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April 1985

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John M. Hoben

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### Recommended Citation

Hoben, John M. (1985) "Reading and the Gifted Plymouth-Canton Community Schools," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol18/iss3/6>

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# READING AND THE GIFTED PLYMOUTH-CANTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Dr. John M. Hoben

Educators today are looking at the unique characteristics of gifted students. For a period of six years, the Plymouth-Canton Community School District has been developing a program that addresses the needs of the gifted. We have four elementary and one middle school center-based programs. The elementary centers included fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. Students attend these centers on a full-time basis. Experiences over the past six years have led us into our present T.A.G. curriculum.

We have learned that gifted students need to be provided with reading instruction, not just assigned an individualized independent reading program. Just as all other students, gifted students need diagnosis, objectives, motivation, and reinforcement.

The characteristics of gifted readers include an advanced vocabulary, often three to five years above level, as demonstrated by standardized testing. They are all readers, reading everything and anything, absorbing language like sponges. They are highly verbal and analytical thinkers and are able to make inferences, generalizations, and analogies. They are also able to draw

conclusions and use inductive and deductive reasoning.

A gifted reader will learn more and learn it faster. Research has proven that gifted readers consume three times the amount of material as the average reader. Gifted readers have good recall and excellent long-term memory. Therefore, they need little time for practice and review. Overlearning can lead to boredom, careless errors, and a decline in motivation to read.

Teachers of gifted students often face a dilemma. On the one hand, their administrators expect a basal program to be used for reading instruction. On the other hand, the gifted reader is reading well above grade level. They often find the typical basal reader far below the student's reading ability and interest level.

How have we used this information in the Plymouth-Canton Community Schools to develop our reading program for gifted students? We felt strongly about providing a comprehensive program for our gifted readers that included the instruction in basic skills and a challenging, interesting content. We have accomplished this through the development of a four-strand approach. These strands include basic reading instruction, reference and research skills, independent reading, and a thematic approach to reading.

Basic reading instruction is conducted by the teacher with the gifted readers divided into small groups based on their abilities and experiential background. A literature-oriented basal is used to provide the common text. As the teacher leads the discussion of her reading group, the higher-level thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are



John M. Hoben, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools  
Plymouth-Canton Community Schools  
Plymouth, Michigan

emphasized. Gifted readers already have in place the skills of literal comprehension (knowledge and recall). This approach allows the gifted reader to be a part of a peer group instead of being an isolated, independent reader. Spin-off benefits include the sharpening of listening skills, the broadening of insights, and the development of higher-level thinking and discussion skills.

The second component of our reading program systematic development of the independent study process. Teachers of the gifted need to give as much opportunity for self-direction and responsibility as the students are able to handle. This freedom of direction and expression is a priority goal for gifted readers. We need to retain this freedom while teaching the underlying structure that prepares students to do independent study. Our District utilizes the **Self-Starter Kit for Independent Study**, by Doherty and Evans, as our process model. The kit teaches the skills of selecting topics, making a schedule, recording procedures, writing objectives, finding resources, taking notes, writing final objectives, creating a product, and evaluating. The objective of this process is to help students become self-directed learners while providing opportunities for both individual and small group activities.

The third component of our reading program for the gifted stresses the importance of developing individual interests in reading and recreational reading. We allow time during the school day for independent reading. Students may choose from a selection of good literature, classics, poetry, etc. Accompanying this portion of our program is a follow-up of activities that is expected of each student. This follow-up activity involves such things as writing book reports, auctioning off of a story or book to classmates, designing a commercial for a book, creating a diorama, writing a book review for the class newspaper, and many other activities that stress creativity.

Finally, it is our opinion that the gifted reader needs to experience a wide range of literature. Teachers of the gifted provide guidance to students through the development of thematic units. Thematic units are based on one type of literature, such as biography, autobiography, science fiction,

historical fiction, and the classics. Sometimes the thematic unit is built around an idea, such as courage, loyalty, honesty, friendship, etc. This approach allows the student an opportunity for individual expression within the framework of a specific theme, with the objective being the broadening of his or her literary experiences. Our ultimate goal in the reading program for the gifted is integration and application of the curriculum in the content areas, including science and social studies.

As our reading curriculum evolved, one of the most important steps was the selection of the appropriate material. It is important when choosing materials that they address the higher-level thinking skills, as well as being at the appropriate instructional level. It is also important that the social and emotional development of the students is taken into consideration when selecting materials. Our program has selected a wide variety of material that spans the range from the fourth-grade level through the adult level, for example, **Vocabulary for College** (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich) and junior high **Scholastic Literature Kits**.

In conclusion, we have continued to evaluate, upgrade, and refine the entire gifted curriculum, with particular emphasis on reading. Each year has brought us ever closer to the development of an effective, truly differentiated curriculum for our students.

### USING JOURNALS IN THE READING CLASSROOM TO HELP STUDENTS LEARN TO LEARN (Continued from Page 9)

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