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TEACHING METHODS UTILIZING A FIELD THEORY VIEWPOINT IN THE ELEMENTARY READING PROGRAM

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The trend in reading instruction during the past few years, has strongly focused on the whole child, his individuality, his feelings, beliefs, and goals as well as his cognitive abilities. All of these constitute the child's life space and are the "parts of the whole" that teachers must deal with. Consistent with this learning theory, the teacher's role has changed. Teaching now consists of the promotion and enrichment of the interactive learning process between the child and his environment. The teaching environment of the reading program is most important to the young reader's success. The acceleration of the reading process depends on the ability of the teacher to create an environment that both challenges and facilitates this interaction.

All of the articles concerned with reading and used for this report (see Annotated Bibliography), are in some way linked directly to the basic principles underlying the Cognitive-Field Theory of Learning. Throughout these articles the terminology most prevalent is significant of this learning theory, for example: "self-concept, perception of self, his world, needs, goals, individual, values, perceptions, insights, field of understanding, level of experience, learning environment, significant other, generalization, enrichment, and enhancement." The authors of these articles also emphasize the individual learner. They speak of the teachers as primarily a facilitator of learning rather than simply a dispenser of information. The teacher is in the "background" and the total individual child is in the "foreground." A child learns through interaction with the immediate environment and gains knowledge through these experiences. The importance of a *rich and stimulating* reading environment is stressed time and again.

The overall theme of the articles emphasizes the importance of the individual learner. The authors discuss the child in terms which depict his/her unique qualities, e.g. Priscilla Vail in "My Book." They further stress the absolute importance of an intimate, friendly, and enthusiastic teacher-student relationship. To be a successful reading teacher, one must know the child and "his world." The authors agree that self-concept is a major factor in the success of a beginning reader. The teacher, as a significant other, occupies a central role in nurturing and enhancing the young person in development. Mary Ann Henderson's article, "Reading While Becoming: Affective Approaches," suggests, for example, many

usable ways in which this may be accomplished. Know the child. Then match a method of teaching and learning that will facilitate success in reading as the “key” according to many of the authors. A very innovative example of this procedure is Zina Steinberg’s “Batman Books: Homemade First Reader.” This method she chose met the needs she identified in her individual students and thus enabled them to successfully enter the adopted program. Another article, “Let’s Suppose Personality Interacts With Reading Instruction Methods,” by Edwin Farrell, advises the teacher to consider the personality type of the child before deciding on the method to use. Similarly, all of the articles stress the importance of knowing and understanding the child before any teaching and learning can occur.

From analysis of these articles it is obvious that the role of the teacher is more important than the particular method used. The teacher makes the difference! However, the teacher’s role is no longer considered to be primarily the information center in the classroom. It is now as an organizer, manager, and evaluator of the entire learning environment. The work is behind the “scene,” challenging the child, not threatening nor coercing. The child is designated as the selector, learner, presentor, and self-evaluator of his own accomplishments. The teacher now occupies the role of advisor and facilitator of individualized teaching as required. Most of the articles illustrate what the child, not the teacher, will do in any learning setting. Such a creative way of utilizing children’s eagerness to “help the teacher” is explored for example, in “A Program to Enhance Peer Tutoring,” by Nancy Boraks and Amy Roseman Allen. This field-tested method was found to improve both reading achievement and school attitude. It provides responsible roles for children and creates a greater sense of community within the group. A new role-reversal unit was included which offset the undesirable superior-inferior relationship which might develop between the two children involved.

Many of the articles deal directly with the language experience approach to beginning reading. Once again the focus is on the child and the use of his/her own language as a vehicle to reading success. The teacher’s role is to aid children in writing their own stories to read and share. Guy T. Bushwell’s “A Limited Reading Program For Grades One Through Six,” for example, states that “the teaching of beginning reading should grow out of and be intimately related to the oral language experiences of the child.” Bushwell believes that if the initial material used for reading were limited to words from the child’s own vocabulary there would be no problem of learning meaning, since “reading is basically a process of recognizing printed word symbols in the same way that the child has already learned to recognize spoken word symbols.” This holistic approach has proven to be an effective/affective program of reading instruction.

Teachers are the guardians of the reading environment and the focus is on the individual. Four of the articles—by Freeley, Ley, Madden, and Meints—discuss self selective individualized reading programs and how they may be implemented in the classroom. They stress the need for a rich environment, a good variety of reading materials, and an abundance of

books at various levels, for the children to choose from. The child must be allowed to choose the book he wants to read and then be given uninterrupted time to do so. Individual work should be at the learner's level of competency; it should be distributed at his pace; and should be chosen by the teacher, with the child's interest taken into account. The accent is on brief lessons, conducted by an enthusiastic teacher, zeroing in on specific skills identified for review and evaluation.

This focus on the individual child, the modified teaching role, and an amelioration of the learning environment, should according to these articles, enhance learner motivation with a positive attitude toward reading. The child interacting within such an environment will be prepared for both independence in reading and the genuine pleasure he will gain from his experience. Accordingly, continued interest in personal reading as a natural, rewarding activity is the overall goal of the Cognitive-Field oriented teacher.

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Boraks, Nancy and Amy Roseman Allen, "A Program to Enhance Peer Tutoring," *The Reading Teacher*, 30:5 (February, 1977), 479-484.

A peer tutoring program was developed and field-tested to determine if elementary school children could actually utilize certain behaviors in an unstructured tutoring situation. Teaching the students to tutor their own classmates improved the reading achievement of both tutor and tutee.

Bushwell, Guy T., "A Limited Reading Program for Grades One Through Six," *Reading Improvement*, 13 (Spring, 1976), 10-13.

Two aspects of the reading program in grades one through six, vocabulary and silent reading, are discussed in the light of the overall principle that the teaching of beginning reading should grow out of and be intimately related to the oral language experiences of children.

Dank, Marion, "What Effect do Reading Programs Have on the Oral Reading Behavior of Children?" *Reading Improvement*, 14 (Summer, 1977), 66-69.

The article analyzes oral reading errors made by twenty children

during their second year of formal reading instruction. Readers in Ginn Reading 360 produced an average of 14.09 percent of oral reading deviations that did not alter the author's message, while those in McGraw Hill's Programmed Reading produced only an average of 7.01 percent. The experimenter attributes the difference to the formal reading instruction. Reading 360 places more emphasis on understanding what the author is communicating while Programmed Reading focuses on processing written symbols.

Farrell, Edwin, "Let's Suppose Personality Interacts with Reading Instruction Methods." *Journal of Reading*, 20:21 (November, 1976), 104-106.

The success of a particular method of teaching reading may be influenced by the personality type of the student. In the Jungian framework (one way of classifying personality types) the thinking type person would best be taught by the decoding-phonics method; the feeling type person by the language experience method; the sensation type by programmed instruction; and the intuitive type of the "look and say" method.

Freeley, Joan T., and Blanche Rubin, "Reading in the Open Classroom," *Language Arts*, 54:3 (March, 1977), 287-289.

The children approach their learning tasks in a businesslike, confident way. Reading instruction is both incidental and directed. The accent is on the individual learner, with the teacher accepting the responsibility for providing the learning environment and direct, functional, individualized teaching as it is required.

Henderson, Mary Ann, "Reading While Becoming: Affective Approaches," *Journal of Reading*, 20:4 (January, 1977), 317-326.

Programs have been initiated to develop reading competence, and others have focused on enhancing self-concept. This article delineates instructional practices which simultaneously advance the two.

Ley, Terry C., "How to Set Up and Evaluate a DIR Program," *Media and Methods* 15 (April, 1979), 20-28.

Directed Individualized Reading allows students to select books they want to read, gives them uninterrupted time to do the reading, and provides a format for feedback and evaluation. An essential component is the individualized teacher/student conference. The program also affords teachers an excellent opportunity to assess the interests and skill levels in their classroom.

Madden, Lowell. "The Learning Package Approach to Individualized Reading Instruction," *Reading Improvement*, 15 (Winter, 1978), 257-260.

A reading learning package is an instructional program which guides students' reading activities and development. It consists of self-contained sets of learning materials developed around selected children's books or stories. The children use the materials independently in a continuously progressive and self-paced manner.

Meints, Donald W.. "The Task System in an Individualized Reading Class," *Journal of Reading*, 20:4 (January, 1977), 301-304.

The article discusses how a teacher, committed to individual instruction, can structure a class so that students will be working at their own levels, paces, and interests, and yet receive instruction in reading as well as other facets of language arts and English.

Pienaar, Peter T., "Breakthrough in Beginning Reading: Language Experience Approach," *The Reading Teacher*, 30:5 (February, 1977), 489-496.

In a Canadian language experience approach study, conducted in both an English and a French-language school, primary pupils shared and read each other's lively writings. This open-ended, eclectic approach to learning to read and write revitalized both learning and teaching.

Smith, Deborah Deutsch, "The Improvement of Children's Oral Reading Through the Use of Teacher Modeling," *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 12:3 (March, 1979), 39-42.

The influence of the classroom teacher's reading orally before the child reads was investigated. Three learning disabled students participated in the study, and in every case the correct and error rates for oral reading improved remarkably. The data indicate that modeling could be an appropriate intervention to select when children are not yet proficient in oral reading.

Steinberg, Zina. "Batman Books: Homemade First Readers," *The Reading Teacher*, 29 (April, 1976), 676-682.

Through a most innovative way a first-year, first-grade teacher taught twenty-seven, non-English speaking immigrant children how to read. She utilized a "universal" children's hero Batman to create hand-made books that taught basic vocabulary. These books

enabled the children to successfully enter the formal reading program.

Vail, Priscilla, "My Book," *Instructor*, 86:7 (March, 1977), 66-69.

The purpose of the "My Book" is to reinforce the links connecting a child to his world and the written word. It affirms the child's unique qualities, and gives importance to his personal facts. Each individual child writes and illustrates his own book and shares it with his classmates.

Wulz, S. Vanost and John H. Hollis, "Word Recognition: A Task Based Definition for Testing and Teaching," *The Reading Teacher*, 32:7 (April, 1979), 779-785.

Six tasks for beginning readers define the act of comprehending printed words. Each can be tested and taught, utilizing any teaching procedure. The tasks are defined so the teacher can present any one or all of them as components of a teaching program.