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THE GIFTED STUDENT IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES: DEVELOPING CREATIVITY THROUGH READING

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There is no consensus on what makes a child gifted. Certainly it is a combination of a multitude of factors. The child's natural heredity sets an upper limit to his possibilities, but giftedness is not a package given at birth with no hopes of change. It is a growing, becoming process that constantly creates, elaborates and refines itself by selecting, comparing, and organizing life experiences (Strang, 1960).

Because language is a creative, innovative process and in the gifted child even more so, he must be given every opportunity to use the skills already owned and develop them further. It is the responsibility, even duty, of the teachers of these children to see that they are given the skills to do so. This is important at all grade levels, however, the intermediate grades are particularly well suited to this kind of activity. Smith (1974:53) states "students in the intermediate grades have a greater wealth of background experience than primary grade students and are not so inhibited in regard to divergent thinking as older students often become." At this age they have enough maturity and ability to benefit from a program designed to develop their creativity.

Creative Reading

Creative reading is the highest form and most neglected of all the reading skills. Frequently, teachers will be unaware of the need for it and the methods with which it can be accomplished. Generally, reading is taught through methods which stress lower level skills of reading. The creative reader should be capable of more than this. Most gifted children have the capacity to become creative readers, given proper instruction. The creative reader possesses the ability to examine relationships among facts and interpretations. He will, however, need guidance to achieve full use of this ability. Isaacs (1974) feels that without guidance, creative reading may never happen. Randomly selected materials will not provide the maximum benefits.

Gifted children generally have the basics of reading well in hand by the time they reach the intermediate grades. They need other things besides "basics" instruction. Barbe (1971:21) believes "intellectually superior students must be challenged if learning is to take place and interest in learning maintained." He identifies nine specific needs for the gifted in

their reading program: differentiation of instruction; regular and careful evaluation of the child's reading ability and achievement; proper grouping for instruction; active involvement of the student in his reading instruction; differentiation of reading style according to the type and purpose of material read; an ever-increasing range of reading material made available; guidance in critical reading; continuity in reading instruction throughout his school career; and superior teachers.

Research by DeBoer (Barbe, 1971) found five specific aspects of creative reading operating in varying degrees in a number of elementary programs. The first, creative inquiry, deals with learning how to ask the right questions. Creative interpretation involves an intensive effort to reconstruct reading material using clues and symbols found in the original writing. Creative integration combines words, concepts and images of a story into new moods or perceptions in the reader's mind. Creative application involves looking for various situations in the reader's experience that may relate directly or indirectly to what has been read. The last one, creative criticism, deals with the process of separating fact from opinion and drawing tentative conclusions that may differ from the author's.

The consensus in the research is that a gifted child's program must be individualized to provide for his needs and to provide for the development of creativity. Gifted students are not always speedy workers, therefore, they must be allowed to work at their own pace. They should have parameters, but should be free to select within those parameters. There should be adequate opportunity to talk with the teacher, for these children especially need this dimension in order to grow and learn. There should also be a time provided for them to put their reading and learning into action, through drama, speech-making, simulation games and projects.

Simulation activities for groups can be created on almost any topic. Once the activity is started, the children could be asked to contribute problems to be solved as it progresses. After reading several different plays by authors whose styles vary widely, they could be asked to write the ideas that make a good play and then write their own and produce it, thus combining several different areas of learning. As for projects, after reading several different sources on one subject, the students could be asked to brainstorm their own projects.

Techniques such as brainstorming, role-playing, buzz sessions, and group discussions are effective ones to use with the gifted. Brainstorming is an especially effective one, allowing the students to stretch their creativity to the fullest without any threat of repression. Gallagher (1969) gives several important rules for this technique: no criticism allowed; the more ideas the better, the more likely a really good one will occur; integration and combinations of ideas welcomed; evaluation and discussion of pros and cons only after all ideas have been presented.

Using Literature

When using literature, the teacher needs to be certain that the material is well chosen, with interesting characters and situations, vivid descriptions

and good vocabulary. Also, that the related activities will focus their thinking skills. Smith (1974:55) has prepared guidelines for the construction of questions and tasks designed to stimulate students to think creatively as they read:

1. They ask for information that is not in the material.
2. They ask for the reader's personal ideas.
3. They do not attempt to evoke responses that can be judged as correct or incorrect.
4. They focus on what the reader can add to the material.

Intermediate grade students can learn quickly to recognize questions that send them on a thoughtful, purposeful trip beyond the boundaries of the story into unfamiliar territory. Using the above guidelines, teachers can construct appropriate questions for any material used.

If a book report is called for, the following example is a suggestion for one that uses Bloom's Taxonomy as a guideline, having a question for each level of difficulty. Each question should have adequate space provided for answers.

1. Was this book hard or easy?
2. What made it hard or easy?
3. Could you tell what was happening all the time?
4. Did you want to keep on reading or quit?
5. Write 6 facts in the story that you remember and that are important to remember.
6. Tell what you think about any one of the characters in the book. Give your reasons.
7. Predict what will happen after the book ends. Be specific and detailed and make sure it fits with what has already happened.
8. Summarize what the book is about in not more than 6 sentences.
9. Write a different ending to the story.
10. Compare 2 characters in the story. Decide which one is best of the two and tell why you think so.

Materials and Ideas

There are prepared kits and materials that can be used by the teacher who wants to challenge her students, but does not quite know what to do or where to start. *Push Back the Desks*, by Cullum, is full of challenging and interesting units in all different areas with which to motivate students. It is a small paperback book which should be available in most bookstores. *Interaction* publishes an excellent series of simulation games that are challenging and interesting. Science is an area in which creative thinking can be used effectively. MSG materials are good. Other sources, identified by Gowan (1971) are: *Curriculum Planning for the Gifted*, Fliegler, 1961; *Teaching Science Creatively*, Washton, 1967; materials developed by Dr. T. H. Sands of Illinois State College which contain kits of science material; and discovery learning materials by Dr. Crutchfield of the University of California at Berkeley, consisting of fifteen units about a boy and his sister who work as detectives.

Isaacs (1974) shares an abundance of general activities suggested to her by graduate students. A few of them are listed here, with supplemental comments.

1. Keep a diary describing memorable experiences. (This could be done in conjunction with a unit, or simply as a private writing experience.)
2. Chair a committee to discuss a good book which all have read. (Some advance discussion with the teacher necessary.)
3. Catalog books in the class library.
4. Set up evaluative criteria, evaluate children's magazines, and make a recommended list for the library.
5. Check reading rate: then use materials designed to improve rate, chart progress.
6. Construct crossword puzzles which utilize specific vocabulary (including adequate clues).
7. Interview an adult or pupil from an upper grade with a specific purpose in mind.
8. Portray a character role in a monologue. (This would entail considerable background reading.)
9. Convert a short story into a short play, then lead in its production.
10. Write and give commentaries for silent movies or slide showings.

The ideas presented here are just the beginning. There are a multitude of activities that can be used with these children, for their capacity for learning is so much more than the average child's. Perhaps gifted children were named as such because they have indeed been given a gift that few have the opportunity to receive. It is their responsibility to use that gift wisely and for the benefit of the world in which they live. But they cannot do it without proper training and education. If it is their responsibility to use their gift wisely, it is the responsibility of the teachers of the world to give them every possible resource with which to develop that gift. We cannot do otherwise.

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