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The Individualized Program in the Elementary School

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THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM IN THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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
Ernest D. Logan
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THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE
COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

Arley L. Vancil
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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I. THE PROBLEM

In a free world of tomorrow there is need for an everchanging curriculum which can best be served by the individualized program. The terms individualized instruction and the individualized program, used interchangeably, mean adjusting the program to the aptitudes and achievement of each individual.

Teachers and curriculum coordinators must be as familiar with the problems and issues of contemporary society as they are with the growth characteristics and interests of boys and girls. If teachers and curriculum coordinators are to guide children in the wise selection of work and are to provide learning experiences for them, they must be familiar with the forces operating in today's world. The individuality of each student must be recognized and respected.

A curriculum designed to meet the needs of children growing up in today's world must provide experiences that will help them to be happy and effective members of a technological society.
(6:23)

In these times of diminishing hours of labor and increasing hours of leisure, teachers must attempt to find the interests and potential of each student and develop them.

Individualization of teaching is under the best conditions, a difficult, easily misunderstood function. Individualization of teaching goes beyond the content of the curriculum and beyond standardized instruction. Certainly it goes beyond routine academic achievement, for individualization gives personal relevance to experiences which the individual learner shares with the other members of his group. (4:13)

It is doubtful that individualized instruction has received as much attention in the past as it has in recent times, although for more than forty years the Winnetka School System at Winnetka, Illinois, has provided for individualization of instruction through grouping and individual study of goal seeking projects. Considerable research has been done and many articles written dealing with the individualized program. One of the principal problems facing educators today seems to be that of adjusting instruction to the various needs of individuals.

Attempts to achieve individualization of teaching have generally rested on an assumption that there exists at any given educational level a fixed body of subject matter which is most worth learning. Some pupils learn the prescribed content rapidly; others learn it more slowly. Teachers' major preoccupation has been with the rate of learning: How much, how fast. (4:9)

Too often we find schools with a teacher-dominated approach to education. Teaching of formalized subject matter and disciplinary methods have little demonstrable effect upon good thinking or good conduct. Methods permitting flexibility, where teachers have the opportunity

to use intelligence and imagination in teaching, are more adaptable to varying conditions. Let the learner be confronted with a real situation--one so challenging and intriguing that it compels him to meet it in his way with the teacher as a guide.

The presence of great individual differences in aptitude and achievement among students generates important problems of instruction at all levels of the educational system. Teachers undoubtedly became aware of these problems soon after the graded school emerged and the concept of class instruction was accepted widely. There is persistent conviction among educational personnel that the solution to many of the graver problems of teaching lies in some kind of plan which will make individualization of instruction possible within the general framework of a mass-instructional organization. (5:853)

As one analyzes the values inherent in the democratic philosophy, four essential principles seem fundamental and to have implications for individualized teaching in that they provide a frame of reference against which to evaluate school programs and practices. These are (1) respect for the dignity and worth of the individual; (2) concern for the common welfare; (3) faith in the ability of each student to discipline himself; and (4) belief in the use of reason, rather than force, for solving problems and settling controversies.

Individualized instruction affords opportunities for children to use functionally the fundamental skills of the "three R's," to live democratically with their peers,

to satisfy their individual needs, and to progress at their own rate.

Unquestionably, increased individual responsibility and commitment are needed in our society. In order that learners may become increasingly responsible and committed, their potential as individuals must be discovered, developed, and released. The times demand this, but not in the sense that the economy needs more engineers, and that therefore educators should emphasize science and mathematics to the neglect of other subjects. The times demand that the individual's potential be discovered, developed, and released because of the multiple benefits which the realization of his full potential can eventually offer the individual person and the society in which he lives. (4:13)

One must view the individualized program in the light of democratic procedures and consider the roles of the pupils, teachers, parents, administrators, and the librarian.

It is the purpose of this paper to show how democratic processes can be incorporated into the school curriculum in the elementary school by use of the individualized program of instruction.

II. THE PUPIL AND THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM

Pupil participation in the individualized program not only creates a mind-set desirable for effective learning, but also enhances social, emotional, and physical development. By his contribution the student feels that he is a part of the group and develops a sense of belonging which is so important for emotional stability. He becomes group conscious and has the opportunity to put into practice socially accepted patterns of behavior. This group participation aids him in developing his own special abilities and developing new interests, and thus he has the opportunity to lead as well as to follow.

By helping to select problems, the child faces the results of his own choice. Of course, he needs guidance but he will learn the importance of making wise decisions. He meets the realities of life in the obstacles that stand in his way. Overcoming the obstacles is growth. As he grows in ability to manage his problems the character of his purposes change.

Self-directed work causes much less physical wear and tear than imposed work. Energies are concentrated and utilized advantageously when the experience is self-managed. Coercion causes strain and restlessness, affecting the youngster's disposition, his work habits, and his attitudes.

If one respects the ways of thought of the growing child, if one is courteous enough to translate material into his logical forms and challenging enough to tempt him to advance, then it is possible to introduce him at an early age to the ideas and styles that later in life make an educated man.
(2:52)

To summarize, pupils should contribute to the individualized program their own purposes, needs, interests, and capacities. Dr. Hopkins' (7:188) enigmatic statement, "The children contribute themselves," means that regardless of what teachers do about it, the children do contribute those purposes which of necessity they must use along with their interest and curiosity in the world about them. Whether these factors come to be used actively, intelligently, and knowingly depends upon the ability of the teacher to start from the children's purposes and thus make their learning purposeful rather than merely permissive.

This chapter has shown the relationship between the individualized program and the pupil and how democratic procedures in the development of curriculum in the elementary school can be effected by utilizing individualized instruction.

III. THE TEACHER AND THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM

The teacher occupies the key position in developing any effective program of individualized instruction. The contribution of all others, including pupils, parents, administrators, and supervisors, depend upon the teacher's attitude and cooperation. The following indicates the relationship between the individualized instruction program and the teacher in the elementary school.

The unique contribution which the teacher can make to the individualized program is to know and recognize the basic needs of learners. These needs are expressed by learners in the interests which they evidence. It is the teacher's responsibility to know which of these expressed interests are vital interests.

The teacher may discover these vital interests by observing:

1. The kinds of spontaneous work and play in which students engage.
2. The books they read and the stories they enjoy.
3. The uses they make of things.
4. The methods they use to solve their problems.
5. The nature of questions they ask.
6. The interests they evidence on trips and excursions.

7. The hobbies and the nature of collections they make.
8. The types of pictures, movies, and slides they enjoy.
9. The TV programs they watch.

He may discover other vital interests through discussion of individual and group experiences, through various forms of creative expression, and by knowing the student's parents and his home background.

Another important contribution that the teacher can make to the individualized program is that of securing the cooperation of all persons involved. He must cooperate with pupils, with parents, with other teachers, with administrators and supervisors, with community organizations, and with all who contribute to the program construction.

The individualized program starts not with procedures but with a creative, perceptive teacher. He is one who believes that children want to learn. He thinks with the children rather than for them and respects the individual behavior of every youngster. He works with children in an informal way. Bruner says (2:52):

If any subject can be taught to any child in some honest form--then it should follow that a curriculum ought to be built around the great issues, principles, and values that a society deems worthy of the continual concern of its members.

The child's purposes and interests must be used as a starting point from which the teacher cuts back more and more widely into the culture. The long-range program must be sufficiently varied to care for all significant aspects of life. The project should be kept sufficiently difficult to challenge the pupil to put forth his best efforts, and yet not so difficult as to nullify the probability of success.

The teacher who views curriculum as an emerging educational experience will, of necessity, see her role as being much more vital, much more involved, and certainly more demanding of her creativity and perception than if she were to view the curriculum as a "fixed" plan for education of children. (9:27)

Guidance, perhaps, is the word that best describes the teacher's position--guidance in helping children to differentiate goals and processes involved, guidance in aiding children to seek better and better goals.

The teacher also has a secondary aim, for he must see that while the pupil pursues his goal, the process must be so guided as to have worthwhile outcomes. Materials of instruction and methods of teaching which promise the best outcomes must be used. The need is great for "a teacher who is competent to deal with diverse needs of the children that are in his group." (1:12)

The teacher has the significant role of guidance in the individualized program. He should be a student of

life and its problems and have a deep understanding of human nature. Most of all, he should have an underlying basic philosophy of education with a strong conviction concerning this philosophy.

Jeanette Veatch (10:47) has made a checklist for teachers preparing to individualize the reading program. It is equally applicable for use in other subjects.

1. Is my own mind made up?
2. Do I know the reading level of my pupils?
3. Have I decided who will participate?
4. Do I have enough books?
 - a. Are there three to five per child?
 - b. Are there no more than three or four of the same title?
 - c. Is there a wide enough range of difficulty for all needs at all times?
 - d. Are there enough subjects to interest everyone?
5. Is my room ready?
 - a. Are books easily available?
 - b. Do I have a good place for individual conferences?
 - c. Can pupils sit beside me?
 - d. Is there a place for small groups to meet?
 - e. Can traffic move reasonably freely?
6. Have I planned enough for readers and non-readers to do while I work with individuals and groups?

7. Have I established adequate routines?
 - a. Do I have a plan for getting and returning books?
 - b. Do I have a plan for keeping records?
 - c. Have I planned a way to help with unknown words?
 - d. Have I planned other routines for my room?
8. Have I consulted with school authorities and parents?

It can be readily seen that the above questions cover essential points vital to the success of any individualized program regardless of the subject area or the grade level. The teacher should not proceed with individualized programming until he has satisfactorily solved the problems posed.

IV. THE PARENT AND THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM

In individualized instruction the school is a continuation of the home, and the parents are inevitably the first and only continuous teachers. In order to bring about closer harmony between parents and the school, it is necessary that the concepts of the function of the school be enlarged to include the home. The parents should understand and help determine the needs, purposes, and goals of the educational program. Our schools should have "the sign of the open door."

Parents and teachers are confronted by many joint tasks and responsibilities. Some of these are:

1. To see that students grow physically, socially, and emotionally, rather than just learn school subjects;
2. To set up an environment which makes growth possible;
3. To see that they make each day a succession of student experiences which are interesting and worthwhile, from the student's standpoint, and which contribute to the welfare of society;
4. To help the student get out of his environment all that it has to offer him, and in turn, to contribute to it all that he can give;

5. To help the student recognize problems, analyze them, use his wits to master them, and reach a happy solution with pleasure, profit, and satisfaction.

Parents can, by sharing their knowledge, skill, and experiences with the school, come to play an active and vital part in developing an individualized program. Parental help will not only enrich the school and students but will also give added pleasure and comfort to the parents. This help may come about either as a result of the child's inquiries or as a result of the parents sensing the need and providing opportunity for the school, the student, and the parent to work together cooperatively.

The parents, as well as the community, need better to understand, appreciate, and practice the principles of democratic cooperative living. John Dewey (3:15) says that "school life should grow gradually out of the homelife in which the child has been nurtured and in connection with which he has his moral training."

Individualization recognizes the needs of each child and the importance of furthering the education of the whole child through an integrated process based on democratic principles in the construction of an individualized program.

V. THE ADMINISTRATOR AND THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM

In an individualized program it is the responsibility of the administrator to organize the entire school democratically and to make sure that the whole life of the school is democratic in nature. Moreover, he must be cognizant of continual adaptation to new situations and consider the various contributions of the different agents in the life of the school. Under the leadership and guidance of the administrator, cooperative group thinking inevitably results in the formulation of transitional policies that at any one time are acceptable and achievable by the persons who are expected to implement them.

Saylor and Alexander (8:385) feel that administrators are also responsible for issuing curriculum guides and materials of the following types:

1. A statement of the philosophy of the school, including a statement of the broad objectives or outcomes desired from the educational program;
2. A basic statement on the scope and sequence of the curriculum and the general framework of the educational program;
3. Guides to planning instruction at various grade levels and in the subject or core areas, including a wealth of suggestions for developing learning experiences with children;
4. Suggested resource units, unless these can be included in the general guides to the planning of instruction;

5. Miscellaneous guides for teachers, such as guides to the study of children, suggestions for evaluating pupil growth and development, suggestions for meeting individual needs of children in group situations, suggestions for cooperative group planning, and the like.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development said that the roles of leaders are twofold: (a) to help teachers discover and develop potential in their pupils, and (b) to facilitate discovery and development of potential in teachers themselves. Administrators and supervisors serve in significant ways as teachers of teachers and as aides to teachers. More specifically, however, they open to teachers the gates of experiencing and experimenting, and assist them in acquiring adequate self-concepts and abounding self-confidence. (4:125)

It is also the responsibility of the administrator to guide the development of the individualized program in such a way that the end results do not conflict with existing school policies. The administrator must be aware of the specific function of each area of curriculum construction.

VI. THE LIBRARIAN AND THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM

The chief function of a library is to further a pupil's growth in knowledge. There are certain materials necessary in a classroom library which should be determined with respect to the activities in progress within that room. The types of materials to be considered for a classroom library include:

1. Supplementary textbooks of different levels.
2. Some general reference books
3. Current materials.
4. Dictionaries.
5. Set of encyclopedias
6. Materials from home and community
7. Single concept films
8. Tape recorder
9. Television set

The classroom library is essentially a flexible collection of materials useful in connection with the particular purposes of the learning group. Classroom library materials are unique only in respect to location and to groups served in the class.

The school central library can be an invaluable resource for learners. It should contain a complete collection of books to give information on a wide variety

of topics to serve the large number of interests among students. The classroom teacher has the responsibility to help promote the functions of the library and must help the librarian know the students and the objectives of his teaching program. Teachers and librarians need to do a great deal of cooperative planning so that the materials chosen will serve the instructional needs of all learning groups.

The library should be staffed with trained school librarians who have a requisite minor in education. The National Society for the Study in Education recommends a fulltime school librarian with clerical assistance in any school with an enrollment of two hundred pupils up to five hundred, and an additional librarian for each five hundred thereafter.

The role of the librarian in a school which is operating an individualized program is far more important than in a basal type program. If a librarian is available, he can aid the teacher in selecting the right type of books for a particular classroom, as well as books which might interest each individual child. Librarians have long felt that they deserved a more important place in the teaching program than has been afforded in the past. The individualized program offers the librarian a real opportunity to be of great service to the classroom teacher. (2:35)

Thus, it is evident that the librarian is in a position to augment the efforts of all other groups and individuals, as well as the classroom library, in a democratic development of individualized instruction.

The librarian should be available to help each pupil choose books for recreational and informational reading. The librarian teaches the pupil to use the card catalogue and other informative materials such as atlases and almanacs.

The library facilities need to be readily accessible so that each student may avail himself of the materials there. The librarian should also be available at suitable times for consultation and assistance to the students and other staff members of the school.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

A child is a very curious and an essentially willing and cooperative person. Subject matter specifications and minimum essentials are the pupils' problems, as well as the concern of all others involved in program development.

In an individualized program it becomes necessary to start with the pupil, where he is, in purpose, goal, interest, and need, and to go forward on that basis. When a pupil has an active part in all aspects of an experience, his mind is so set as to make learning more sure. His inner impulses are made ready and alert to carry out his purposes. To act upon his purposes gives him satisfaction. Pupil self-discipline is essential to the development of the program. No classroom can be labeled a good classroom unless the teacher is helping the children to grow in learning and self-discipline.

The teacher should be a real human being, possessing poise, a sense of humor, and a wholesome, jolly, friendly attitude toward youth. He should have intelligence, imagination, intellectual curiosity, capacity for growth, resourcefulness, and initiative. He should be a learner with learners. In individualized instruction where there is a relaxed, interested, and cooperative group, there should be a real sincerity on the part of every teacher--

a willingness to be a leader only when, as a member of the group, he finds himself in that role. The teacher must never disregard the group plans. Planning in which children will participate readily is planning that grows out of an inherent democracy on the part of the teacher. The democratic classroom cannot grow out of a basic autocratic philosophy. A democratic personality cannot violate a group decision.

The parent has exerted a general, though sometimes very powerful influence upon the individualized program. It is well that he accepts his responsibility actively and constructively. He should be involved in meaningful, participating experiences. The parent is vitally concerned about his child's experiences at school. Therefore, the teacher must capitalize on this interest. If the parent is impressed with the appraisal of his child's growth, he will give of his time and funds and thus enrich the school program. Contacts with the parent will greatly aid the school in helping the child adjust to the many educational experiences. These contacts must also make the parent feel he is wanted and that the school is interested in the development of his child.

The primary function of the administrator is one of leadership. Under his democratic leadership the success of an individualized program is insured. He initiates

curriculum improvement through cooperative group thinking and stimulates group action of the whole school and community in the formulation of desirable educational policies. His function is to bring unity out of diversity and to make it possible for all to participate in creative planning.

Since, in individualized instruction, it is our goal to adapt the program to the individual, a goodly array of library books is essential. Thus, the librarian must be considered. The librarian cooperates with the classroom teacher in learning the interests and desires of the pupils so he can provide guidance in selecting resource materials. Wise planning with the pupils will help them make efficient use of the library and its contents. A good librarian is a valuable asset in learning situations.

Taking all points of view into consideration, it would appear that the individualized program in the elementary school should be a cooperative affair in which teachers, pupils, administrators, librarians, and parents should participate.

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