DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 091 355 SP 008 027

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TITLE An Introduction to the Harlingen Teacher Renewal Center.
INSTITUTION Harlingen Independent School District, Tex.
PUB DATE Aug 73
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Behavioral Objectives; *Educational Innovation; *Individualized Instruction; Learning Activities; *Learning Modalities; *Teacher Centers; Teaching Models

ABSTRACT

This paper provides background data regarding the need for individualized instruction and describes the training activities of the Teacher Renewal Center in Harlingen, Texas. The center provides teachers the opportunity to acquire a set of behavioral skills, which are a prerequisite to individualizing instruction, and serves as a model in training the teachers. The training curriculum is presented in modular form with a linear core of required material and a series of branched programmed options. The set of core materials and branching options is divided into three subjects: Advanced Organizers, Behavior Skills Labs, and Classroom Planning. The Advanced Organizer module components are designed to increase the teacher's awareness of the consequences of his current instructional procedures and to permit the training staff and the teacher to become aware of his teaching. The Behavior Skills Lab is designed to actively involve the teacher in the acquisition of new skills by permitting the teacher to experience the effects of teaching innovation as a teacher and as a student. The Classroom Planning materials facilitate the teacher's systematic implementation of the previous program curriculum to fit the teacher's situation. After the completion of the Classroom Planning component, the teacher returns to the center to reinforce behavioral and attitude changes. The teacher's progress is self-paced, and a criterion-referenced plan is used to evaluate each teacher. (PD)

Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District
Harlingen, Texas

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE

HARLINGEN TEACHER RENEWAL CENTER

August, 1973

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Introduction

What We Owe Kids

There is a recognized need to provide new ways of organizing the schools to provide an educational program that is available to the individual pupil when he is ready, and is greater in depth and breadth than ever before. This need for change is a result of the changes occurring in society and of a renewed interest in our knowledge of children and how they learn.

The changes in society caused by the technological revolution are so dramatic as to be frightening to many segments of the population. Scientists are predicting, for the year 2000, such activities as genetic manipulation which may allow future generations to decide not only whether they wish to have children, but also what kind of children they wish to have. Predictions for early in the 21st century, such as large scale ocean farming and mining, robots to do the routine chores about the house, and automated highways may be credible to today's population. More bizarre predictions such as man-machine combinations, intelligence-raising drugs and direct mind-to-mind communication are given just as high a probability prediction as those changes more easily accepted. It is well to remember that the development of many of the great discoveries of the 20th century such as nuclear energy, radio, television, transistors and lasers was made possible only by unexpected breakthroughs in science and technology. This would indicate that many of the most dramatic future developments have, as yet, not been predicted or imagined.[1]

The fact of individual differences has been proved beyond question and no one can conscientiously argue against the right of the pupil to grow to his maximum potential or against the provision of a continuous learning experience for each child as he progresses through public schools. But who has developed the highly specialized instructional techniques, designs, and materials to effect this program in the classroom? To be honest with ourselves, we must admit that little has been done. Few of the graduates of teacher education institutions are equipped to develop highly differentiated programs for their students. They have not had the opportunity to acquire these techniques in their methods courses or in practice teaching.

Theoretically, the increment to learning accrued by individualizing the learning experience for a child has been validated by research and well known for many years. The difficulty has not been in knowing what to do, but rather how to do it best.

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[1] "Take a Look at Tomorrow," Arizona Republic, November 27, 1966.

What has been known theoretically, however, about how a child learns best has been too long ignored in the classic self-contained classroom, which at best has utilized the questionable technique of ability groupings that ill-serve the goal of personal dignity for each child while attempting to meet the challenge of diverse abilities. Lack of teacher training in the individualization of learning has been one major factor in the absence of implementation of true individualized instruction.

To be able to offer an instructional program geared to the uniqueness of each individual child is a most difficult task. As mentioned previously, to date not much help has been offered the classroom teacher in seeking to implement such programs either in his college or university training nor in most in-service programs. Nevertheless, if we believe that every child has the right to an equal education, we as professional educators, must strive to provide it.

For a teacher to be able to individualize instruction he must individualize his teaching behavior. This entails thinking and planning in terms of the individual child instead of the large group. An individualized program is not necessarily different for each learner, but must be appropriate for each. It is based on the premise that there is no best way for all learners, but that there are best ways for each learner, which may be different from those for another learner. Not only must a teacher individualize what a child learns but must also individualize how he learns. Both of these major premises have been validated by research.

In determining what a child learns, it is important to understand that learning is incremental. A child learns one step at a time, like a stair-step. Each step serves as a foundation for the next. Some children go up the steps faster than others. The rate at which each child learns must be taken into consideration in the assignment of all tasks. Age and grade level are in no way guides to the appropriateness of a learning task. We certainly don't expect all children in a particular classroom to be the same height or weight, nor to run the 100 yard dash in the same time, so it is reasonable to assume that we cannot expect a whole classroom of children to accomplish the same task at the same time.

How a child learns is also a very important aspect of the individualization process. Each child has a unique learning style or modality. That is, some children learn best from reading or independent study, some from multi-media apparatus, some from role-playing, some from simulation, some from class discussions, some from teacher presentations, some from peer tutoring and some from field trips, etc.

To understand and implement a truly individualized instructional program, it is imperative for a teacher to individualize his grading practices. Once a teacher accepts the concept of providing learning activities appropriate for each individual child it stands to reason that each child must be evaluated on an individual basis. To compare one child's work to that of the rest of the class is to reject the entire concept of individualization. The traditional concept of grading has been based upon the idea of a minimum standard, with the report card grade reflecting how far above or below the standard a particular student

scored. This minimum standard is arbitrarily set by each teacher. Some teachers use the "curve" system for assigning grades to children in their classes. Some believe so strongly in this type of grading system that they actually practice giving so many A's, B's, C's, and F's. They rationalize that some children have to fail or the instruction is too "easy." In an individualized instructional program the grade assigned to the child each reporting period is based on the growth he has made since the previous reporting period, regardless of what the majority of the class has accomplished. It is possible for each child to receive a good grade if each one indicates growth in the skills and objectives on which he is working. This eliminates the normal curve idea that the low four or five in a class have to do poorly. If each child has been assigned appropriate learning tasks which he can master, then he should be graded on the growth he makes on those tasks during that particular grading period.

There has been a great deal of discussion and controversy about grouping, but the fact remains that grouping procedures alone will not solve the problems of individual differences. The differences in students mean that "fixed" grouping by level of achievement is of little real value and introduces questionable procedures as well. We all realize that this is true within the classroom as well as among classrooms. Continuous progress learning at the optimum rate for each individual child can never be obtained where children are put in stable groups in which the group is taught, regardless of the needs of the individual. A child should be assigned to a group in which he produces best. The groups must be rearranged as the children's needs change. Under no circumstances should a group become a "label" for a child. Labeling a child is one of the most tragic mistakes made by educators. Benjamin Bloom[1], referring to the labeling of children, says:

> "This set of expectations which fixes the academic goals of teachers and students is the most wasteful and destructive aspect of the present educational system. It reduces the aspirations of both teachers and students and it systematically destroys the ego and self-concept of a sizable group of students who are legally required to attend schools for 10 to 12 years under conditions which are frustrating and humiliating year after year."

The teacher expectation as a result of labeling children many times becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy." The implication being that when a teacher expects a group of children to perform well, they usually do. In the same manner, if the teacher expects a child or group of children to fail, they generally do. A great deal of research seems to validate this concept.

Teachers are primarily concerned with the "now" aspects of classroom life. Unfortunately, the teacher's history of pre-service and in-service education has been regarded as irrelevant to the most basic technology of teaching by the pre-service and veteran teacher alike. Silberman (1970) observes the following:

> Rarely do any of the "methods" courses make any effort to relate the discussion of teaching methods to what the teachers may have learned in their work in psychology, philosophy or anything else. More often than not, the professors teaching the courses contradict their own dicta, e.g., delivering long dry lectures on the importance of not lecturing.

This theme may be observed even in those programs claiming to be "How To" training courses. The major obstacle to teacher preparation is not a lack of "How To" programs, but that the "How To" courses do not teach anyone how to do anything except perhaps stand immobile in front of students and quickly reduce their original eagerness for learning.

Recent classroom research point to the conclusion that the teacher's lack of relevant training has produced related and significant effects:

1. Teachers are not always aware of what they teach.

2. Teachers lack the skills necessary to teach what they want to teach.

A large majority of teachers would verbally assert that they intend to be "good" teachers, i.e., to treat students fairly and attempt to maximize the achievement of every student. The teacher's classroom behavior may, however, communicate a message dissonant from the teacher's intentions. For example, Good (1969) concluded that students perceived by the teacher as high achievers received significantly more response opportunities and more praise than did students regarded as low achievers. Brophy and Good (1969) presented dramatic evidence that children who were expected to achieve less than their classmates not only received less praise for a correct response, but were less likely to receive sustaining feedback for a partially correct response which limited any possibility of the teacher shaping answers. Rist (1970) confirmed the self-fulfilling prophecy at work in kindergarten classes. He writes, "The organization of the classroom (homogeneous ability grouping) according to the expectation of success or failure, after the eighth day of school, became the basis for the differential treatment of the children for the remainder of the school year (p.423)." Rist characterized the educational experiences of students assigned to "slow" groups as a lack of communication, lack of involvement in class activities, and a lack of instruction. In following some of these children to the first grade, Rist further discovered that the same children assigned to low ability groups in kindergarten were immediately placed at the "slow" tables in the first grade.

The classroom teacher may also be unaware of the extent to which he controls conduct or behavior problems in the classroom. The teacher's lack of awareness of what he is incidentally teaching may result in more time spent in "handling" the classroom rather than teaching. Jackson (Medley, 1970) observing in a progressive nursery school, i.e., open, nongraded, and individualized instruction, found that teachers directed ninety-five percent of child actions.

Thus, even in supposedly open, free-selection learning environments the teacher unwittingly acted as the authoritarian source of knowledge. This discouraging discovery is partially due to the teacher's habitual response to misbehavior. Marie Hughes and her associates (1959) looked at the classroom behavior of approximately 40 elementary teachers in the Salt Lake City area, and summarized that in over 80% of the records, over 50% of the teacher behavior was dominative. Flanders (1965) comments that a surprising amount of classroom interaction can be summarized by what he calls "the 2/3 rule." About two-thirds of the time someone is talking, about two-thirds of the talk is produced by the teacher, and about two-thirds of the teacher talk is direct. He characterizes the term "direct" as teacher behavior which limits pupil freedom, and it is defined by categories in his system. Several authors have demonstrated the powerful effects of the teacher's differential attention in controlling disruptive behavior. Thomas, Becker and Armstrong (1968) systematically varied the teacher's approval and disapproval in a class of twenty-eight students. The results clearly indicated that approving teacher responses served as a reinforcer in maintaining expected classroom behavior. The teacher's attention also acted to functionally maintain misbehavior. Several investigations have demonstrated the teacher's ability to incidentally teach and reinforce a wide range of student misbehavior (Patterson, 1965; McAllister, Stachowiak, Baer and Conderman, 1969). Madsen, Becker and Thomas (1968) found that when teachers respond to a child only when he is misbehaving, the teacher's intended punishment functionally serves to increase the long-run probability of the student's inappropriate responses. Dollar (1971) found that when classroom teachers are simultaneously presented with "good" and "bad" behavior, teachers responded first to disruptive behavior ninety-four percent of the time. This study also clearly indicated that teachers usually ignore appropriate behavior but rarely fail to punish inappropriate responses.

From this data and previously noted studies, it is obvious that teachers not only form concrete beliefs, attitudes or expectancies for the child's classroom performance, but the teacher also differentially reinforces or shapes the student's classroom performance to fit the original expectations. Those children for whom the teacher holds low behavioral or achievement expectancies are automatically guaranteed less reinforcement for effort toward academic and non-academic gains. This situation created a "caste" system from which the child is unlikely to escape. Once the child is diagnosed, labeled, and "placed" there is little hope for the student to receive rewards for behaving in ways which are dissonant from the teacher's and school administrator's prophecies.

Related to the problems of teacher awareness is the teacher's lack of concrete behavioral skills which enables him to teach as he wants to teach. As previously mentioned, the teacher's history of education is inadequate to help him cope with the immediate demands of classroom life. Watson (1967) has suggested that teachers teach in much the same way as they were taught. Teachers are taught, however, in highly routine, unproductive ways. Teaching behavior, as modeled by college and in-service courses, rarely approximates the behavior the courses are designed to teach. In most large school systems, a teacher's classroom behavior goes unnoticed. Even if the teacher acquires effective skills in workshop or in-service programs, sustaining supportive follow-up critical to behavior changes is simply not provided.

From the previous discussion, it becomes obvious that the primary task of teacher training programs must be to focus upon efforts designed to bring the teacher to an objective awareness of the incidental learning and teaching in the classroom environment. This first step alone is insufficient. The next focus of the training program must be upon the teacher's acquisition of instrumental skills. Smith (1969) captures the teachers' needs when he writes, "It does little good for a teacher to understand that he should accept the child and build on what he is if the teacher does not know how to assess what the child brings, and lacks the skills necessary to work with him."

The Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District has been functioning under a nongraded elementary school organizational plan since 1963. In its simplest form, a nongraded school is nothing more than a school which has eliminated or minimized the formal grade barriers. The nongraded school, instead of focusing attention on how a child is achieving in comparison with a particular grade level, allows educators to focus on how an individual child is achieving in terms of his own ability and development.

Teachers and administrators in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District fully accept the concept and philosophy of individualized instruction. This was revealed in an eighteen-month study carried out by the district beginning in August, 1971. The conclusions of the study are:

1. To teach in an individualized instruction program, a teacher must abandon the conventional role that is associated with group instruction. Most teachers need assistance in moving from a teacher-dominated, group-centered instructional approach. The key feature in making this transition is the teacher, and therefore the teacher deserves assistance in achieving the new behaviors that he must display if he is to successfully implement an individualized instructional program. A training program is needed to help teachers in making the role transition to individualization. At the heart of this training is the need to develop individualized teacher preparation modules to be used in an in-service instructional setting at the local school level. This concept reflects the belief that if teachers are to support individualized instruction and if they are to be adequately prepared to implement such a program, they must encounter a training program which itself is individualized.

2. Establish a continuum of skills beginning at the preschool level and continuing through the upper elementary levels. A classroom management system must be designed to provide diagnostic teaching procedures and appropriate instructional materials, texts, and equipment to be used with each pupil as he proceeds in mastering the various learning skills in each subject area. This will entail providing each teacher with the necessary basal texts (multi-level) and a training curriculum package. It will also entail the correlation of existing supplies and materials to the continuum of skills in the nongraded program on each campus.

3. Provide positive reinforcement, support, and feedback to teachers and administrators implementing individualized instruction techniques.

The Teacher Renewal Center has been designed to provide teachers in the Harlingen Public Schools the opportunity to acquire a set of behavioral skills (competencies) which have been identified as a prerequisite to individualizing or personalizing instruction. The basic premise behind the Center is that it will serve as a model in training teachers to implement individualized instructional programs. In other words, we plan to do for our teachers what we request them to do for pupils.

The pivotal element of the full application of the Teacher Renewal Center concept will be the teacher's two five-day rotations through the training activities at the Center (total of ten days). Thus, teachers must be released from regular classroom teaching duties for ten days. To replace teachers during this time period, a core of project trained substitute teachers will be necessary. The substitute teacher will move from school to school as the regular teachers rotate through the Renewal Center.

Teacher Renewal Center Training Activities

Curriculum Model

The format for the delivery of instrumental teaching skills incorporates the following characteristics. First, the training curriculum is presented in modular form with a linear core of required material and a series of branched programmed options. The core curriculum is required of all teachers because the core materials contain skills, information and attitudes important to any teaching strategy. However, one-third of the training content is placed in branching, self-selected modules because no one instructional procedure can provide optimal learning for all trainees. Secondly, the complete set of core materials and branching options is devided into three instructional subsets: Advanced Organizers, Behavioral Skills Labs, and Classroom Planning. These three instructional components correspond to three separate time periods - before, during, and after the teacher's training activities in the Teacher Renewal Center.

Advanced Organizers: The Advanced Organizers will be sent to the teacher approximately three weeks before the teacher leaves his classroom and reports to the Teacher Renewal Center. The Advanced Organizer module components (core and branched options) are designed to increase the teacher's awareness of the consequences of his current instructional procedures. The Advanced Organizers will consist of the teacher's mastery of core concepts regarding incidental learning, modeling, the operation of the self-fulfilling prophecy, behavior measurement and evaluation and individualized instruction. In summary, these materials will permit the teacher the opportunity to become aware of what he is teaching and exactly how closely his teaching behavior approximates what he wanted to teach. The teacher's mastery of the Advanced Organizers units will also provide the training staff with baseline measures of the teacher's entering skills.

Behavioral Skills Labs: Once the Advanced Organizers units are mastered, the teacher is eligible to be admitted to the Renewal Center and begin a new series of training activities. These activities will be referred to as Behavioral Skills Labs (BSL). The primary difference between the Advanced Organizers units and the BSL is that in the former the teacher demonstrates mastery of the presented concepts through verbal behavior and the BSL requires verbal and non-verbal demonstrations of concept mastery. The BSLs involve the trainee in classroom simulation exercises designed to provide instructor control and shaping of new teacher behaviors. The trainee's acquisition of new teaching skills within the lab experience proceeds through a three-step process:

1. The instructor models the responses or class of responses.

2. The teacher rehearses the modeled responses.

3. The instructor provides audio and video feedback concerning the trainee's approximation to the target response.

The above sequence will be followed for each presented concept.

In summary, the BSL is designed to actively involve the teacher in the acquisition of new skills. The teacher is permitted to feel and see the effects of each teaching innovation from the perspectives offered by being a teacher and student within a wide range of classroom teaching strategies.

Classroom Planning: The third and final subset of the training curriculum is received by the teacher after his departure from the Renewal Center and upon his return to his own classroom. The post Renewal Center curriculum will be designated as the Classroom Planning component. These materials are designed to facilitate the teacher's systematic implementation of the previous program curriculum in ways which fit the teacher's own teaching situation.

Cycle Two: After the teacher's completion of the Classroom Planning component, the teacher will return to the Teacher Renewal Center for a second five-day instructional period. The trainee's second cycle is designed to solidify and concretize the application of the Center's training curriculum. During this second Center visit the teacher will be able to relate specific organizational and instructional problems unique to his classroom. The training staff will use the second five-day training period to reinforce the teacher's behavioral and attitudinal changes and re-evaluate the program's impact upon each classroom. Emphasis will also be placed upon the identification of problems and solutions the teachers have encountered while attempting to stimulate change in their respective faculties. Remember, the team of four teachers visiting the Center will serve as the stimulus for change among their teaching peers.

Self-Pacing: The teacher's progress through the Advanced Organizers, Behavioral Skills Labs, and Classroom Planning Components will be self-paced

by the individual learner. Perhaps uniquely, structure and freedom to explore one's own interest will be handled within the same curriculum. This is possible because the training staff will clearly specify important core concepts and skills and at the same time structurally provide for the unique needs and interests of each trainee through the Branching Option component. Teachers will be given the freedom and support necessary for the self-generation of branching units and demonstrations of curriculum mastery.

Evaluation: A key decision to enhance the personalization of training afforded by self-pacing was the use of a criterion-referenced evaluation plan rather than the often used norm-referenced grading system. Teachers cannot be expected to believe in the ability of their students to learn productively, if the teacher as a person does not experience the same positive regard from a training program. A criterion-referenced evaluation of progress will permit the staff to reward successive approximations to training objectives which in turn eventuate in mastery learning for each teacher. This supportive, learner-centered evaluation plan will also serve as a model which the teacher can adopt for his own classroom instruction.

The Reinforcement Model

The presented ideas will not successfully modify teacher behavior unless two conditions are met upon the teacher's return to the receiving school environment. First, the new ideas must be tailored to fit the teacher's unique classroom situation and personality. Secondly, the feedback and support accompanying each effort toward the program's objectives is even more important as the teacher begins the process of making the presented concepts operational in his own classroom. Thus, the classroom planning component is oriented toward the objective of providing information and skill in the techniques of classroom problem identification and solving. The primary agents of reinforcement for the teacher will evolve from the Coordinator of Individualized Instruction.

The Center's efforts to monitor the teacher's application of the curriculum after he returns to the classroom stems from the project's emphasis upon practical teaching skills and the importance of support while teachers successfully implement the project's objectives within their own classrooms. Again, a team of teachers returns to their own schools to serve as models and agents of change for their respective faculties. This teaching team will have to work together as teachers and as consultants for their teaching peers.

In summary, we as educators must make a personal commitment to each and every child for whom we are responsible. This commitment will insure that provisions will be made to meet the individual educational needs of each child to the best of our ability. This, we owe kids. What more can we ask?