

DEVELOPMENTAL PACE

Children reach the same learning at different times, and the spread inside any one classroom is wide. School is built as though it were not: one birth-date cohort, one body of content taught at one time, one set of expectations — and then a mark for the distance between the child and the timetable.

THE SAME AGE IS NOT THE SAME STAGE.

A GRADE IS A BIRTH DATE · IT IS BEING ASKED TO REPORT A STAGE

01 GROUPED BY BIRTH DATE

A grade is a cohort of children born inside the same twelve months. They are then taught the same body of content at the same time, and assessed on how much of it they can demonstrate. **Nothing in that sequence ever asked where they were.**

02 READINESS ASSUMED, NOT ESTABLISHED

The machinery assumes everyone in the grade is about equally ready for that content. **That assumption is not a finding.** It has been examined against the research, and the evidence does not support it.

03 THE GAP RECORDED AGAINST THE CHILD

A-to-E grades report distance from a grade expectation. A learner earlier in the sequence is marked down for being where they are — **which is information about the ruler, not about the learner.**

“The curriculum assumption that all students in a grade are about equally ready for the same learning is not supported by evidence.”

GEOFF MASTERS · THE CHILDREN WE LEAVE BEHIND · ROUTLEDGE, 2026 · P. 194

WHERE YOU WILL MEET THIS

- The report card that says **below grade level** and stops there.
- The letter proposing **retention**, or holding a child back a year.
- The plan or IEP goal about to be pinned to a **year-level benchmark**.
- The meeting where **“behind”** is said as though it described the child.

WHAT TO MEASURE INSTEAD

Masters puts the fix as a change of *purpose*, not of rigour: assessments “designed to establish and understand the stages that individuals have reached in an area of learning to support their further learning and monitor their growth over time.” – P. 153

- **The stage, not the gap.** Find where the learner has actually reached in a sequence of learning, and teach from there. That is a different question from how far they are from a benchmark, and it has a different answer.
- **Levels not tied to age or grade**, through which every learner advances at their own pace — with no requirement that a whole cohort be taught the same thing at once.
- **Growth over time**, each learner measured against their own earlier work rather than against the people born the same year.
- **Individual assessment.** Teaching from where a learner is isn't a concession for the children who need it most — it is what assessment is *for*, for everyone.

WHAT THIS SHEET IS NOT

- ✗ not **slower is better**. Pace is not a virtue and speed is not a vice. A pace is survivable or it isn't, and the environment decides.
- ✗ not **lower expectations**. Presume competence, then teach from where they actually are. Those are the same move, not opposite ones.
- ✗ not **a claim that age tells you nothing**. It tells you a birth date. It is being asked to report a stage, and it cannot.

WHAT TO ASK FOR IN THE ROOM

- **“What can they do now, and what comes next?”** Ask it before anyone reaches for a grade level. If nobody present can answer it, that is itself the finding.
- **Ask what the mark is being used for.** A grade reporting distance from a year-level expectation cannot also tell you what to teach on Monday. Those are two different instruments.
- **Ask to see growth against their own earlier work** — dated, specific, and put in front of you.
- **Ask that support not wait for a missed benchmark.** Needing longer is not a finding a child has to earn by failing first.
- **Ask about mixed-age and flexible grouping.** Children learn at their own rate; sorting them by year of manufacture is a scheduling convenience, not a pedagogy.

“Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds.”

ALISON KAHER · FEMINIST, QUEER, CRIP · INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013

Geoff Masters, *The Children We Leave Behind: How School Could Be Done Differently* (Routledge, 2026) — both quotations verbatim, pp. 194 and 153. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), on crip time as flexibility rather than merely extra time. Alfie Kohn, *Getting Hit on the Head Lessons* (Education Week, 2005), names *BGUTI* and observes that the defence almost by definition ignores developmental differences. Ira Socol, *The Multiage Magic*, and the ACEI, on mixed-age grouping and learning at one's own rate. Alison Clark, *Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child*, on slow pedagogy and on following an emergent rather than inbuilt timetable. All of it in full at stimpunks.org/glossary/developmental-pace. Quoted passages remain their authors'; this sheet's own text is CC0.