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# HAVE GOOD READERS— WILL GO PLACES

*Joan Paul*

John, a well developed fifth grade boy, has been chosen to represent his school in an all-city sports contest. Since he is very athletic and has been encouraged by his classmates, he stands a good chance of winning the 100-yard-dash trophy for his school. Sounds exciting, doesn't it? But, wait. What if his teacher tells him to run slowly so the other boys can keep up with him? No teacher would dream of doing that. We do not expect children to run at the same rate, and we encourage them to try to excel.

Now, consider Joey. Alert, six-year-old Joey comes from a home where much emphasis has been placed on books, plays, and music. Joey's parents have read stories to him from the time he was a baby, and Joey has already built up his own library of children's books. With his parents he has travelled through many states and has visited several foreign countries. Joey could read many words, phrases and sentences when he entered kindergarten. Now, in first grade, although Joey is in the top group, he is thoroughly bored with reading,

“‘Jump,  
Jump, Spot  
Jump down, Spot  
Jump down, Spot,’ said Dick.”

It is understandable why Joey asks his mother, “Why doesn't Dick just say, ‘Jump down, Spot,’ and get it over with?”

His teacher knows he is bored, but Joey must keep with his group and continue, unchallenged, to waste day after day reading what he already knows, working in simple workbooks, and drawing pictures when he finishes his work too soon. Are we not actually asking Joey to lag behind, to stop in the middle of a race in order that others may keep up with him?

Is this child being educated, or is the role of the school in Joey's case, that of a baby sitter? Witty says, “One of the chief responsibilities of the school is to provide for the gifted child stimulating reading experience in the primary grades.” (11) In determining what will be best in educating our pupils, why, oh why, do we fail to consider that the intellectually advanced reader must be challenged! We spend much of our time working with the slow reader, but how many of us actually do more than help the bright child to put in time and keep

busy? It has been stated, "The gifted, the potential leaders, discoverers and creators . . . are usually left to develop their own skills in their own way and in terms of personal initiative alone." (8)

In most classrooms, what do we usually do with the advanced reader? We provide busy work which generally consists of games, flash cards, puzzles, and pictures. We may have a few old workbooks for children to use, or we may just tell them to go ahead a few more pages in their reading workbook so that they won't be "idle." In this way, we defeat the purpose of workbooks which is to provide an opportunity for children to make use of ideas gained through reading. "Workbooks have been designed to serve a purpose and are not to be employed merely as a means of keeping children busy." (3) This type of busy work may aid the teacher, but what is it doing to challenge the student? Cannot we do more to stimulate imaginative and creative thinking? "One of the prime reasons for the low level of achievement of many older gifted and superior children is that they were not stimulated to work up to their capacities in early school years." (7)

Terman, in his research has concluded that the bright child becomes the bright adult. (10) Some of the organizational procedures which administrators have used for providing for bright students have been acceleration, special classes, and enrichment. While acceleration may prove beneficial for some, it may not be satisfactory for a child whose development is uneven. Academically, a child may achieve in an accelerated grade, but physically and socially he may be a misfit. Most school systems are too small to provide special classes, and this also has the disadvantage of segregating the child from his usual social group by placing a label on him. Kirk says,

An enrichment program has the advantage of keeping the bright child in a heterogeneous class allowing the child to develop leadership, yet remaining with children of his own age. This program makes every teacher a teacher of the gifted thus elevating the quality of instruction for all children, and it will minimize the financial requirements since in the elementary grades this does not necessarily add to the expense of running a school. (5)

What then can we, as teachers of reading, do to meet the needs of our advanced readers? Mentally advanced children "learn faster than the average child, and therefore, require less repetition in order to learn the same material." (5) These readers require a modification of the regular reading program. Witty says,

The reading program should make provisions for the full range of ability, including the gifted. This program recognizes

the value of systematic instruction, utilization of interests, fulfillment of developmental needs, and the articulation of reading experience with other types of worthwhile activity. (11)

A program of this type takes time, knowledge, and skills, which some teachers are unwilling or unable to give. It means extra planning, additional education for the teacher, and learning and employing techniques of child study. It will be necessary for the teacher to direct creativity into constructive channels, by encouraging, guiding, and providing stimulating classroom experiences. The teacher will make use of varied language arts activities, and will help the children express themselves as much as possible in writing reports. She will make up original dramatizations and work out experience charts and stories which can be exchanged with other groups. In schools where educational television is being utilized, bright children can use this medium. Children can compile reading lists, and teachers will strive to help students develop a sense of values so they can select books wisely and read critically. In the early primary grades, simple book reports requiring use of vocabulary such as "title," "author," and "illustrations," will be of much value. Due to the establishment of children's book clubs and to the increased sales of children's books generally, many children are reading more than ever before. Larrick states,

The facts show that in many a publishing house the gross sale of children's books far exceeds that of adult books. At Simon and Schuster and Viking Press, children's books account for over 75% of the gross sales each year. *The Golden Dictionary* sold 83,000 copies in 1953, and by now has sold over a million and a half copies. (6)

The basic school reader alone is no longer sufficient to challenge space age children!

McWilliams suggests committee work to provide opportunities for leadership and to create situations where people of varied abilities and interests learn to work together. He feels library facilities, alcoves, or small rooms should be utilized for groups working on class projects, assembly presentations, and dramatizations. (7)

Even in the early grades, the children should be taught how and when to use library facilities, and the bright youngsters will be anxious to delve into almanacs, atlases, encyclopedias, and other reference books. Robinson tells us an exchange teacher in Vancouver found pupils there to be excellent readers, and attributed this to the well used libraries. (9) School libraries should include such books as: *The Land-*

mark Books (Random House), *The Allabout Books* (Random House), *I Want To Be Books* (Childrens Press), *The True Book Series* (Childrens Press), and *Our Animal Story Books* (D. C. Heath and Company). *The Beginner Reading Books* (Random House) can be valuable in supplementing early primary reading programs.

If we are to define reading as a "process of identifying, interpreting, and evaluating ideas" (3), then we have the responsibility to guide our students in developing the necessary skills to go beyond the mere identification of words into divergent and convergent thinking and evaluation of concepts! McWilliams points out,

The gifted and superior children in our schools represent one of our nation's richest resources. We dare not neglect to inspire and help these children to develop to the utmost of their potentiality. Recognition of the value of the individual is a fundamental tenet of our democracy and it is the duty of our schools to help each child reach the highest possible level of personal achievement, and develop as a citizen who contributes worthily to our society. (7)

If we can accept this challenge, and accomplish this, then we can truly earn the right to say, "HAVE GOOD READERS; WILL GO PLACES."

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