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A Comparative Study of Basal Reading Practices and the Individualized Reading Program in the Intermediate Grades

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BASAL READING PRACTICES
AND THE INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM
IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
John Charles Eglin

August 1962

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING THE
PLAN 2 REQUIEMENT FOR THE COMPLETION
OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

M. Doyle Koontz
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dominant motives for reading have differed radically at various periods in history. In early Greece and Rome cultural and utilitarian motives for reading developed side by side. Religious motives attained prominence in the middle ages as children and adults prepared for service in the church and continued to expand during the Reformation to help laymen understand the Scriptures. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reading as a means of acquiring information was used by those in trade and commerce. Throughout the last 2500 years, enrichment of experience, pleasure, and thought stimulation have ranked high as motives for reading (10:1089).

With television, the movies, youth organizations, and other aspects of modern life making demands on children's time, the elementary teacher must develop an interesting and stimulating reading program to encourage children to recognize the values and pleasures found in books.

This study surveyed literature pertaining to "basal reading practices" and the "individualized reading program" in an effort to discover the relative merits of each. The paper will include a careful analysis of

specific terms characterizing each program. Each practice has been weighed for its shortcomings as well as its outstanding qualities. The reader will note an interchange of the terms "practices" and "programs." As far as this study is concerned, these two terms will have the same meaning.

Chapter II will present the dominant features of the basal reading program with the ever popular grouping procedures used almost exclusively in today's schools.

Chapter III will analyze the individualized reading program with its emphasis on the approach to the child as an individual with a reading problem peculiar to himself.

Chapter IV will give an unbiased summary of the two programs in the light of the advisability of incorporating them into the curriculum of the intermediate program.

A desire to discover new methods of reading instruction so as to improve the quality and quantity of reading done has led to this search for newer instructional practices.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible uses of "individualized reading" as a means of strengthening and supplementing the basic intermediate reading program.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Basal or basic reading method. This will be defined as that method which uses as its foundation the graded series type of reader, with the usual accompanying manuals, whose purpose is to provide for gradation and variety of material, organization, and content based on years of research. Lesson steps in the manuals help children perceive the values possible from a given story and provide for fewer gaps in the child's reading progress. The following four steps have arisen in response to the needs of the children and occur in most series in the order given: (1) preparation for the story, (2) guided reading, (3) skills and drills, and (4) follow-up activities.

Individualized reading. Individualized reading is typified by (1) self-selection of materials by pupils for their own instruction, (2) individual conferences between each pupil and teacher, and (3) groups organized for other than reasons of ability or proficiency in reading.

Basic reader. In this report the term basic reader will refer to that text selected as the "method" reader. This is considered to be a text which displays a systematic approach to developmental reading.

Frustration level. This is the level at which the

individual is thwarted or baffled by the difficulty of the reading material.

Developmental reading. This term includes instruction in vocabulary development, silent reading, oral reading, re-reading, and supplemental reading for the purpose of increasing reading achievement at the instructional level.

Self-selection. This is the opportunity children have to choose the materials they read during the regular period of reading instruction. Books of many types, on many subjects, and of varying degrees of difficulty are made available.

Trade books. Books designed especially to capture the interest of the reader and to give pleasure are included.

CHAPTER II

THE BASAL READING PROGRAM

In most American elementary schools the current practice is to choose a set of basal readers for the primary grades and follow fairly closely the teaching methods recommended by the authors. It is necessary to have a clear idea of what these materials are like in order to develop a real understanding of the arrangement of instructional materials.

It is strongly recommended, therefore, that each teacher choose a series of basal readers popular in his community and take time to study it (8:71).

Although no two series agree perfectly on the details of method, the similarities far outweigh the differences and there is a large amount of agreement concerning the basic structure of good reading lessons. In general five main steps are discernable in typical basal reader lessons. These are: (1) preparations: (2) guided reading: (3) rereading for specific purposes: (4) related activities: and (5) enrichment activities (2:74).

It is generally wise to continue through the grades with the same series set of readers, in order that the pupils can derive full benefit from the organization of vocabulary and skills.

Basic readers are designed for use under the teacher's guidance in a sharing situation. Children profit from a common experience of reading in a group.

By far the most common practice for carrying on basic instruction in reading is the use of the three group organization. After several reading surveys have been given, the class is divided into three groups on the basis of the results: the fast-moving, the average-moving, and the slow-moving. A few children in the class may score so low that they do not fit into any group; these must be helped individually (6:160).

Anderson (1:39-40) points out several advantages in grouping children for reading. In a group the children are encouraged to read with extreme satisfaction. He says that grouping children according to ability increases the opportunity for social communication. By maintaining a natural social situation, reading can function as an exchange of experience. Small groups provide a situation in which many children are stimulated to greater effort than when working alone.

Small groups give added opportunity for the development of reading ability:

1. More children can participate in reading and discussion.
2. More material can be read.
3. More children have an opportunity to render service to those needing assistance.
4. More practice can be given in the kind of reading the children need.
5. Subject matter can be selected to meet the interests and needs of the respective groups (10:39-40).

A basal reading program is essential for adequate reading development because it provides the teacher with a sequential organization, a gradual introduction and a careful repetition of words, and minimizes the possibility of instructional gaps or overemphasis.

Basal readers are sets of reading experiences carefully prepared to encourage the development of abilities and to expand reading vocabulary. Basal readers are of sufficient importance to constitute the core of the reading activity. All other uses of reading materials as aids to learning should be attuned to the basal readers if reading disabilities are to be prevented (2:196).

CHAPTER III

THE INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM

The effectiveness of reading instruction can be measured by "the amount of time during which each pupil is actually engaged in reading at his own rate material from which he is deriving adequate meaning and satisfaction" (3:250).

Student choice of books and reading-rate form the basis for this method. Students read silently as the teacher checks on those in need of help. A major portion of each reading period is used for conferring with as many pupils as possible. During this time the teacher checks oral reading, word analysis skills, and knowledge of content. Records are kept by both teacher and pupil: titles of books read, beginning and completion dates, conference dates, notes on problems, and progress in skills (9:30).

To carry on this type of plan efficiently, children must be able to read independently or work quietly at a non-reading activity while the teacher is moving from one student to another or is engaged in a conference.

That no two children are alike is a known fact. Each child has the same number and type of physical features, but for learning purposes, 35 children are 35 different persons to be dealt with as individuals. Children are vastly different in intelligence, muscular

coordination, and behavior traits as well as in matters of energy and effort. Homogeneous grouping as a method of organizing a classroom is grossly inadequate if the problems arising from individual differences are to be met (12:6-7).

Alice V. Keliher in her arguments against homogeneous grouping states that: Seldom are two children ready to be taught reading from the same material at the same time. They should have a chance to seek and explore, to select and use the books and other materials most suited to their needs (12:7).

Even though educators' goals may be the same, there is deep and profound controversy about ways in which they may be reached. For example:

1. Is ability grouping the best way to organize reading instruction?
2. Are basic series and their teacher's guides the best tools for teaching reading?
3. Are trade books more or less important than basal readers in an instructional reading program, or are they equally so?
4. Is rigidly controlled vocabulary more important than interesting material?
5. Are we sure that what we try to teach through carefully worked out lesson plans is actually what children learn?
6. Can children wisely choose their own material for reading instruction (12:10)?

The chart below lists some of the important techniques

and principles of individualized and ability-grouped reading practices, lesson planning, and teacher-pupil interaction. While some teachers may shift from one program to another at times, the basic philosophies of individualized and ability-grouped reading programs differ profoundly. The conditions of self-selection, individual conferences, and short term grouping function in an individual reading program as presented here (6:10):

INDIVIDUALIZED READING

ABILITY-GROUPED READING

I. READING MATERIAL

- | | | |
|--|-------|---|
| A. Large number and variety of trade and textbooks used in instruction | _____ | A. Single basic or supplemental readers used in instruction |
|--|-------|---|

II. CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURE

- | | | |
|---|-------|--|
| A. Children choose what they read | _____ | A. Teacher chooses what children read |
| B. Motivation arises from child's interests | _____ | B. Motivation comes from teacher using the manual |
| C. Instruction on individual one-to-one basis | _____ | C. Instruction on group basis |
| D. Grouping is short term and for specific, immediate purpose | _____ | D. Grouping is semi-permanent and for indeterminate purpose |
| E. Reading lesson prepared independently and seatwork has element of self-determination | _____ | E. Reading lesson prepared in a group and seatwork determined by teacher |

- | | | |
|--|-----|---|
| F. Remedial work integrated with other activities | ___ | F. Remedial work entails separate operation |
| G. Planned sharing period | ___ | G. No special sharing period |
| H. Individual peak reading level checked and evaluated | ___ | H. Various and indeterminate reading levels checked and evaluated |

III. EFFECTS ON THE CHILD AND ON HIS READING

- | | | |
|---|-----|---|
| A. Gifted child progresses at his own pace | ___ | A. Gifted child must gear progress to group's |
| B. Slow reader not publicly stigmatized | ___ | B. Slow reader publicly stigmatized by group and book assignment |
| C. Close personal interaction with teacher serves child's psychological needs | ___ | C. Child loses advantage of close personal interaction with teacher |
| D. Reading at own interest and ability level fosters development of skills | ___ | D. Working at group interest and ability level may hinder development of skills |
| E. Acquiring skills only as needed assures their normal development | ___ | E. Acquiring skills when not needed may hinder reading competence |
| F. Oral reading promoted by genuine audience situation | ___ | F. Oral reading suffers through absence of genuine audience situation |
| G. Reading becomes its own reward | ___ | G. Extrinsic rewards may debase intrinsic value of reading (12:10-11). |

Basic to the success of an individualized reading program is the philosophy that children should learn to

assume considerable self-direction and control as they mature. Only when pupils in a class have developed to the point where they can read and work independently for short periods can this program have any chance for success. Individualized reading may be initiated when these criteria have been realized.

Certain materials are essential before this program can be initiated. A wide variety of books must be readily available in the classroom or in the school library. It is desirable to have eight or ten copies of a number of good basal readers. In addition there should be as many fiction and non-fiction books on different levels as the teacher and children can accumulate. The pupils can be urged to bring in their books to share with the group. Many public libraries are happy to lend 50 or 60 books to a teacher for use in the reading classes. Parent-teacher groups often purchase additional books for schools upon request. At any rate, a good selection of readers and outside reading materials is essential to the success of an individualized program.

There is a feeling among some proponents of this program that the school should be responsible for developing and maintaining a sufficient number and variety of books without the aid of parent-teacher associations, book-a-ramas, children's collections, or any of the other

numerous book collection methods. They feel that if the teachers and administration have enough confidence in the program for its inclusion in the curriculum, the school budget should include funds for its development.

Pupils must be acquainted with the procedures, particularly if they are used to "grouping" in reading. Each individual in the class must realize that his progress in reading depends on his own efforts and that certain independence is required. Since self-selection of reading materials is the key to individualized reading, children should understand that they are to have in their possession at all times a book of their own choice. Each child is also encouraged to keep a record in his notebook of the reading he does. A notation of title and author and a brief comment on each book or article or story is sufficient. Those pupils with word trouble should be urged to keep a vocabulary list to which they add as they read.

Motivational techniques are highly desirable, especially in reading. A few that can be used here are:

1. Keep a record chart on the bulletin board in which the child can insert his card when finished with the book. There can be an arrangement of such topics as animal stories, adventure, farm stories, biographies and others. The child will enjoy seeing his

progress and at the same time this will provide an opportunity for the teacher to determine at a glance in which areas the child is reading. Teacher guidance will help him gain variety in his reading.

2. Furnish, or have the child construct, a "chart wheel" which he colors as he completes a book. Each color division can represent a different area as used in the "open chart" above. Children love the sense of accomplishment and will strive hard to vary their reading so as to complete the wheel. A sample "chart wheel" can be found in Appendix A.

Finally the students should understand that the teacher will help them to improve their reading through individual and group conferences.

After orientation of the children, the program involves the following activities:

1. Individual conferences of from 3 to 10 minutes between teacher and child at least once a week.
2. Silent reading in books or stories of the child's choice.
3. Teaching sessions with small groups.
4. Children who have selected the same story reading and discussing in small groups.

5. A short period in which children spontaneously talk about books and stories they have just read, with the thought that others in the class might be interested in reading them also. The entire class participates in this activity.
6. Some children working on or studying reading lists and vocabulary lists discussed above.
7. Creative work growing out of common reading may be going on in small groups. For instance some children may be preparing a play (5:272).

There are numerous advantages to the Individual Reading Program, including:

1. There is no stigma about what is read or the amount of material covered. Group competition is minimized.
2. An individual program results in larger amounts of material being read.
3. Reading speed is accelerated.
4. The amount of time spent reading is increased; consequently, more words are learned through the content.
5. The program is flexible and provides maximum efficiency in the use of time. The teacher really has more time to spend with each child.
6. Undesirable attitudes toward reading are eliminated.

7. The entire reading time is devoted to the individual child, his problems and interests. Slow readers get results. Fast readers enjoy their reading.

The administrator must consider the following before attempting to implement the individualized reading program:

1. Does he sincerely believe in the program?
2. Does he have a staff willing to try new approaches to problems of reading? Are they interested in the program?
3. Does his staff have the skill to make this type of program function properly?
4. Will the community accept the new challenges and problems?
5. Is the school budget able to accept the added burden of purchasing the wealth of material necessary?

The teacher must know the content and degree of difficulty of each book. He must be acquainted with the individual abilities of each child. He must be able to match each child's desires in reading preferences and attitudes with the appropriate book. The child should have certain freedom of selection but under the direction and consultation of the teacher.

What happens if a child selects a book that is too difficult for him? Even we as adults often pursue tasks above or beyond our ability. The child should be given the opportunity to browse through the book and then lay it aside until he masters the necessary skills and vocabulary to read it. The teacher can direct this selection of books after she learns something of the child's desires, attitudes, and abilities. The child will readily select within an area provided by the teacher. Children want some direction, but at the same time wish a certain amount of freedom in their selection. They are proud when they become adept at selecting books which challenge their skills and vocabulary.

Groff (7:359-60) states that librarians by and large subscribe to the principle of individualized reading. At least they have long protested the practice of classifying children as certain types of readers. They feel this tends to restrict the child to reading materials of an unchanging nature of difficulty and interest.

Individualized reading makes no judgment for the child as to what materials he can or should read. He makes the decisions under a process of self-selection, the teacher acting as a guide.

Because the teacher actually does function much as the librarian at the same time, knowledge of children's books and their contents become as important for him as the librarian.

Wide variations in reading ability are usually found in every school grade. Often, the teacher will find a single class range in reading achievement from the primary level to one or two years above grade level. A range of from one to three years can almost always be found in a single class (3:252).

Table I is a chart which points out the extreme differences in reading abilities in one grade at Franklin Elementary School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The basis for distribution was the National Achievement Test form t. The test was given to grade 4 on June 12, 1958.

TABLE I (4:19)
 READING ABILITIES OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS
 AT FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
 PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Name	Achievement	Name	Achievement
A	5.4	L	5.0
B	3.85	M	*8.0
C	6.5	N	5.4
D	5.9	O	4.7
E	5.3	P	3.45
F	7.35	Q	5.35
G	5.75	R	5.5
H	4.25	S	5.4
I	4.55	T	4.95
J	4.0	U	6.7
K	5.9		

*You will note that while the mean was 5.39 the range was from 3.45 to 8.0. The range is the significant factor here and it clearly points out the need for individual instruction.

Another study substantiates these findings. During the school year 1958-1959 two of the elementary schools in Palmdale School District, Los Angeles County, organized the intermediate grades on the actual reading ability. Each child was given an individual reading test to determine the level at which he could:

1. Pronounce accurately on sight 95 of each 100 words.
2. Comprehend a minimum of 75 per cent of both thought and fact questions.
3. Read in a natural conversational manner, with rhythm and proper phrasing.
4. Read without indications of tension, such as finger pointing and twitching.

The test was based on the Lyons and Carnahan reading series.

Table II (11:75-6) shows the distribution according to ability of the 288 students in grades four, five, and six in one of the schools.

TABLE II
READING ABILITIES OF FOURTH, FIFTH, AND
SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS
IN PALMDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Actual Grade Placement	Instructional Reading Level											
	7	6	5	4	3 ²	3 ¹	2 ²	2 ¹	1 ²	1 ¹	p	pp
Six	9	22	26	7	5	5			1	1		2
Five	6	12	46	15	1	9		1	1	1		1
Four			8	44	26	15	8		1	2	4	9

Although this specific study was organized to determine distribution for reading groups, it clearly points out the need for an individualized approach to the reading program.

The crucial difference between the individualized reading program and teaching children in a group using a single book is essentially that of adapting the reading material to the child rather than the other way around. We know that no child learns to read at the same rate as another nor are his interests the same. By permitting him to select the material he will read, individualized reading allows the child to learn at his own pace and read materials that are interesting to him (7:359-61).

CHAPTER IV

THE MECHANICS OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM

In a reading program involving five 45 minute periods per week, at least two of these periods should be devoted to individual conferences.

While the teacher is conferring with the children one by one, the remainder of the class is involved in other quiet activities such as silent reading. Some children during this period will be bringing their reading lists up-to-date. The comments made by the child on each selection should reflect his reaction to the story. This method of recording is so easy that children will actually enjoy seeing their lists grow.

The child also enjoys listing words he does not know in his vocabulary list.

In this conference the following are accomplished:

1. The child's reading and vocabulary list are checked to note his progress since the last conference. The teacher must maintain a card file on record for each child's progress. On this card is noted: (a) previous reading test data, (b) the data of each conference and observational records, (c) a brief record of the child's reading since the last

conference, (d) words missed, and (5) skills learned or ones needing attention.

2. A second activity of the conference could be a discussion of the book the child is reading and oral reading in a section he has already covered. Difficulties in word analysis and other skills can be pointed out to the child and a notation made on his card for future drill.
3. The child can be urged to tell part of the story, thereby indicating his comprehension.
4. The teacher can aid the child to select books suitable to his ability level and interests.

When not in conference with the teacher or engaged in another activity, the child should be reading silently at his own seat. He may be busy with his library book or an exercise (recommended by the teacher in a basic reader) to improve his reading skills.

When children learn to proceed quietly and directly to their own reading at the beginning of the period with little or no specific directions, the teacher can then begin the conferences and other features of the individualized reading program.

On days when conferences are not held, the teacher may instruct small groups who are having trouble in certain areas. These groups will be made up on the basis of

teacher's remarks on cards and special diagnostic reading tests. Those not needing any special help may be progressing on their own.

Groups of children frequently are assimilated when the teacher reviews some specific story or book in which a number of children show interest. Afterwards group discussions of the story can be held.

Children enjoy sharing their reading experiences, especially when it is a selection they made themselves. It is surprising how much motivation for future reading takes place without the teacher participating at all (5:267-275).

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This investigation is an introductory search for improved methods of teaching reading. Additional research should help improve programs in reading, either from increased knowledge or from integrating ideas and techniques already possessed.

A brief review of the individualized reading program was made in an effort to discover some of its outstanding qualities. The basic reading program in the intermediate grades may be supplemented by part-time use of individualized reading.

The following combined program utilizes the merits of a good basal reading program and the individualized program. It is recommended:

1. That a program in reading combine the best features of both the individualized and group instruction in reading.
2. That the basic developmental reading practices be used for three to four days each week. During this time the teacher would continue the systematic approach to reading skills.
3. That one to two days each week be devoted to individual instruction.

4. That individual instruction in the areas of science, social studies, and language arts be increased to improve pupil-selection of books and pupil-appraisal of readings.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

MY READING DESIGN

TO THE READER: -- Here is an unfinished design.

You may make it yours if you complete it as you read and enjoy the books you like. You may wish to build YOUR DESIGN in this way. (1) Find the book you wish to read. (2) Read it. (3) Discuss the book with your teacher or librarian, with your parent or friends to find the parts of the circle in which the book belongs. If you examine the subtitles on the back it may help you find the correct parts. (4) Put the number of your book in a small circle in each of the parts where the book belongs. (5) Then trace those small circles with your pencil. SEE SAMPLE. Very few books belong in more than three parts. If you read many books and record each book as you read, it will be fun to watch your pattern grow. (See chart on following page.)

