

4-1-1971

Exploratory Reading in the Secondary School

Fehl Shirley
San Fernando Valley State College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Shirley, F. (1971). Exploratory Reading in the Secondary School. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 11 (3). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol11/iss3/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

EXPLORATORY READING IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Fehl Shirley

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY STATE COLLEGE

If the gap between technological enterprise and the development of humane individuals is to be overcome, then programs adjusted to the unique characteristics of individual readers need to be promoted. As Earl Kelley has averred, the primary goal of education must be the production of increasing uniqueness. Idiosyncratic learning patterns are revealed through diagnostic teaching and the self-analysis on the part of the student. Correlative adjustment of instruction according to student needs may ensue as a cooperative enterprise of student and teacher. Both parties to this contractual process are learning about themselves and about techniques that succeed or fail.

An individualized, exploratory reading program was organized by the author in a high school in Tucson, Arizona, built around the concept of self-initiative and self-improvement through the recognition by the individual student of his own strengths, needs, and goals and through the concerted efforts of the teacher and student in planning strategy to achieve the student's purposes. This strategy required a variety of techniques and materials designed to stimulate, encourage, and motivate the student to read and enjoy it. The exploratory reading course was intended to be catalytic and to reinforce communication skills in other subjects. The individual student brought his reading and study problems in other areas to the reading teacher who attempted to help him overcome his deficiency. The reading teacher also contacted the subject matter teacher and suggested materials and techniques that might help the student experiencing difficulty in that particular subject. The subject teacher furnished key assignments and vocabulary and a few taped lectures that were used for reinforcement practice in the reading laboratory.

As an elective, the exploratory reading course was open to all levels of students, who could take it for a semester or a year and receive credit. The student applied for the course through a personal interview with the counselor and by filling out an application, designating the areas in which he would like to concentrate; e.g., vocabulary enrichment, comprehension skills, accelerated reading, spelling improvement, remembering information, and study skills. Also, referrals were made by classroom teachers based on the following observations:

1. Reading problem does not appear to be caused by lack of mental ability.
2. Limited sight vocabulary.
3. Lack of comprehension skills. (Unable to grasp meaning and to organize facts in silent reading.)
4. Excessive spelling errors.
5. Gross errors in oral reading. (Mispronunciations, omissions, insertions, substitutions, inversions.)
6. Pronounced slowness in reading rate.

Diagnosis

The client-centered approach to diagnosis as described by Strang (1965, pp. 8-9) was used in the exploratory reading course. The teacher started with the reading problem as presented by the student through interviews, autobiographies, formal and informal diagnostic procedures. Feedback was prompt. The teacher began immediately to help the student solve his problem. In this way, little time lapsed between diagnosis and instruction. Also, the student assumed more responsibility for self-diagnosis and for planning with the teacher's guidance strategy for self-improvement.

The procedures used for diagnosis included the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (which recognize the fact that a student's real score may be anywhere within a range of scores, due to the probable error of measurement, by reporting percental bands rather than percentile scores), Gray Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs, Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary List, Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test, Wide Range Achievement Test, phonics and structural analysis surveys as well as inventories prepared by the teacher. Diagnostic teaching permeated the entire program as new clues were revealed.

Individualization

The diagnostic records and the personal observations of the teacher revealed areas of students' strengths and weaknesses which formed the springboard for future activities. The teacher and each student entered into a contract of reading assignments adapted to the student's reading level, need, and goal. The program was organized as follows:

<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
Vocab.	Vocab.	Vocab.
Individualized	Groups:	Individualized
Contract	Spelling	Contract
	Fiction	

Listen and
Read
Controlled
Reader

Thursday

Vocab.

Groups:

Spelling

Fiction

Listen and

Read

Controlled

Reader

Friday

Vocab.

Individualized

Contract

The small groups listed above represented an emphasis for a six weeks' period as follows:

Spelling Group

VAKT Approach (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, and Tactual)

S.R.A. Spelling Lab

Personal spelling lists

Fiction Group

Library reading

Dramatization of story read

Tape recording of play or poem

Creative writing

Listen and Read Group

Listen and Read Tapes (Educ. Develop. Labs)

Tapes of lectures by subject area teachers

Tapes by other students

Controlled Reader Group

Skimming the story first

Reading at progressively faster speeds

Comprehension exercises

Progress chart

As other needs were revealed by the students, the group tasks changed.

As an on-going activity, the students devoted 10-15 minutes at the beginning of each class period to vocabulary development exercises in the form of pantomimes, dramatizations, and games; *30 Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary*, by Wilfred Funk and Norman Lewis (Washington Square Press, Inc.) was used as a text for this work.

The students also kept a personal card file of difficult words encountered in their reading, noting the diacritical markings, the parts of speech, and the meaning as used in an original sentence on the back of each card. Vocabulary review tests were given each Monday.

Another on-going activity was the election each six weeks of officers, who facilitated the organization of the group work, the debates, panel discussions, and other activities.

Instead of six weeks' tests being given at the end of each grading period, oral book reports were presented by individuals or group panels. The book reports took various forms. The students were asked to project themselves into the role of a character in the story and to give the experiences encountered; they were asked to choose a character from a book and tell how this character reminded them of someone whom they knew at the time or had known in the past; they were asked to describe democratic and undemocratic values as revealed by their readings. The teacher also held individual conferences with students to discuss the reading they had done.

The individualized contracts represented varied activities from phonic exercises to research on schools of cosmetology in accordance with the needs, interests, and reading profiles of the students. A classroom library of multilevel materials was available, including many paperbacks, *Scholastic Literature Units*, S.R.A. Reading and Spelling Labs, EDL Word Clue and Study Skills Kits, *Tactics in Reading*, several workbooks on reading and study skills, *Reader's Digest* Educational Editions, Literature Sampler, magazines, tapes, recordings, and filmstrips.

Evaluation

Self-evaluation was an integral part of the exploratory reading program. Each individual was aware of his progress through the following means:

1. Personal vocabulary card file.
2. Personal record of books, stories, poems, articles read.
3. Taped recordings of early and later reading.
4. Dated samples of work.
5. Timed exercises.
6. Practice exercises.

Also, the students were administered equivalent forms of the California Achievement Tests (Advanced Forms W and X) in September and January. According to this test, one student improved 3.2 grade levels, three students improved over two grade levels (2.9,

2.6, and 2.1), fourteen improved about one grade level, and the rest improved a few months or remained about the same.

The students were asked to respond anonymously to a rating scale regarding the course and to give personal comments. Some individuals responded as follows:

It drove me into reading books. It enlarged my vocabulary. I like the way you let the class choose the way they want to work and do things, especially the book reports and vocabulary.

I don't stumble over words as much as I used to and I think by giving oral reports it helps you to learn to speak better.

I think it has improved my reading a lot. When I would read aloud, I would read a few words. Then I would stop and go back and read it again smoothly. Now I read smoothly and I don't backtrack.

I can read a little more freely than I could before and I can speak in front of a class better.

Discussion

The focus in the reading program is on the individual. The student is the driver at the wheel. The instructor sits beside him advising him about making the turns and avoiding the pitfalls in the road ahead. However, the student does the driving and sets his own goal, direction, and pace. Gradually, the teacher, with an attitude of positive expectancy, leaves the driver more and more on his own. The student then becomes his own instructor.

However, the reading teacher is frequently confronted with a confused, frustrated, and belligerent driver—a human enigma with an aura of suspicion, fear, and animosity emanating from him. There he sits—victoriously resistant to all efforts and overtures of friendly aid.

"I hate reading!" he cries vehemently. "I never read a book in my life." Defiantly, he delivers the ultimatum.

The teacher can suggest, guide, encourage, stimulate, direct aggressively at times, withdraw at other times—always aiming at intelligent self-direction on the part of the student—and never give up!

Reference

Strang, Ruth. *Diagnostic Teaching of Reading*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965.