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Linda Mixon Clary
Augusta College

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HELP FOR THE MOBILE STUDENT

Linda Mixon Clary
AUGUSTA COLLEGE, GEORGIA

Teachers today know firsthand that sociologists are correct when they describe Modern American society as mobile. It is not at all unusual for many students – sometimes half a class – to enter classrooms while numerous others leave during the normal school year. This situation of course has always been true in areas that serve very transient groups such as military families, but it appears to now also apply to many other populations. Some up-to-date estimates predict that workers will change jobs eight or nine times in a lifetime and children are often involved in these moves. Consequently, today's teachers have to be prepared to help new students as they come to their classes throughout the school year. Many times these students come with few records from their previous school, and it can be a difficult task for a teacher to find the time to properly assess the new students and their reading needs. The following ideas are possible ways for the classroom teacher to be prepared to welcome new students to class, properly place them for instruction and make them feel at home in the new group.

For the teacher to help herself and the new student simultaneously, it is important to work in the categories of testing and acclimatizing. These areas include determining the child's instructional reading level, assessing his actual classwork, and making him feel accepted. While achieving these goals, the teacher of course, cannot neglect the other students, so it is important to work as quickly as possible, use student help, and let the new student perform some tasks independently.

Testing

When a new student arrives, it is often with no more than a report card, if that. How can we decide where to place him for maximum success? An individual informal reading inventory can be very helpful, but that takes time. What can be done that's quicker and still useful? Try the following:

- (1) For older children (approximately, third grade level and above), prepare CLOZE passages from the texts being used in your classroom and keep them on file. Make a tape of directions and follow the exercise with a tape of how to find the answer key and correct the passage. The new student can work independently or with minimum help from a teacher-appointed helper in the class. The data are available quickly, and the student feels useful without being embarrassed.
- (2) Have a passage selected in textbooks to be read for ORAL READING. Again, have the student work alone and read and record the passage on tape. Later, you will be able to assess his

oral reading performance without neglecting the other youngsters and making the child feel ill at ease in front of you.

- (3) Keep passages for a **GROUP INFORMAL READING INVENTORY** on hand. However, in this case, let the new student work alone in the passage and write the answers to his questions. These results give helpful data about the student's comprehension skills and also yield a sample of writing ability.

After getting an approximate reading level from one or more of the tasks above, follow up in these ways:

- (4) Let the student look at the materials in use in your classroom at or about his level. In a short interview, ask which ones are most similar to those that she had been using. If time permits have the youngster read a short passage and answer questions about it or check sight word knowledge by pointing out important words in the glossary or word lists for instant recognition.
- (5) Give the child several assignments at the apparent instructional level from the materials you use at that level. Again, these could be kept on file and would probably be most useful if taken from work the other students have already completed. These **WORK SAMPLES** might include several worksheets of the basal unit tests that you have already finished, workbook pages and/or criterion-referenced tests.

If these suggestions have been followed, two of the goals for dealing with new students have been achieved: you should now have work samples and a fairly accurate instructional level. The third goal of making the new student feel welcome might need some more work. These points then are aimed at the affective domain and fall into the category of acclimatizing the youngster.

Acclimatizing

- (6) Use the **BUDDY SYSTEM**. Appoint a student who does approximately the same level work to show the new pupil where supplies are kept, how to label his work (name, group, date, book, level or whatever is the usual procedure), where to put completed assignments, the time schedule, guidelines for doing work over, how to get help, etc. The two pupils might even work together for a day or so.
- (7) The first time that you meet with the new student for instruction in a group or individually, conduct a **BRAG SESSION**. Explain how well the child followed directions, did the testing assignments, or completed the worksheets. Use anything positive and true that you have observed and congratulate the child.
- (8) When time allows, be certain that the new student meets any other personnel in the school who may deal with reading—the librarian, parent volunteers, the reading specialist, principal. The child's buddy or another student might make these **INTRODUCTIONS**.

- (9) Have the entire class do a group language experience story to welcome the new child. Allow a few days for them to get acquainted and then use language experience for a reading assignment. Let the new student participate too, and some more diagnostic information on oral language facility can be procured during the WELCOME STORY activity.
- (10) Finally, when the child's records arrive, do a CROSS-CHECK. See if your instructional level agrees with his previous work. (Often, unfortunately, titles of books, rather than reading levels are given. In this case, many state departments of education, reading specialists, college professors or textbook representatives can help determine the levels.) Check any notes on past work with your observations. If the records differ from your findings and you feel that you do not have the child at a point where he is making maximum progress, further testing may be necessary or a parent conference might be needed. In contrast, however, if the child is doing well, let him continue to succeed.

These suggestions are possible ways that classroom teachers can deal with new students who enter their classes during the school year. Many times, the child's first day can be disruptive to the class, unsettling to the teacher and disillusioning to the student. These activities, in contrast, can help the teacher learn about the student with a minimum of preparation and time and get the youngster started in his new school in a positive, productive manner without disturbing his classmates.