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AN INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

Janet Langerveld

Not long ago after reading many articles dealing with an individualized approach to reading, the writer was challenged to attempt this "new method" with a selected group of students. These children were to be given an opportunity to select their own materials for their instruction and to participate in individual conferences with the teacher. This paper is a brief account of the writer's experience.

Eleven third-grade children were selected to participate. All tested a year or more above their grade level in reading according to the Metropolitan Achievement Test. The mean reading score was 4.8 and the average chronological age was 8 years and 6 months.

At the beginning of the school year the teacher informed the group that they were going to try a new way of reading in their room. Instead of reading in groups each child would select his own books, read at his seat, and have separate conferences with the teacher to talk about their books. The explanation was brief because four of these children had participated in an individualized reading program previously and were eager to tell of their experiences. They reported that they enjoyed this program for two reasons: (1) They could read as fast as they wanted, and (2) they could choose the books they desired. In these introductory meetings which continued for approximately two weeks the teacher and the children discussed various kinds of books and what they might learn from them. Since there were five boys and six girls in the group, there were many opinions and the discussions were lively. During this time the teacher and children talked about the kinds of reading records that the children might keep for evaluating their progress. The children decided to record the titles and authors of books which they had completed. Some decided to keep a list of dates telling when they started and when they finished their books. All wanted to keep a list of words which they learned from their reading. In the beginning these children seemed to compete with one another to see who would have the longest list. This feeling seemed to become less important to them as the year progressed.

The books which were used came from the school, town, and county libraries. A bookmobile was available once a month for the

children's selection. The books ranged in difficulty level from second grade to junior high. The children enjoyed adventure, humor, fantasy, and biographical stories. On several occasions the children brought favorite books from home and shared books gathered in an "attic hunt." The children gained experience in caring for their books because they were responsible for keeping the books on separate shelves according to the library from which they came.

In preparing for individual conferences with the children the teacher made several check lists. With these lists she evaluated certain aspects of oral and silent reading and tried to discover the specific difficulties each child was encountering. Daily conferences were held with each child and a careful record was kept. The teacher wrote down the titles of books which the children were reading and dates that they were started and finished. The child's ability to identify, interpret and evaluate ideas expressed in the book was observed. If there were certain skills which needed further development, these were noted also. Instructional procedures were provided for each child which met his individual needs.

Frequently the children met in special groups to share their favorite books. Some shared them by giving puppet shows, others by making roller movies or by giving reports. They made bulletin boards, kept a reading corner for use for all the children in the classroom, and occasionally worked together on group projects. One of the most successful of these involved the space flight of John Glenn. The children divided his flight into five parts. Each group worked separately and later integrated their findings into one story. Many sources were used in completing this project such as newspaper articles and magazines and many subject areas were explored.

At the end of the school year it was satisfying to see the progress these children had made in their reading. They showed a mean gain of ten months on the Metropolitan Achievement Test, but far more important was the enthusiasm with which these children approached reading. They were eager to have conferences with their teacher concerning the books they had read. Their oral reading improved. They were able to tell stories in their own words. They seemed to have more reactions to their books as the year progressed, and they were volunteering to read more and more for the class.

Individualized reading is not the only way to show children the wonderful world of books, but self-selection and pacing which are an integral part of this activity have many desirable merits to consider. This program takes into consideration the development of the

child. Each reader can progress at his own rate, and no child is made to feel embarrassed or inadequate because of his failure to “keep up” with a group. It helps each child to learn to read and to learn to like to read. Why don’t you try an individualized reading program in your classroom?

Janet Langerveld was graduated from Western Michigan University in 1960. She has taught in the elementary grades for three years and is now working on a master’s degree at Western. Mrs. Langerveld is an enthusiastic supporter of an individualized approach to reading.