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MEETING THE READING NEEDS OF CHILDREN BY AIDING THE NEW ELEMENTARY TEACHER

Margaret Millard

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The first day of school has come. Orientation days are over for the new teacher, and the children have arrived. Thirty or more little faces smile back at her when she says "good morning." It had all seemed fairly simple during the student teaching days, but suddenly there was no one to fall back on when things went wrong. The entire responsibility for the education of these children rested with her. True, she could ask questions of other teachers, but they seemed so busy. The principal has offered to help, but the opening days of school are hectic for him, too. To add to the confusion, the books are different than those used during student teaching. Some of the books have been misplaced during the summer while others are still on order. Parents want to meet the new teacher. Johnny has his milk money to give to someone. The books that are in the room don't seem to fit the mold or the theories that had seemed so practical during college days. Hopefully, by the second week things will have improved.

These problems are familiar to almost any new teacher. The person who is going to help the new teacher through the maze and on the path to teaching success should remember these perplexities.

Some Basic Principles

There are some underlying principles that seem reasonable for any helping teacher to take into consideration before attempting to aid the newcomer.

Establish rapport with teacher

Establishing rapport is one of the most important factors in any human relationship. It is extremely important in any situation and particularly essential when one person is attempting to guide or aid another individual. When rapport is not established or a breakdown in rapport occurs, there is a great likelihood that the best of suggestions will go unheeded. Important questions may go unasked and therefore unanswered.

Get to know the teacher

The helping teacher should become thoroughly acquainted with the new teacher as rapidly as possible. In so doing, observation of the

teacher's needs may be made. Some teachers may need just a few suggestions or aid in locating materials. Others may have found the bridge between theory and practice so difficult to cross that they are truly floundering and will require a great deal of help and support. Some teachers may have very little background for the classroom in which they find themselves. Still others will have come from a school system that was so completely different that they will need aid in interpreting the present situation. While getting to know your teacher, you can determine what background and experience she has had to bring to the classroom.

Meet the needs of the children and the teacher

The children and their needs are the first consideration. The classroom teacher must execute any program that is planned, but she has needs too. If she is uncomfortable, the children will be uncomfortable. It will be necessary to plan a program that the teacher can handle and that will insure progress from that point.

When aiding in the selection of materials, attempt to find things that will fit the needs of the child. At the same time, keep in mind that the teacher will be the guide in the learning process. She must feel adequate in her ability to use the chosen materials. A teacher who says, "I chose this book for Johnny and Suzy because it looked about right," will probably need a great deal of structure in the beginning.

Another teacher may ask for material on the second grade level, with additional material for vocabulary development. She has determined that Joe can handle materials at this instructional level but needs help in a specific area. Her problem is probably one of having found the shelves bare of interesting materials for the sixth grader. Few school systems are able to afford a large supply of such materials.

Maintain an atmosphere of continual growth and learning

The helping teacher should guide the new teacher so that she grows in ability and knowledge. At the same time, the helping teacher should be growing and learning too. Through continued search for better understanding and more knowledge, we can better educate our children.

Aiding the New Teacher in Establishing a Reading Program

Many problems face the new teacher immediately. Thirty children with different abilities, levels of achievement and needs are sitting in their seats. Where does the teacher begin? Obviously, one must start somewhere. Each school day is at least six hours long, and children are

not noted for their ability to sit still.

The author had occasion to ask a group of student teachers some questions concerning their knowledge of the teaching of reading. Their answers indicated that their understanding of the reasons for grouping was good, but they didn't know how to group under any plan. They seemed to know what constituted an individualized and basal approach to reading, but they didn't know the basic sequence of reading development. They knew that each child had individual needs, but they didn't know how to determine them.

One beginning teacher was overwhelmed by the many series of books available, but she didn't know how to determine the level of the book. Another beginning teacher stated that she felt she had a pretty good sense of direction in most academic areas, but she was confused about teaching reading because it was so complex.

These statements do not necessarily indicate poor preparation. They do seem to indicate the need for continued guidance and in-service training as the teacher attempts to bring knowledge and practice together.

With these things in mind, and keeping in mind the individual teacher, we shall consider some of the practical problems that face the new teacher in the approximate order she may face them.

Grouping and ascertaining reading levels

There are many plans for grouping students. A grouping plan should be selected that will meet the needs of the children and the teacher. Several factors should be taken into consideration before selecting a plan. Some of these considerations are: teacher preparation, range of reading levels in the classroom, materials available, schedules and patterns of the school system and teacher control of the classroom situation.

Probably the grouping plan that is the most practical for the new teacher is that of grouping according to reading levels. At any rate, it is a place to start and leaves opportunity for flexibility as the teacher gains additional insight into both the children and the situation.

The new teacher wants to know how to accomplish such grouping. There are many tools that can aid the teacher in this process. Often former teachers will have provided information concerning the placement of the children. This may take the form of a list when groups are moved as a unit. Cumulative folders will sometimes have cards on which the books and materials used by the child in previous years are recorded. Standardized test scores are also recorded in the cumulative folder. Frequently a great deal of interpretation of these scores

is needed to avoid their misuse. Another tool that can be introduced at this point is the informal inventory. The helping teacher can supply information concerning the administration and uses of this inventory. The inventory may be introduced at this point as a device for grouping and determining independent and instructional levels. The helping teacher can also lay the groundwork for the use of this instrument in determining the needs of the individual student. With all of this information available, an attempt can be made to form groups for reading instruction. As the teacher gains control of the situation and her knowledge increases, these groups can become flexible and individualization of the program or portions of the program can begin.

Selection of materials

Selection of materials is another problem that faces the new teacher immediately. Of course, if she happens to be in a system where one set of basal readers is available per classroom, the element of choice may be eliminated. Frustration would have to be dealt with. A thorough foundation in the sequence of reading development would be needed as rapidly as possible. The teacher could then supplement the program with additional materials according to the needs of the children.

Many schools today have additional materials available to use with children who are above and below grade level. With the information about the children that has been gathered during the grouping process, materials may be selected that will aid the children. Every effort should be made to obtain materials that the children have not used before. The new teacher should be guided to make selections that are not so easy for the child that no growth takes place, nor so difficult that he is frustrated. Again, the results of the informal inventory may be utilized. Every effort should be made to locate books that will be of interest to the child and still be on his reading level. As the teacher grows in her own knowledge of the "learning to read" process, more variation in materials may be used.

Many times the teacher's manual seems to be among the missing. The author once taught in a system where there was no basal reader, many series to choose from and no manuals for the teacher. With this situation, a teacher must again have a thorough understanding of the developmental reading process. The helping teacher should maintain files of her own so that she will have readily available additional materials to fulfill specific reading needs.

Sequential development in reading

All too often new teachers appear to have reading terminology

in mind but seem unable to fit it all together to form a developmental picture. Thus, word attack skills become an end goal rather than just one phase of an integrated process.

Independent reading is a desirable part of a reading program. Unless the teacher understands the developmental process, she may expect children to take off on their own long before they have reached that stage of development.

Without knowledge of reading development, the teacher will find it difficult to work with individuals above or below the level with which she becomes the most familiar. It will also be difficult for her to determine the individual needs of her students. She will have little mental content to help her decide when a child is lagging in one phase of development or to ascertain which learning pathways are the best for the individual.

The reading process may be divided into stages of development. Certain skills are introduced at each stage. Each succeeding stage maintains and further develops these skills. Many school systems have curriculum guides that give a broad overview of the reading program. The teacher's manual will frequently have some guidelines for the overall reading program. Professional books may contain such a guide. By utilizing many of these sources, the new teacher can be guided in a growing understanding of the overall picture of reading development.

Summary

All suggestions made are designed to be open-ended and can be evaluated and revised as the teacher finds her way. As the year continues, additional suggestions can be made to enable the teacher to meet the changing needs of individual children.