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Planning for Instruction in the Secondary Reading Classroom

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Learning takes place only when it has meaning for individuals; they are personally involved; they have initiated the process and it changes them in some way; and, they know that it is important for them. Denying students the opportunity to initiate learning will restrict the amount of learning that does take place to the relatively narrow goals of the curriculum guides or the teacher's objectives.

Student participation in planning for instruction does not imply an abdication of the teacher's responsibility. Rather, the teacher who significantly involves students has laid the foundation for such planning through preassessment of individual student need and a comprehensive evaluation of all of the instructional alternatives.

In the secondary reading classroom the mechanism for mutual planning may take a variety of forms: the pupil-teacher conference, large group brain-storming sessions, content oriented groups, planning committees, or other arrangements. The important factor is not the format of the planning group, but rather, the meaningful involvement of learner and teacher.

Giving responsibility for learning and self-direction to students cannot be successful if it is viewed by the teacher as merely a "new method". It must be based upon a sincere conviction that students can and will accept that responsibility, and a commitment on the part of the teacher to the role of facilitator of learning rather than transmitter of knowledge.

A problem frequently encountered by teachers who attempt to motivate students to take responsibility for learning is that the students are so unused to being accorded this right that they are fearful of such an undertaking. Resolution of this problem requires that the teacher be patient with, and understanding of, the varying needs of students for direction and support. The teacher should continue to provide direction for those who express a need to be dependent, but there should be a time when they become confident and begin to trust their own judgment.

The secondary reading teacher lays the foundation for mutual planning by assessing the current achievement level of each student. He/she may then meet with individual students or small groups of students and, with them, plan the means whereby each is to attain his/her learning goals. This planning should result in the formulation of content objectives which are measurable and which each student accepts as attainable.

Motivating a relatively unmotivated adolescent with reading problems is no easy task. It is precisely this fact which makes mutual planning such an important consideration. Placement of responsibility for learning in the hands of the learner and provision of the means and materials whereby he/she may discharge that responsibility should help to generate some enthusiasm for learning. The secondary student may indeed be suspicious of the confidence implied by this trust. Therefore, it is extremely important that the teacher's commitment and resolve be firm enough to survive the student's testing of it.

In *Experience and Education,* John Dewey (1938) referred to the role of the teacher in the planning process as facilitator and frequently, initiator:

> It is possible of course to abuse the office, and to force the activity of the young into channels which express the teacher's purpose rather than that of the pupils. But the way to avoid this danger is not for the adult to withdraw entirely. The way is, first, for the teacher to be intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction, and secondly, to allow the suggestion made to develop into a plan and project by means of the further suggestions contributed and organized into a whole by the members of the group. The plan, in other words, is a co-operative enterprise, not a dictation. The teacher's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contri-

> butions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process. The development occurs through reciprocal give-and-take, the teacher taking but not being afraid also to give. The essential point is that the purpose grow and take shape through the process of social intelligence. (p. 71)

Dewey's words reaffirm the importance not only of affording the opportunity to be responsible for learning, but also the responsibility of the teacher to channel and support the learner's initiative. If the secondary reading teacher is committed to the task of helping students to become self-directed, he/she will find the time first, to assess the individual learner's needs, and second, to develop with the learner a plan whereby those needs may be met.

Diagnosing the Needs for Learning

When the adolescent with reading problems has reached the secondary school level he/she has, no doubt, a highly developed sense of inadequacy. The first task of the teacher in this framework is to insure that the student's physical, organizational and psychological needs are acknowledged, and to some extent, alleviated.

When the secondary reading teacher, through whatever diagnostic means, attempts to determine the extent of the student's reading problem, it can serve to reinforce the student's feeling of inadequacy. The students must be assured that they are not some sort of inferior human beings; that they are not responsible for all of their inadequacies; and, that they are not stupid. It must be pointed out to them that schools have also failed them and that the teacher is not some sort of superior human being who can make it all happen, but rather, a resource, a facilitator, an empathetic guide who can steer them in the right direction.

To admit that schools and teachers have failed children, especially with regard to the status of reading instruction, requires an honest assessment of reality. When the reading progress records of disabled readers are examined, they frequently reveal that a variety of teachers have employed a "supermarket" approach in a well intentioned effort to solve the student's problems. When the student has reached the secondary level this random "method" has probably resulted in confusion, frustration, and too frequently, rebellion.

The secondary reading teacher has the awesome task of sorting out what has taken years to accrue and developing with the learner a plan of instruction which for most students, represents a "last ditch" effort to remediate the problems. Teachers confronted with this responsibility must be careful not to succumb to the temptation described by John Goodlad (1963), in *Planning and Organizing for Teaching:*

> The searching teacher has to scrape off a formidable amount of paint to discover what lies waiting: the clear, fine beautifully grained wood that is underneath. In the scraping process, conscientious teachers become angered that human beings should have so corrupted what is basically first-rate, forgetting that the corruption process probably was effected by persons whose ends were good. In their anger, however, they must not give up the search for what lies beneath, thus yielding to the easy temptation to brush on still another, brighter, coat of paint. (p. 157)

In diagnosing the needs for learning, it is essential that the teacher attempt to view learning from the secondary student's perspective. Because the teacher has achieved a high level of education and is a thoroughly competent reader, he/she may not understand the very basic needs of his/her students. Teachers are frequently preoccupied with long-term goals, whereas students are usually motivated by short-term goals.

When the secondary reading teacher, after using some sort of diagnostic instrument, sits down with the students to plan for instruction, he/she should seek to understand what the students perceive as their immediate need for learning. It may be that they need help with the mastery of content materials in a history, English, or auto shop class. They may be failing in these subjects because of their inability to read. Their most immediate need would then appear to be tutorial help with these subjects. A by-product of such help will hopefully be some improvement in the student's reading and comprehension skills.

By recognizing the students' immediate needs, the teacher avoids the pitfall

of alienating them with unrealistic goals. Passing in their other classes is usually more important to students than long-range goals which tend to be abstract. In addition, they may be acquiring, in those other classes, life skills which will help them to cope with the adult world. The students' need to pass in their classes is a survival need.

It is hoped that the confidence gained through the attainment of short-term goals will lead students to greater confidence in their ability and greater self-direction.

> The genius of good teaching is not simply in the satisfaction of needs but in harnessing these needs to encourage a search for new goals and objectives which the student has never had before. (Combs, 1965, p. 33)

The matter of the diagnosis of learning needs is one requiring the highest level of professional expertise on the part of the teacher.

In addition to utilizing standardized and informal reading tests to determine the nature and extent of the student's disability, the teacher should also examine the cumulative records of the student to determine the developmental history of the student; what reading methods and materials have been utilized in past years; what physical or psychological factors may be present to inhibit the student's progress in reading; and, what previous reading tests and achievement tests have revealed about the student's potential.

Whenever the teacher utilizes reading and/or achievement test data, it should be considered as only one indicator of the student's capability in reading. The teacher's observation of the student functioning in the classroom is also an essential ingredient in developing a diagnosis for learning.

The involvement of the student in the assessment of needs is crucial. This can be achieved through the utilization of interest surveys, personal interviews, autobiographies, and above all, through the establishment of a rapport with the student which will serve to abate any anxiety which the student may have regarding the diagnostic process.

As a result of the needs assessment, the teacher and the student should both be aware of:

1. What reading skills have already been mastered by the student;
2. What the student perceives to be his/her immediate learning needs;
3. What the student's interests are;
4. The degree to which the student is committed to taking personal responsibility for learning;
5. What the teacher and student have determined to be short- and long-term goals for instruction.

The essential nature of the diagnostic process is highlighted by Goodlad (1963):

> Teaching seeks to develop that which is already waiting. The first principle of method, then, is to find out what is in the person. This is not where most teaching begins. . . How many lessons are wasted, how many hours spent in boredom or frustration because the teacher failed to determine first how much or how little of what he sought to offer already was possessed by the class! (p. 156)

The diagnosis of learning needs is certainly one task which requires the skills of a highly competent reading professional. At the secondary level remediation of reading disabilities is a responsibility which should only be undertaken by professionals who have received diagnostic training. The secondary student does not have time for a "trial and error" approach.

Formulating Program Objectives

The emphasis in recent years upon the formulation of objectives for learning is not a new concern of teachers. Teachers have always been concerned with projecting short- and long-term goals. The significant aspect is the involvement of both teacher and learner in the formulation of learning goals. Dewey cited the need for this type of interaction in *Experience and Education,* in 1938:

> There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (p. 67)

In "Planning for Instruction with Meaningful Objectives", Bruce Monroe (1972) distinguishes five criteria for formulating objectives. He stated that they should:

1. Indicate the learning needs of students.
2. Serve as targets of instruction. By indicating targets of student achievement, the objective orients the instructor to an analysis which might indicate what kinds of prior student achievement are prerequisite to accomplishing the objective.
3. Guide the evaluation process. Evaluation is partly the process of assessing the out-put against a predetermined standard. Educational objectives form the standards of education evaluation.
4. Reflect students' gains. Objectives serve as useful reinforcers of student achievement. The student who knows what is expected of him also knows when he has met those expectations. Objectives help instructors fill a void which has hounded education for years, the void of feedback.
5. Reduce student competition. Objectives are impersonal. Their place of distinction in an instructional program permits students who are accustomed to competing against one another for recognition and rewards to work cooperatively and compete against an impersonal standard. In an objectives-based sequence of instruction the learner succeeds, not by placing high in a student ranking order, but by conquering the instructional objectives. (p. 38)

A sixth criterion which might be added is that the objectives formulated by teacher and student should be comprehensible to the learner and that the learner consider them to be within the realm of possible attainment.

Monroe's criteria emphasize the practical nature of learning objectives. Cyril Houle, in *The Design of Education* (1972), outlined the theoretical basis for the formulation of objectives and their relationship to the specific needs of students:

1. An objective is practical. It is neither an attempt to describe things as they should be nor an effort to probe to the underlying nature of reality.
2. Objectives lie at the end of actions designed to lead to them.
3. Objectives are usually pluralistic and require the use of judgment to provide a proper balance in their accomplishment.
4. Objectives are hierarchical. A broad educational purpose is made concrete by the provision of subordinate purposes which in turn are made even more definite by specific goals.
5. Objectives are discriminative. By indicating one course of action, they rule out others.
6. Objectives change during the learning process. In all situational categories, the beginning of action makes concrete what was formerly only potential. (p. 140)

After the learner and the teacher have identified learning needs and formulated objectives, it is essential that these needs be prioritized on the basis of: 1) the teacher's and student's perception of what is most immediate and attainable; 2) the teacher's judgment of what constitutes prerequisite learning in the hierarchy of reading skills; and, 3) the student's willingness to accept personal responsibility for learning. In pursuing this prioritizing process, reading should be viewed as an integrated process and not as a series of fragmented skills to be mastered. The reading teacher will probably find that emphasis upon drill and isolated skills at the secondary level is nonproductive. Because adolescent students in the secondary reading classroom are soon to be adults, their acceptance of responsibility for learning and their role in the planning process are essential factors in insuring success in learning.

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