Individualized reading and its implications to primary teachers

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INDIVIDUALIZED READING AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS TO PRIMARY TEACHERS

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Background

Reading was one of the first curriculum areas to be individualized. This came about from teachers being discontent with uninspired reading texts, observing lack of pupil interest and progress in reading, having difficulties with present reading programs, and other causes. For many years, teachers have thought that the most effective way to teach reading was to place children in groups according to reading abilities. Working under this plan, they became aware of the fact that within the groups there were varying stages to development and capabilities, and that many children did not learn the reading skills effectively by the organized sequences and structures of the textbook manuals. Thus began the search for new ways to teach reading. Their search found that there was greater satisfaction and more handicaps were overcome when individual help was given to the pupils at the moment of need. Children choose how to help themselves in reading.

A review of professional literature describes many attempts to put individualized reading into practice. As
early as 1850 some educators saw an answer centered in organizational plans that started with Horace Mann's grouping according to chronological age--the graded school of today. This was followed by Multi-Track, Dalton, Joplin, Departmentalization, Acceleration, Nonpromotion, Homogeneous and Non-graded, to name just a few.¹

Statement of the Problem

It is the general purpose of this investigation to survey and present in a concise form the place of individualized reading at the primary level. The main interest of the writer is to set up this program at the primary level; however, most of the literature will be of a general nature.

Significance

The significance of this study lies in the background knowledge gained from reviewing recent literature which will benefit the writer in setting up an individualized reading program at the primary level to serve the students with whom she works. Hopefully, it will be of some small assistance to other primary teachers in answering their probings about how best to individualize their teaching of reading.

Definition of Terms

Reading.--The term reading is used throughout this paper as the interpretation of symbols or written language. It is a means by which a person enriches himself through

enjoyment and increases his knowledge, insight and understanding.

**Individualized Reading Program.**--This program provides freedom for the pupil to select, from a variety of sources in the classroom, materials which are interesting and challenging, but which he can read without too much difficulty. He'll choose for himself the materials he'll use in learning to read. He reads at his own rate, without constant prodding from the other children. In the individualized reading program, the pupil receives instruction designed for the individual student rather than for an entire class. At times the individual will receive personal attention from the teacher. At other times he may be a member of a larger group. Individualized reading endeavors to group together children with similar reading problems and teach each group differently in accordance with its needs. Each group goes at its own pace using materials that seem most suitable.

**Group Instruction.**--Throughout the study, the term group instruction shall be interpreted as meaning the plan that is used in many schools whereby children are reading in groups according to their ability.

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Conferences.--This term shall be interpreted as a meeting between teacher and child. During this time, the child will discuss with the teacher the book or story which he has read independently, and he also may read a portion of it orally to her, so the teacher can see how well he unlocks words. At this time, the teacher also diagnoses and may try to correct the child's specific word recognition and comprehension difficulties.4

Record Keeping.--In the individualized reading program, it is necessary for the teacher to keep careful records of each pupil's progress and shortcomings. A teacher may use a folder, notebook, or cards for such a purpose.

Seeking.--The child is continually exploring books and seeking experiences that fit in with his growth and needs.

Self-selection.--From a large collection, each child chooses a book which he wants to read and which through the guidance of the teacher appears to be most effective in terms of his abilities and needs. This may be a basic reader, a supplemental reader, or any trade book.

Pacing.--Each child proceeds at his own pace, his own rate of growth.

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4 Wilma H. Miller, "Organizing a First Grade Classroom for Individualized Reading Instruction," The Reading Teacher, XXIV, No. 8, (May, 1971), p. 748.
CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

The problem of how a teacher teaches a child to read has received much attention in the past few years. Educators have been put in the limelight. Professional and lay people have been critical. It is of utmost importance that educators discover and know what is best for the total development of the child. Methods of teaching whether old or new should be investigated by all educators.

Education, to be effective, must be continuous, individual, highly personal, active rather than passive. As a result, the range of individual differences within a group is increased rather than diminished. Educators should be alert for new and improved instructional practices to meet these differences. One of these new practices may well be the individualized reading program. Possibly, through this method of instruction, the needs, diverse interests and abilities of children will be met without sacrificing the basic skills essential to the development of the maturing student. The effectiveness and efficiency of the individualized reading method remains yet to be evaluated.
After reading many articles concerning individualized reading, it is very evident to the writer that the amount being written on both the principles and the practice of individualized reading is growing rapidly. Today individualized reading is a more developed idea than that of which the writer spoke in the background. Smith points out today's concept of individualized reading in these words:

The present concept of individualized reading extends far beyond the earlier plans permitting children to progress at their own rates. It is primarily concerned with reading as it meshes into and promotes child development in its many different aspects - physical, mental, social, emotional, linguistic, and experiential. It is interested not only in a child's reading achievement, but also in his interest in reading, his attitude toward reading, and his personal self-esteem and satisfaction in being able to read.

Basically, individualized reading is probably the most intelligent of the new approaches to reading instruction. It is wise to teach individuals in terms of their interests, in terms of their own pace, and in terms of the things they seek. With this way the child has an active role in the learning process.

It is only within the past two or three decades that individualized reading has come into its own. Several conditions have given this philosophy the support necessary for its development. The most significant is the knowledge

educators have gained of the reading process itself; children learn best when allowed to move at their own pace. According to Serlin, individualized reading upholds the philosophy of the learning process well, in that its chief objective is to unleash the potential of the individual enabling him to go as far as his abilities permit. In hundreds of places throughout the nation, the individualized method has gained respect as it has demonstrated that it allows reading instruction to become what it should be: an individual matter.

In the past twenty years, there probably has been no general approach to reading that has been investigated more than has been individualized reading. Even though it has been a subject of such interest, the research findings are controversial as to whether this method is better than any other. Most studies have been set up as a comparison of the relative effectiveness of the individual method and the group basal plan. There hasn't been enough definitive data from which to draw conclusions. Concerning individualized reading, Grotberg states that the system produces no better results than other systems, and it produces no worse results than other systems. Odom confirms Grotberg's statement, saying, "To advocate one methodology of teaching

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reading and ignore the advantages of other methods would be heresy; no one method of teaching reading will be a success with all children or all teachers."\(^4\)

Of all reading methods, individualizing reading, with proper attention to record keeping, is one of the most promising of all techniques for gathering specific data about the reading status of a student. A requirement of effective instruction, notes Cohen, is to develop a core reading program for all pupils, one in which each can move at his own pace. Such a program requires a continuous measurement and diagnosis of specific operations. On the basis of this diagnosis, each pupil branches from the core to specific instructional segments according to needs.\(^5\)

The growing interest in individualized reading is reflected in reading labs, kits, texts, and literature. These aids, as Serlin comments, are advantageous in working with the unique learning traits of pupils.

A big plus of an Individualized Reading Program is the freedom it affords regarding the use of technology. Since each child works at his own pace, he can partake of a variety of media and self-instructional materials designed to help him learn with immediate feedback and satisfaction in his work which perhaps enables him to better understand the subject matter.\(^6\)


\(^6\)Serlin, "Toward Individualized Reading," p. 35.
Advantages and Disadvantages

Many reading authorities recognize the desirable features of individualized reading. Sartain, a well-known advocate of this method, explains some of the most frequently mentioned advantages:

1. The reading material can be the best of children's literature rather than being limited to a set of textbooks.

2. Individualized reading can begin with whatever good books are available regardless of the orthography or purpose for which they were intended.

3. It is possible to capitalize on the child's special interests and unique background of experiences.

4. The child can progress at the rate which is most comfortable to him.

5. The teacher can make adaptations in instructional procedure to fit the child's optimal mode of perception in learning.

6. The skills program can be tailored constantly to fit each child's differing needs in reading the books he selects.

7. The child is never asked to complete large quantities of unneeded exercises on worksheets and workbook pages merely to keep him occupied while the teacher works with other children.

8. All of the child's available learning time can be utilized instead of being wasted in having to sit and listen
while different children struggle with oral reading of the same selection.

9. The individual conference is personalized rather than mechanical—it provides an opportunity for the development of human traits and values which are unique in the individual and which are fostered by personal interaction.

10. The individual conference has special appeal for the children.

11. Children seem to develop more favorable attitudes toward reading, so they usually read more books.

12. It is possible, some say, to utilize the more mature pupils to instruct the less mature ones. 7

The major advantage of individualized reading is the high interest in reading it promotes. Children become enthusiastic about reading. Odom states that interest is developed because each child reads what he can and wants to read. 8 Teachers who have succeeded with individualized reading unanimously acclaim their children love books. The personal satisfaction gained from reading is genuine. He sees the true reasons for reading—reading for his own purposes.

Sartain considers these to be the disadvantages of the


8Odom, "Individualizing a Reading Program," p. 409.
individualized reading program:

1. It requires that a large number of books be available.

2. Children may have difficulty selecting a book of the appropriate level to stimulate progress.

3. There is no opportunity to develop readiness for reading a new selection—motivation, background information, and techniques for attacking new vocabulary.

4. There is no systematic procedure for gradual introduction or repetition of the vocabulary and concepts that are being learned.

5. A large percentage of teachers do not have enough knowledge of the reading skills so that they can teach them without some professional guidance whenever a child needs them.

6. The conscientious teacher feels a great deal of time pressure in trying to complete profitably as many conferences as necessary for a day.

7. There is some doubt about the adequacy and permanence of skills learnings that are developed in brief, infrequent conferences.

8. There is danger that children will not read in enough different types of books to broaden their literary interests.

9. There is little opportunity for group interaction of the type needed to develop critical thinking and to refine literary tastes.
10. Those pupils who learn slowly often become restless and do not make good use of time.

11. Children from some types of backgrounds may need more definite structure in their school study.

12. The teacher's time and energy are quite inefficiently used.  

Individualized reading has a unique and worthy quality, the personal nature of the conferences between the pupil and the teacher has a highly salutary effect on the child's attitude. He feels that the teacher is interested in him as an individual as well as in what he is reading. He responds to the teacher's encouragement, and, according to most reports, he reads considerably more.

Unfortunately, this great strength of personalism is offset by a serious weakness in individualized reading—inefficiency. The most conscientious teachers find themselves frustrated in their efforts to schedule as many conferences as the children really need; often they feel that they can take time to teach only a part of the needed skills. They have doubts about the permanence of learnings which are not systematically reviewed. They spend an inordinate amount of time in preparing ten to fifteen individual reading skills lessons each day, and then feel they are forced to present them somewhat superficially because of time limitations.

In brief, it can be stated that the individual system has one outstanding strength—the personal pupil-teacher conference, and one tremendous weakness—inefficiency.  

Possibilities for Primary Levels

Research shows that individualized reading programs can succeed in the primary grades. Beginning reading is considered by many to be the most difficult stage in which to use the plan. Groff gives the reasons for this:

Since individualized reading demands of children an independence of effort and a certain degree of self-selection of reading materials, it is obvious that this approach to reading will be very difficult to begin until the child has developed reading skills at such a level that he can read from available texts and trade books...

For the child who comes to school with no reading abilities, however, there must be, of course, an introduction to the reading process before he begins with the individualized approach. Any of the programs set up for typical children, described as basal reading, the language experience, the linguistic, or the phonetic approaches, could serve this purpose.  

Before beginning individualized reading, children in first grade are introduced to reading through many experiences; much oral communication, dictation of stories, and various types of charts and activities. They learn a sight vocabulary as they did in basal readers through exposure to

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11 Patrick J. Groff, "Individualized Reading in First Grade," First Grade Reading Programs, ed. James F. Kerfoot, International Reading Association—Perspectives in Reading, No. 5 (Newark, Delaware: IRA, 1965), p. 19.
pictures, symbols, words, phrases, sentences; through rhymes and other sound techniques including informal phonics. After this introduction, first grade children can learn to do independent reading within the limits of their maturity and abilities. In the later primary years, children can be easily adjusted to individualized reading.

Many advocates of individualized reading make several claims for the approach as a superior one for reading instruction in the primary classroom. One such advocate, Hunt states that teachers who have succeeded with individualized reading unanimously acclaim that it builds a passion for reading—a love of books. Young readers in the primary grades have learned to care about books and they enjoy reading them. The personal satisfaction gained from reading is genuine.

Individualized reading has been proven to be a worthwhile innovation, claims Groff. The special value of it is the respect given to each individual child. This comes from removal of grouping situations. Working with the individual child, the teacher can best fulfill the needs of each child in reading. The child develops self-management in individualized reading as he sees the true reasons for


reading emerge, that is, reading for his own purposes.14

Gurney further emphasizes the effectiveness of individualized reading, stating that it provides pupils with a sense of achievement. The child starts at the point at which he meets a reasonable degree of success and with individualized reading, he is allowed to move ahead as fast and as far as his learning rate and capacity will let him. Regardless of his learning rate and capacity, he sees his own progress, and experiences the satisfaction of moving forward.15 Interest is developed because each child reads what he can and wants to read. In the individualized reading classroom, the needs of all pupils are met, regardless of reading levels. Pupils who can read at an advanced level do not have to read materials too easy for them. Pupils who make their own selection of reading matter develop not only a desire to read, but also responsibility for their own learning.

More investigation is needed to determine if individualized reading does make children in the primary grades more self-reliant and self-determining, more cooperative, more inventive and creative, more motivated for school work, and better psychologically adjusted to their teachers, as many authors of individualized reading affirm.

14Groff, "Individualized Reading in First Grade," p. 10.

15David Gurney, "The Effect of an Individualized Reading Program on Reading Level and Attitude Toward Reading," The Reading Teacher, XIX, No. 4, (January, 1966), p. 277.
CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROGRAM

It is the responsibility of the school to teach reading. From school system to school system, reading is taught differently. Because schools strive to have each child read as well as he can, those arrangements for reading which are believed to achieve the best results are used. So, there is diversity in how reading is taught in every classroom.

The individualized reading program, as well, may be taught differently by various teachers. It is not possible to say that every teacher who would individualize guidance in reading must do this or that. Likewise, it is not desirable to present a simple, single formula of what is right in individualized reading which every teacher must follow. However, the following suggestions given by James and Patricia Fitzgerald may be of value in planning an individualized reading program for children of a class or group:

1. Know the class, and study the interests and needs of every child in it.

2. Equip a library shelf or corner with an adequate supply of books of varying types and interests on the levels necessary.
3. Describe books enthusiastically, so that readers will desire to know more about them and want to read them.

4. Guide each child to select the right book, appropriate in difficulty level, interest, and need.

5. If possible, arrange for free reading in the library and instruct children about the way to find books, periodicals, and reference materials.

6. Keep in a cumulative record for each child a notation of needs, interests, assignments, achievements, progress, degree of success, and outcomes.

7. Evaluate the reading of each child in each period. Note changes in interests and improvements from day to day and month to month.

8. Guide the child in self-selection, pacing, and in responsibility for extending and intensifying his reading in realms which interest him.

9. Motivate each reader to complete his own record and to strive for the degree of excellence which he seeks and can attain.

10. Have individuals appraise their progress, and recognize the importance of success in reading.

There is a need to describe more fully certain factors involved in implementing an individualized program. These factors will be discussed in general in this chapter.

Choosing of Staff

The success or failure of an individualized reading program rests exclusively with the teacher. The program requires well-defined goals and purposes; careful organization and planning; belief in the individualized reading

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method; boundless energy; excellent organization; and a world of patience. Hence, the program is not for uncertain teachers. The beginning teacher or the one having a low energy level also should be cautioned about adopting it.²

A successful individualized reading program requires a teacher who is very knowledgeable about the complex reading process, and who can organize her time effectively. It also demands a teacher who is enthusiastic about the benefits of individualized reading, and who really wants to make this kind of program work.

Teachers of individualized reading should be volunteers. The program cannot be forced upon teachers, as it needs their explicit cooperation to really succeed. Before instituting the program, they should become better acquainted with the information and research on the program. This may include a great deal of reading about individualized reading, in-service workshops, lectures, observation of an already working individualized reading program, or any other means of obtaining complete information about the program.³

Certainly teachers will want to take advantage of opportunities to discuss with fellow teachers their experiences, understandings, and suggestions for individualized reading. With the support and encouragement of principals,


³Odom, "Individualizing a Reading Program," p. 404.
supervisors, and fellow teachers, the teacher can feel more secure in experimenting with individualized reading, freer to search for ways to improve practices and to evaluate progress.

The program gives and takes from the teacher; it gives her a chance to really meet her students' needs, but it may also take a lot of her time achieving them. The program is only as good as the teacher. Herein lies the key to the final success of any instructional design.

**Introduction of Program**

It is necessary to realize that organizing any classroom for an individualized reading program will take considerable time. No two teachers will individualize a reading program in exactly the same way. As teachers express their own individualities and creativity, variations will occur in the way they will cope with procedures of beginning the program, selecting materials, keeping records, developing reading skills, and organizing their work.

There is no "best way" to introduce individualized reading. Many teachers find it necessary to first determine each child's reading level. This can be done with a standardized test as Gates Primary or Advance Primary Test or some other suitable standardized test. Another method used is an informal reading inventory. Also, the teacher may find it helpful to think through such questions as these

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enumerated by Darrow and Howes: 5

1. What materials will I need? Where can I get them?

2. How will I make the change-over to individualized reading?

3. How will I handle self-selection?


5. What procedures will I use for skill development? What skills will I teach?

6. How will I evaluate progress? What records will I keep? What records might the children keep?

Teachers of first graders have special problems in getting started. They may begin the year in the usual way, introducing reading through experience charts and creative writing. As certain individuals show readiness to read in reader materials, the teacher may work with them as a group, guiding their reading through several preprimers. Soon those individuals can be encouraged to continue ahead to finish the materials at their own speed, still under close teacher guidance. Gradually individuals will select different materials available and which they can read easily and with successful effort. By midyear or so, many children will be able to select materials to read individually for instruction, at least on the preprimer level of difficulty. Occasionally a child may even work individually from the beginning of the year, having started school with power to

read already established. 6

In the second and third grade, the teacher needs to advance slowly at first with the individualized reading program. The first week or so may primarily be exploration and discovery time on the part of teachers and pupils. To begin the program, the teacher may pick out a few children who are able to accept responsibility and who need less teacher direction than other class members.

In one way or another, and in all primary classrooms, teachers usually plan for these kinds of times for reading:

1. Time to make selections of reading material.

2. Time for conferences between the teacher and the pupil.

3. Time for independent activities while not reading independently or with the teacher.

4. Time for class or small group discussion and sharing of stories read.

5. Time for children in pairs or small groups to engage in creative work growing out of common reading.

6. Time for small groups or the whole class either with the teacher or independently to develop needed skills and to work on confusions and common difficulties in reading.

7. Time for children to read independently.

Putting these time allotments into practice varies from teacher to teacher, class to class, school to school.

In spite of differences in techniques and variations in teaching, the teachers will allow the child's level of

6 Ibid., p. 99.
ability and need to set the pace for instruction. Individualized reading is a method the teacher uses according to the children involved.

Methods of Procedure

The key to individualized instruction in reading within a classroom is diagnosis, and the key to better diagnosis is a periodic individual conference with each child. Darrow and Howes emphasize this fact in these words:

The reading conference is perhaps the heart of the individualized approach to reading. It is a time of close personal relationships between teacher and pupil; a time for intense teaching specifically geared to individual needs with emphasis and aids appropriate to the reading growth of the child at this time. During the conference the teacher probes, questions, and listens to evaluate pupil progress, to diagnose strengths and weaknesses, and to discover pupil attitudes and interests in reading.

Conference time is flexible. It may last from one to ten minutes. Some children require a conference each day, while two or four conferences a week are sufficient for others. More frequent conferences, especially for first graders, provide the security and encouragement needed in the early stages of reading. The younger children need closer daily guidance.

The children come to the individual conference, either voluntarily or as directed by the teacher. Some people recommend allowing the students to come voluntarily at the time they have the need for either help from the teacher or have something which they particularly want to share with

7Ibid., p. 46.
the teacher. In such a situation, if certain children do not voluntarily come to see the teacher once every three or four days, the teacher asks them to come for a conference. In some classes, the teacher might put the names of those children on the board each morning who will have the conference with her on that specific day.

Once the child is with the teacher in a one-to-one relationship, there are certain things the teacher may do:

1. Check the child's understanding of and reaction to the chosen material.

2. Check the child's ability to deal with the mechanics of reading.

3. Check the child's ability to read orally.

When the teacher listens to the child read, she should keep in mind these criteria:

1. Discover how the pupil attacks new words, uses context clues, and phonetic clues.

2. Ask general and specific questions about the story, main ideas, details of specific episode.

3. Observe the child read orally and silently.

4. Evaluate his progress in locating material through use of indexes, table of contents, etc.

5. Check his knowledge of word meanings, and interpretation of ideas.

6. Discuss his reading difficulties; ask the pupil what he thinks he needs help with.

If individual conferences are to be a worthwhile part of reading instruction, it is important that accurate records of each student's performance be kept. Teachers may

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Odom, "Individualizing a Reading Program," p. 407.
devise various ways for keeping records. Some find that a card or notebook page for each child can be easily used to record notes during the conferences. Others use a more formalized checklist on which the teacher periodically records observations concerning the children's performances and abilities. Such records serve as a guide for planning and as a basis for reporting to parents on the child's progress.

The keynote of record keeping is simplicity. Suggested information for the records kept by the teacher are test scores, formal and informal; particular reading weaknesses; date of conferences and what occurred; the reading levels of the child; the number and titles of books read, and the special activities that the child is engaged in. A checklist of each of the reading skills can be kept and checked at different intervals during the year. Student difficulties should be located as early in the year as possible.

While record-keeping is primarily the responsibility of the teacher, valuable assistance can come from the teacher. Some children keep their own records with respect to performance in sight-recognition vocabulary, word study, oral and silent reading.

The conference and record-keeping techniques require much ingenuity of the teacher to be successful. A teacher

\[9\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 407.}\]
must be able to discern and record the approach most frequently used by the child as he tries to study out words for himself. She must teach students to look within the word, to cover up endings, to use meaning. She must be able to discern and record whether oral reading is becoming more fluent, more enjoyable, more presentable to herself and to the group. She must be able to discern whether silent reading is becoming truly effective. She must help children to concentrate on meanings when they read to themselves. She must constantly try to transfer to the child her know-how in all the skill areas so she can help him to help himself.

After securing information concerning the strengths and weaknesses of students, teachers can pick out several children with common weaknesses and then organize instructional groups to deal with them. The groups should be organized only on the basis of one, specific, definite purpose and for as long or short a period of time as is necessary to accomplish common goals. Individual students can participate in several groups at specific times or perhaps none, depending on their particular needs. There is no single size for a group to be instructed. The right size for any activity depends both on the maturity of the child and the nature of the activity. The student learns best when he is constantly actively involved and it is the small group that provides most effectively for such involvement.

In the individualized reading program, according to Johnson, there is a non-sequential skill development pro-
The teacher doesn't become concerned only with skills as such, but with the problem of which skills are desirable for which children; how much practice is necessary—when and for whom. All children do not need instruction in identical skills or practice in the same amount. Nor do skills needs necessarily coincide with reading level abilities. The skills teachers are concerned about are: skills of word recognition, skills of word meanings, skills of comprehension, skills of interpretation, skills of selection of materials for reading.

The disadvantage of the non-sequential skill development program is that sometimes certain skills are neglected unless the teacher is aware of all the reading skills to be taught at her particular grade level.

Most supporters of an individualized approach would accept the need for some grouping in the following situations:

1. Giving children some common experiences upon which a group story could be based.
2. Developing initial sight word vocabulary.
3. Helping children to understand the mechanics of reading.

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4. Chalkboard and chart work developing basic word recognition clues.

5. Helping individuals who have needs in common with certain other individuals—working together can be more stimulating.

6. Sharing and discussing good books much as a group of adults would get together to discuss what they had read.

7. An occasional working together on a common problem, a common interest, or a chosen subject.

Selection of Materials

Materials, carefully selected and in quantity, make up one of the basic elements of individualized reading. There is no limit to the amount of resource materials available. There are large numbers of texts (basal and supplementary), films and filmstrips, open and closed circuit TV, machines and devices of various kinds, "laboratories" of reading materials, workbooks, charts, pupil and teacher-made materials, specialized personnel, innumerable easy-to-read books, and vast resources in children's literature—including paperbacks and children's magazines and newspapers. Reading games and tape recorders can be used in a variety of ways in teacher-directed or student-directed activities for expanding reading interests and ability.¹²

Choices of materials depends in part upon what can be collected, but most important is the consideration of children's reading levels, tastes, and personality needs.

The larger the selection and variety of materials, the broader the opportunities a child will have for vicarious reading experiences.

Once materials have been collected, teachers have the problem of arranging them to stimulate reading. Materials need to be displayed attractively and should be within easy access for browsing. A stimulating reading environment in the classroom is an important requisite to careful instruction. Obviously, children will enjoy working in a classroom that contains colorful pictures, attractively arranged furniture, bookcases, etc.

The teacher beginning the individualized reading program may ask how many books should be available. It seems that three to five books per child is a number given by those who are operating successful reading programs.

Books can be obtained from various sources. City and country libraries will usually lend quite a number of books to responsible teachers for various lengths of time. Children can bring books from home. Book clubs provide a wealth of excellent children's literature in paperback as well as hardbound books. Other teachers and parents are usually willing to donate any books they have available.

Because individualized reading depends to such a large extent for its success on the development of self-selection skills, instruction in the use of the library, including the card catalog, should be undertaken as soon as possible. Primary grade children can be taught the location
of the nearest library, how to make application for library
cards, and where in the library to find books at their
reading levels and interests.

Even though there is no pressure from the teacher on
the child to select specific materials to read, the teacher
does help guide the child to books on various topics so that
his interests do not remain static. The teacher tries to
protect the child from frustration resulting from reading
books over his head in reading difficulty. Most importantly,
the teacher sets up procedures by which a child can skim
books himself to see if they are beyond his reading abili­
ties, or are of little interest to him.13

Selecting materials for individualizing reading is a
continuous process throughout the year. Expanding inter­
ests, growth in reading ability, and changing emotion­
social needs of children make it important to change the
book selection from time to time and to add new materials
to satisfy particular needs or choices of certain children.
A wide variety of carefully selected reading material stim­
ulates children to read, to expand their interests, and to
develop healthy attitudes toward reading.

In order for the individualized reading program to be
successful, books which will interest children must be made
available. There are general guides for choosing books for
a given age or grade group. Primary children enjoy stories
based on familiar settings and experiences, pets, toys,

13Groff, "Individualized Reading in First Grade," p. 17.
other children like themselves, fairy tales, funny stories about people and animals; surprise and action stories; nonsense stories; rhymes and jingles.

Teachers can gain many other clues of reading preferences among their children by using techniques like the following: 14

1. Interest inventories
2. Book checklists
3. Conferences with parents
4. Activity checklists
5. Class discussions of interesting experiences

Involvement of Parents

Whether the child has been in a traditional basal reader program previously, or whether this is his initial experience with reading, the individualized program is different from what he expects reading instruction to be. It is also different from what his parents expect reading instruction to be, and is almost certainly different from the way in which they were taught. For these reasons, a careful explanation to both parents and children must be given. The teacher who overlooks this preparation is very likely to be accused of not teaching reading by the overzealous mother who wants the best possible instruction for her child. On the other hand, however, the parent who fully understands the program can do a great deal to assist

14Darrow and Howes, Approaches to Individualized Reading, p. 32.
the teacher in making the program a success.

The parent must understand that the primary goal of all reading instruction is to develop permanent interest in reading, as well as the necessary technique and skills for reading. The value of being able to read is best measured in terms of how to read well. Parents must understand that the individualized program has as its main advantage the exposing of the children to different kinds of books, and that these are good children's books which will be interesting and challenging to the children.

The parent must understand that this is not a method whereby the child will receive less of the teacher's attention, or will spend less time receiving reading instruction. By a careful breakdown of the time spent by the teacher with the children in the traditional three group, basal reader approach, it is possible to show that the child will actually receive more personal attention in this new program than he did in the old.

Care must be taken not to introduce the individualized reading program as an attack on existing plans. The program should be carefully explained to parents as a new type of program which is being investigated; not one which is meant to imply unfair criticisms of present methods. If the teacher introducing the individualized reading program is not successful in explaining in terms of its ability to develop permanent interests in reading and skill development, there is little likelihood that she will receive the
cooperation of the parents.

A letter explaining the new program to the parents, with an opportunity for teacher-parent conferences to further explain the program, seems to be an effective manner in which the program can be initiated. Parent-teacher meetings serve as another way in which the purpose and goals of the program can be explained.15

Suggestions as to what the parents can do to aid their child in reading have proven an immeasurable help to the classroom teacher. The teacher can suggest to the parents that they take their children to the library; that books make excellent gifts; that a book club would be beneficial; and most important; in the early first grade, that the parent read to the child at home.

Such administrative details as how grading is to be done and reported is an important item to be discussed with the parents. Since the teacher is to spend more time with each child individually in this program, it can easily be explained that grading will actually be fairer for it will represent more accurately what the child is doing and what he is capable of doing.

15Wolf, "Individualized Reading," p. 158.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The ideal educational system seems to be one which educates each child according to his capabilities and at his own rate of understanding. This ideal can never be reached, but, with an individualized reading program, we can move toward it in the reading field.

It should be noted that the individualized reading program is not a cure-all for all reading programs. It is hoped that the teacher will not enter the program with that in mind. The prognosis or expectations of individualized reading depends on many factors. As with any program, the teacher is a key factor in respect to the success of the individualized reading program. If as teachers, they have been unsuccessful in the basal reading program, most likely they will be unsuccessful interdependently in the individualized reading program, unless they take the time required for careful planning and organization.

Darrow and Howes adeptly sum up the conclusions of the preceding paragraph when they state that the success of individualized reading depends upon teaching skill, as does any other method. For teachers who believe in working with the individual on his unique level of learning, for those who do not rigidly adhere to traditional assumptions
popularly followed but unsupported by research, for those who have faith in teacher judgment and creativity, individualized reading opens the door to limitless opportunities for pupil and teacher growth. Freedom to grow and to learn is a fundamental characteristic of the individualized method of teaching reading.¹

A wealth of material is available to support the fact that there is much value in a reading program for teaching reading individually that:

1. allows the child to select the books of his own on the basis of needs and purposes
2. allows him to read books on his own comfortable reading level
3. allows him to read at his rate of speed
4. eliminates the status problems associated with directing children into "slow", "average", and "fast" reading groups

Conclusions about the possible success of individualized reading in the primary classrooms can be best stated in the following words of Anderson:²

1. Individualized reading can be somewhat successful under certain conditions.
2. It requires highly competent teachers, and those who are not particularly capable should not be asked to adopt it.
3. Children usually enjoy the personal attention of the individual conference and as a result, develop favorable attitudes toward reading.

¹Darrow and Howes, Approaches to Individualized Reading, p. 100.
4. They often, but not always, read more books.

5. The less capable pupils and those having special problems are likely to be less successful in individualized reading than in more structural programs.

6. The lack of a sequential skills program and opportunities for readiness instruction cause teachers to feel doubtful about the adequacy of skills learning.

7. Teachers are constantly pressed for time to provide conferences that pupils should have.
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