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# A PLAN TO IMPROVE READING INSTRUCTION FOR THE SUPERIOR STUDENT IN FIRST GRADE

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Teachers often become so concerned about children who are having difficulty that the needs of the superior students are neglected. Bright students often learn early to work independently; because of this, teachers "put them on their own." All of the students in the classroom need guidance in their development, but good readers need a different kind of guidance than that required for the average or slow learners. It is important for superior students to develop and mature physically, emotionally, socially as well as mentally so that they may become well developed personalities who will be better able to make worthwhile contributions to our society.

Most new teachers are well inoculated with the idea that there should be a readiness program before actual reading instruction begins. The superior students usually meet the conditions of readiness fully and are filled with the desire and urge to get to the business of reading. Too often, teachers feel obligated to wade through the full reading readiness program. Several results are fairly certain to follow prolonged, unnecessary use of readiness materials. First, little additional readiness is gained. Second, a considerable period of time is lost. Third, much of the eagerness of the child is gone and the sharp edge of desire is dulled.

The superior students make rapid progress in beginning reading, and with a minimum amount of help develop a basic sight vocabulary. They also associate meanings with visual symbols, fuse the meanings of separate words into chains of related ideas, become deeply absorbed in the content of what they read, and quickly acquire interest in and ability to proceed with independent reading. They readily discriminate words, associate sounds with specific elements of words, and apply what they know about familiar words in recognition of new ones. Superior students soon acquire habits of fluent, intelligent reading that are distinctly superior to those of their classmates.

How often is the teacher caught in the humdrum of canned basal reading classes for all students? Lack of time and experience have forced her to depend upon the teacher's manual. All of the students suffer, especially the superior students, who need to broaden their

experiences and further develop their acquired skills. They eventually end up with what Trace, in his book *Reading Without Dick and Jane* called, "Programmed Retardation."

In order to prevent "Programmed Retardation," the teacher's responsibilities for superior students are: to reduce the amount of explanation, to make use of principles of application, and to experiment with freer more individualized types of assignments. The teacher should release and challenge energies of superior students and arouse enthusiasm for learning with the children. The superior students need guidance rather than dictation. The stage should be set so that students can become alert and interested in pursuing ideas. When interest is aroused, students become inquisitive and seek answers to questions. These children should be allowed to program their interests. Originality in thinking by the students should be reinforced by the teacher.

—For this paper, primary classroom teachers were asked to list activities they used to challenge superior students in their classroom. The area mentioned most frequently was "written expression." Next, teachers used activities related to the "content area." "Creative expression" and "social development" were apparent concerns of teachers for superior students. Accelerated basal reading and necessary "skills" were employed with a great deal of individualized instruction. "Free time," important for the superior student, was available with the opportunity to choose activities that were of interest or helped to meet particular purposes or goals.

#### **Written Expression**

Reading is a language activity, so the best way to challenge a child is to have him use his vocabulary in spoken or written conversation. Word meaning is linked with the understanding of words in spoken or written sentences. If children can read well for their age, some of their attention should be turned to oral and written expression. It facilitates the interpretation of language in print. The ability to write grows with extensive reading.

Some enrichment activities dealing with "Written Expression" are:

- \* Write own reading books.
- \* Write a "Who's Who" telling about each member of the class.
- \* Make own stories and illustrations on TV made of cardboard with scroll-type ruled paper in front of the screen area.
- \* Write endings for stories.
- \* Build stories from phrase strips.

- \* Write daydream stories:
  - If I Could Be Someone Else
  - If I Could Take A Trip
  - If I Could Have Anything I Want
  - If I Could Spend \$1,000
  - I Would Invent
  - If I Were A Frog
- \* Complete sentences:
  - One day I went . . .
  - This morning I saw . . .
- \* Write own sentences or stories of anything of interest to them, using their spelling words.
- \* Write simple book reports.
- \* Collect interesting items from current newspapers, magazines or pamphlets; label them, put in scrapbook. In free time child may go to scrapbook, find something that interests him and read further on subject or create stories or free verse.
- \* Report and write simple news items.
- \* Report a simple field trip.
- \* Write descriptions of an animal, person, or thing. Make a guessing game with them.
- \* Write letters to different schools in other cities, states, or countries; write notes to classmates; set up a Post Office.
- \* Write letters to friends or families.
- \* Make cards for sick people, Mother's Day, Father's Day and other holidays.
- \* Write notices or memorandums.
- \* Finish a poem.
- \* Create own poems or riddles.
- \* Write own parts and put on a play.
- \* Write paragraphs or even lists of:
  - What I Do For Fun
  - I Would Be Mad If
  - I Would Be Glad If
- \* Creative writing folder containing two pockets:
  - (1) Can you write a poem or story today?
  - (2) Put finished work here. (Stories later placed in a book)
- \* Advertisement for a good book they have read.

#### **Content Areas**

Broad experiences should be provided for superior students so that they do not become specialists too soon. A broad base should be provided so the children may take off in whatever direction their talents carry them. Superior students should be encouraged to read material in content fields. Sharing with the rest of the group broadens understandings of all the members of the group.

Activities related to "Content Areas":

- \* Set up and take care of a science table.
- \* Do weather or nature study projects.
- \* Write and stage original puppet shows.
- \* Bring in new bugs—learn to use reference materials by looking through books for identification by shapes, sizes, and colors.
- \* Read science stories or books and give reports to the class with simple experiments.
- \* Prepare charts for unit in science.
- \* Write report of field trip.
- \* Prepare special reports in connection with unit being studied, for example, consumers, producers, specialists, animals, leaves, and trees.
- \* Make story problem for friends and work thought-provoking problems.
- \* List the uses to which one could put a light bulb.
- \* Permit children to use film strip projector, tapes, and the listening post with material from content areas.

#### **Creative Expression**

All students need to express themselves creatively in some way. Superior students should be challenged with lots of how and why questions. However, academic skills should not be overemphasized at the expense of other learnings. Creative expression serves as a great emotional outlet as well as a means of encouraging social cooperation.

Activities for "Creative Expression":

- \* Give a child a shape to use as a major part of a picture.
- \* Illustrate own books.
- \* Take a smelling tour, sound tour, sight tour.
- \* Mount pictures for description.
- \* Make up and tell fanciful stories, a solution to a problem, stories about wishes or surprises.
- \* Compose an extra verse to a song or poem.

- \* Make a diorama.
- \* Dramatize parts of a story.
- \* Design covers for booklets.
- \* Do a play from basal reader; children can design a background on a large sheet of paper to tape on a pegboard.
- \* Design note paper for a letter to someone.
- \* Paint or draw a picture about a good story.
- \* Make a mobile from story book characters, hang from string on coat hangers.
- \* Make tongue depressor puppets and make up a short play related to studies.
- \* Choose a story and after reading it plan a puppet show and make puppets of characters in the story.
- \* Pantomime stories written by students.
- \* Tell what happiness is . . . using various emotions.
- \* Dramatize current events.

#### **Social Development**

Challenging the gifted while not undermining the confidence of the less able pupils is possible only when every child in the class is made to feel that he is an integral part of the whole, that his achievements, no matter what their quality, count for something in the ongoing projects of the class. All children need to develop feeling for others and skills of working together for the common good. Children should learn the value and importance of sharing and team work to offset tendencies toward solitariness. Group work not only guards against isolation but utilizes children's capacity to learn from each other and provides some competition. Interests are broadened through work on projects with other children, taking leadership in small groups, undertaking classroom duties, and learning to use arts and crafts materials.

Activities for "Social Development":

- \* Help children who enter late to get materials and show how to use them.
- \* Arrange and care for science table, library corner, and creative writing table.
- \* Read stories to kindergarten.
- \* Serve as resource person for class.
- \* Participate in choral reading.
- \* Plan bulletin board.
- \* Read a story with a friend.

- \* Help slower readers by listening to their reading and using phrase cards, vocabulary cards.
- \* Make book reports and have a contest to see who can read the greatest number of books . . . Keep a record chart to show this.
- \* Serve as group leader for art projects.
- \* Read or tell stories to the class instead of the teacher.
- \* Form hobby and reading clubs.
- \* Lead class discussions.
- \* Make a mural to tell story or experiences.

A reading program which includes flexibility in grouping and individual instruction will help to meet the needs of the superior student. Reading should serve children's purposes more and more. However, superior students need guidance to develop wide interests and a teacher should help in two ways: (1) provide a wide range of good material at various reading levels from which selection may be made; (2) help children to be sure they are selecting books within their reading range. Sometimes it is good for a child to "stretch" his capabilities a bit with a difficult book, if his desire to read it is great.

Superior students may be invited to various group sessions for experiences in oral reading in one group, for sharing of interesting reading content in another, for certain instruction in another; and each can work by himself on certain interests. Programmed reading, used flexibly, may serve certain individuals well.

#### **Skill Development**

Care must be taken so children do not remain on a plateau in their reading ability. It is fine for them to use their skills and to enjoy reading, but teachers have a responsibility for helping children grow continuously. There is frequent need for instruction and guidance to enable children to read at higher levels of reading achievement. All instruction in skills for the fast learner should be put on an individual basis as the result of diagnostic study. He might be excused from some class exercises required of other pupils. Children who work on individual projects should be taught the specific techniques they will need in carrying on an independent activity.

Activities for "Skill Development":

- \* Encourage experimentation with materials, making things, putting on programs, playmaking, cooperative problem solving, working on hobbies, conducting experiments, sports and games.

- \* Build own phonics scrapbooks, personal file.
- \* Scan for details, reading carefully in difficult materials.
- \* Write questions to ask other children if student finishes reading story first.
- \* Learn to classify words in different categories, people, places, things, actions.
- \* Use *Children's Reader's Digest* with comprehension checks (children read as they wish).
- \* S.R.A. Independent Reading (self-correcting).
- \* Practice a story to read orally to the class.
- \* Look through the dictionary or picture dictionary—make one of own.
- \* Go through word cards and find a pile of “hard” words. Practice them with a friend.
- \* Make charts with pictures and label for units of study.
- \* Evaluate and compare books read.
- \* Make own vocabulary list; spelling lists.
- \* Do crossword puzzles.

#### Free Time

Children must be helped to be responsible for knowing what to do with spare moments—those times when he finishes his work before it is time for the next activity, those times when he does not need to do the work others are doing. He should always have an interesting book available and should ask himself if he has any unfinished work of any kind. Creative interests should be so well stimulated that he looks eagerly to opportunities to have time to write or draw. Appreciative interests should be stimulated to the extent that he is eager to listen to good music or literature at the listening post. Reading should enrich these experiences, and these experiences should nurture interest in more reading.

Superior students need opportunities to make choices. Free time should be “choosing time.” They should make their own choices of reading material and enjoy the contents independently. Interest centers in the classroom, an art work area, a library corner, an area for building, another for dramatic play should all be available. There should be many opportunities to visit the library. For them, browsing is an intelligent process which leads to deep respect for books and learning.



## Activities for "Free Time":

- \* Organize a book club time, have children read 10 minutes in the morning when they arrive.
- \* Read magazines and find something to share with class.
- \* Have centers of interest available.
- \* Provide lists of suggestions they might do.
- \* Use tape recorder, opaque projector, listening post.
- \* Read anything "just for fun."
- \* Use picture file . . . make one.
- \* Use the typewriter.

Enrichment in reading involves using a variety of resources, techniques, and activities to add depth and application to skill development. Such a practice should not exclude other children from the benefits enrichment can give.

**Summary**

Although ability grouping, special-class programs, and departmentalized instruction have been widely adopted in many schools, the self-contained classroom continues to be the most common situation in the elementary classroom. Superior students must be provided for in the regular classroom. Individualization of assignments, materials, and activities form the basis of enrichment. The teacher must guide in the proper use of materials, the best use of time, and the maintenance of high standards of work.

Superior students can learn to do something with what they read. They can reproduce what is read with imagination, elaborate what is read, transform and rearrange what is read, and go beyond what is read. It is up to teachers to find ways of heightening expectations and anticipation and invent ways of getting pupils to do something with what has been read.

This paper suggests ways to improve the reading instruction for the superior student. Many more can be added. Superior students can be motivated and challenged through "Written Expression," "Content Area," "Creative Expression," "Social Development," "Skills," and "Free Time" activities.