the "new socialist man." The new socialist man, among his other attributes, is one with self-confidence i.e., with a strong faith in his capability to learn, to think, to create, to interact, and to improve. This is a man who is expected to play an important role in social transformation, and to contribute to the enhancement of the development and progress of his country. Youngsters are prepared for such important role.

Needless to say, this important task of preparing an individual with a healthy-image of himself and with a strong confidence in his capability, makes the obligation and responsibility of those affiliated with the task, in general and of teachers, in particular, of paramount importance. Therefore, such a professional responsibility can not be neglected by all concerned. Obviously, the prevalence of such

a neglect, i.e., the responsibility to do what is right and worthwhile, does not make it less important. In fact, it is high time that schools are held accountable for their wrong practices or negligences which have crucial negative impact on the quality of education in our country.

The teacher has to be cautious in the choice of words or language he uses when dealing with his students; for everything he says is grabbed by them as it sounds on the surface. For instance, the teacher who says "if you work hard on it you may improve" may think he has encouraged the learner, but it may create an increased feeling of uncertainty and failure. Moreover, a teacher who emphasizes on the child's being good at arithmetic and science only, may appear to show disappointment in the child's performances in other subjects. As many educationalists and psychologists have reiteratively indicated, children's adjustment depends on how the teacher sees their accomplishments. A poor reader is likely to be well adjusted to the fact that he cannot read; for he could have formed an image of himself as a poor reader. And his inability to read strengthens the feeling of his being a poor reader. Therefore, he adjusts himself to it.

The self-structure develops in response to environmental stimuli. Since teachers are important aspect of the child's environment, it is likely that they have great effect on the child's self-picture.³⁰

Finally, the writer believes that this paper will trigger the strong impetus of those concerned with quality education, to do further investigation and research on the problem. Certainly, the attempt will deepen our insight and improve our skills in the teaching-learning processes which are instrumental in educating nation builders.

³⁰The British Journal of Educational Psychology, Loc.cit. p. 99.

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