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ABSTRACT

As students progress through the different grade levels, reading across the curriculum needs to be emphasized because it provides opportunities for students to practice reading in each academic discipline. Becoming a good reader is a curriculum "must." On the kindergarten level, experience charts may be used as an early means of teaching reading. A Big Book procedure could also be used in teaching reading to young children. In thinking of levels of reading, it may well follow or be used with the experience chart. When considering levels of reading instruction in addition to the experience chart and the Big Book procedure, perhaps individualized reading comes next in being an open-ended procedure of instruction. An ample number of library books on diverse general reading levels must be available for student choice. The level of library book chosen to read depends upon the student's ability to comprehend the contents. When basal readers are used in the classroom, the accompanying manual has objectives listed for students to achieve, learning opportunities for learners to pursue, and evaluation techniques to ascertain what students have learned. Basal readers are graded as to level. State mandated objectives for students to achieve are now in force in 49 of the 50 states. The local reading curriculum is to be aligned with the state mandated objectives. Assessment of student progress in reading will be emphasized within the framework of state mandated tests. Teachers and administrators should be on the lookout for innovative reading programs which might assist a student to achieve more optimally. (NKA)

Levels of Reading Achievement.

by Marlow Ediger

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LEVELS OF READING ACHIEVEMENT

There are diverse levels of reading achievement for pupils to attain. These levels can be achieved on any grade level, but increasingly more complex objectives should be achieved by pupils as they progress through the different grade levels. As a vital trend, reading across the curriculum needs to be emphasized. This provides opportunities for pupils to practice reading in each academic discipline, as well as read in the vocational arena. Becoming a good reader is a must in the curriculum. A person who cannot read well will certainly be handicapped in recreational pursuits as well as in finding suitable employment later at the work place, whatever the vocational/professional endeavor may be. When attending a university, most of the course work does require much reading of subject matter content. Pupils need to begin in the pre-school years to become ready for reading with having quality background experiences. These background experiences are helpful when pupils are learning to read words, sentences, and paragraphs, beginning on the kindergarten level in a developmental program of reading instruction.

The Experience Chart

Experience charts may be used on the kindergarten level as an early means of teaching reading. Pupils here do need background experiences in order to have something to say and to talk about. Pupils may view the out of doors from the classroom window to notice something of interest. They might also view objects on an interest center to discuss with others in the classroom. After adequate time has been given to observations made, pupils may provide ideas to the teacher for an experience chart. Thus, the teacher writes each idea on the chalkboard for all to see clearly. Following the printing of these ideas in neat manuscript style, pupils may read aloud the ideas together with the teacher as she points to each word. Rereading orally may occur as often as desired. As pupils read the content, they develop a basic sight vocabulary of words, useful for future reading activities. The content makes sense since pupils perceived the ideas from the outside world or objects on the interest center. Pupils see talk written down with the use of abstract symbols. The teacher pronounces each word as she points to it. Learners follow along in oral reading as the teacher points to each word. Rereading the selection from the experience chart helps pupils to recognize an increasing number

of new words. The experience chart is read together by pupils of different ability levels, and yet learners may achieve optimally in word recognition as abilities permit. The experience chart may then be used early in the reading activities of young learners, at least on the kindergarten level of teaching (Ediger, 1989, 1-18).

The success of any program of reading instruction depends much upon the knowledge and skills of the classroom teacher. A good teacher will

1. engage pupils in active participation in reading instruction. The pupil will not sit passively, but have an inward desire in learning to read. Strategies need to be found to involve each pupil in learning to read.

2. assist pupils to make sense of what is being read. It is important for each pupil to attach meaning to what is being read. Not understanding subject matter read is useless in the reading curriculum.

3. help pupils to perceive order or sequence in content read. The better the sequence in the mind of the learner, the greater will be the gains of pupil reading achievement. If pupils fail to experience good sequence, they will not obtain the skills and knowledge necessary for becoming a good reader. What has been read provides background information for the new subject matter to accrue.

4. guide pupils to sense purpose for reading. If purpose is involved, a pupil will perceive reasons for reading. Reading then is not done for the sake of doing so, but for intrinsic values to the reader.

5. accept each pupil as having extreme worth. Pupils need to feel that they are accepted and belong to the group. A school is a social setting whereby pupils interact with each other and need to feel that they belong to and are members of a group (Ediger, 2002, 75- 81).

The Big Book Approach

A Big Book procedure may be used in teaching reading to young children. When thinking of levels of reading, it may well follow or be used with the experience chart. A big book is an enlargement or an original copy of illustrations and print, large enough for all to see in a group setting. The teacher then may discuss the illustrations with pupils. This provides background information for pupils so that they might understand the related print discourse. In sequence, the teacher reads aloud the related print. Pupils need to follow long as the teacher reads aloud and points to each new word being read. Then, pupils together with

the teacher read the same content orally. The teacher still points to each word read aloud. Rereading may be done as often as is desired. Pupils here are developing an increased number of basic sight words for reading. Sequential stories in the Big Book may be used in teaching reading (Ediger, 1991, 45- 52).

The Big Book procedure has the following advantages in reading instruction:

1. pupils read ideas which can capture interest and enthusiasm. The teacher here is the one who carries the ball for pupil reading success. Although, it too must be said that each pupil has major responsibilities for making any learning activity a successful venture.

2. the teacher provides a scaffold in having pupils move from the known (the background information) to the unknown (the print discourse).

3. each pupil can succeed in that the teacher reads aloud the selection to children followed by pupils reading orally with the teacher as the latter points to each word being read.

4. rereading makes it possible for a pupil to identify a word if he/she was not able to do this with an earlier oral reading activity. Reinforcement is also possible with a pupil meeting up with the same words again when rereading or when reading a new selection with Big Book methodology.

5. the teacher can be quite creative in using the Big Book approach in reading instruction in that there may be no Manual to follow in teaching. There are reading advocates who believe in minimizing the use of the basal reader in the instructional arena. Basals do have related manuals to offer suggestions for objectives for pupils to achieve. learning opportunities to achieve these objectives, and evaluation techniques to use in ascertaining what pupils have learned. The reading curriculum may become quite formal in following the Manual religiously. In the Big Book approach in teaching reading, the methodology is open ended for the teacher in developing a developmentally appropriate reading curriculum.

Individualized Reading

When thinking of levels of reading instruction in addition to the experience chart and the Big Book procedure, individualized reading perhaps comes next in being an open ended procedure of instruction. An ample number of library books and on diverse genera/ reading levels need to be available for pupil choice. These criteria need to be in evidence so that each pupil may select a developmentally appropriate book to read from. The

pupil is the chooser of the book to read. The teacher steps to make a suggestion to the pupil if he/she cannot settle down with a reading a library book. Most schools would need to increase their updated library book holding if they are to offer a quality individualized reading program. The teacher needs to be thoroughly familiar with the individualized reading philosophy before initiating this method of instruction. The teacher needs to be able to introduce selected library books in an appealing way so that learner appetite for reading is increased. Also, the teacher needs to read selections from library books in an interesting manner to encourage pupil reading endeavors. After the pupil has completed reading a book, he/she may have a conference with the teacher to assess achievement and progress.

Individualized reading offers the following opportunities to pupils:

1. the learner may choose that which is interesting to read, rather than someone else doing the choosing.
2. the learner may select what is developmental in nature, rather than content which is too easy or too difficult.
3. the learner sequences his/her own choices in terms of content read.
4. the learner may select what to discuss with the teacher, after having completed reading a library book, within the conference setting. Word recognition fluency may also be evaluated within the conference.
5. the learner may choose to read the same library book as another pupil. Cooperatively, a conference may be held involving the readers and the teacher.

Individualized reading may also manifest itself within sustained silent reading (SSR), and/or by checking out library books for home reading. Generally, there is no evaluation component in these two procedures of individualized reading, otherwise the five above named criteria also apply here. The level of library book chosen to read depends upon the pupil's ability to comprehend the contents therein.

Basal Readers

When basal readers are adopted by a school, the series of readers chosen by a selection committee are written on a graded basis. Thus, there are graded level textbooks for pupils to read in their respective grades. The accompanying manual to a basal has objectives listed for pupils to achieve, learning

opportunities for learners to pursue, and evaluation techniques to ascertain what pupils have learned. The manual may be used in a formal manner by the teacher whereby he/she determines sequentially what pupils are to achieve in reading. Somewhat toward the other end of the continuum, a more open ended curriculum may be in the offing whereby pupil/teacher planning of the curriculum is emphasized. With pupil/teacher planning, the manual is used in terms of flexible teaching suggestions. Basal readers then offer the following:

1. security for teachers in teaching reading, especially beginners, be it in a formal or flexible manner with teacher manual use.
2. a planned curriculum be it in whole or in part.
3. a plan of teaching reading which can also incorporate individualized reading along with other reputable procedures of instruction.
4. teachers providing for individual differences among pupils within the framework of a planned curriculum, especially with an open ended approach in teaching.
5. an inclusion of one on one approaches in teaching reading such as Reading Recovery.

State Mandated Objectives in Reading

Forty nine of fifty states in the union now have state mandated objectives for pupils to achieve. The objectives are generally developed under the auspices of state departments of education within each state. If a state has many objectives for pupils to achieve, then decision making by the teacher will be more minimal in terms of the scope of reading instruction. However, the learning opportunities to achieve the objectives may be selected by the teacher. Assessment of pupil progress in reading will be emphasized within the framework of state mandated tests. The local reading curriculum is to be aligned with the state mandated objectives. Flexibility may then be stressed with the selection of learning opportunities to achieve the state mandated objectives of instruction. The learning opportunities must provide for individual differences among pupils, using the best knowledge of how pupils learn within the framework of educational psychology.

State mandated objectives then

1. provide for uniformity in terms of what pupils are to learn within a state.
2. attempt to provide quality objectives and tests through the efforts of curriculum and measurement specialists.

3. emphasize what is perceived to be relevant and vital to learn for pupils.
4. stress the importance of feedback to teachers in terms of diagnostic and remedial information, based on pupil test results.
5. try to identify the basics which pupils are to master.

Additional Plans of Reading Instruction

Teachers and school administrators need to be on the lookout for innovative reading programs which might assist a pupil to achieve more optimally. The revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2001 accepted the research findings of the federally funded National Reading Panel (NRP), to incorporate five key components of effective reading instruction which include

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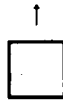
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