

TEXTBOOKS

Can Be Creative Resources

Still the most widely utilized tool of learning is the textbook. When placed in proper perspective and used intelligently, text materials can become creative and effective instruments for improving learning.

WE CAN DO a more effective job of teaching, and the child a better job of learning, when all the tools and devices and resources within the textbook are better understood and utilized. Whatever use is made of textbooks, it is important to recognize their potentialities and to argue for their complete utilization as instructional resources. Textbooks, when properly viewed, are almost unlimited resources for teaching and learning. Perhaps the greatest limitations occur in the teacher and in the methods of teaching, rather than in the textbook.

Consider this glimpse into an eighth grade classroom while an informal experiment is being carried on to discover and apply the multiple resources in language arts textbooks. From outside the classroom can be heard the buzz and hum of voices. Inside the room, the scene resolves into a picture of 36 boys and girls working in small groups. Some are standing, some sitting; all are attempting to work effectively together. Two groups, on this particular day, are working on plays to be performed for the class at a scheduled time; a third group is preparing a "This Is Your Life" of the principal; two other groups are working on "long themes," rewriting and improving

sentence structure, organization, bibliography, etc. More detailed observation indicates that all groups are participating in speaking activities. Each member of the class is writing a play, a skit or a long theme on a subject of his own choosing. Tuesdays and Fridays are given to scheduled activities for the entire class; on other days students use their time in individual and small group problem-solving projects; all keep diaries of activities in and out of the classroom. The 36 students vary in reading ability from third to twelfth grade, and in age from 12 to 15. The room and the group are fairly typical as eighth grades go, but the activities probably vary from those usually found in eighth grade classrooms. In this instance, the role of the textbook has been enlarged and enriched.

Effective Use of Textbooks

The following principles of textbook utilization may serve to illustrate how this class is making effective use of its text materials:

The textbook is something to come

Helen K. Bottrell is a teacher of English and Speech in the Jackson Junior High School, Pasadena, Texas.

to, not to start with. At every level, the need for readiness is usually evident. A single textbook cannot provide adequately for individual differences; use of multiple textbooks is necessary to take care of the varieties of interests, abilities and differences in readiness. Needed are textbooks of earlier levels, preferably with grade level not clearly indicated. For remedial purposes, classroom library books are needed, although if out-of-adoption books and earlier grade level textbooks are available, students can be provided opportunities for successful understanding of their reading.

Never underrate the reading ability of any student, remedial or advanced. For example, in a high school class the writer mentioned a college textbook on a subject on which the group was working, adding that it was written for college seniors. A student asked for it, saying, "You'd be surprised what we can read when we want to." If interest (self-motivation) is there, and the student finds acceptance and recognition (social motivation) within the classroom environment, textbooks can be used and appreciated in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes.

The textbook is a framework, a guide, a point of departure. It is not a teacher; in itself it is no automatic guarantee of learning. We often say that the reader learns from his reading to the degree that he brings understanding to it. This is true to some extent, but often students, with or without the direct influence of the teacher, can understand that the situations, the problems and the activities they read and talk about are common experience. Thus, use of interest reading and work-

ing in small groups can become a point of departure for discussion and, through discussion, lead toward better individual and group learning.

The function of the textbook is to facilitate learning. The textbook can help bridge the gap between the known and the unknown. Stories which tie in with the life-experiences of the reader help him understand human problems and situations common to all.

The function of the teacher is to put the textbook in the context of student experience. For example, a starting point may be sports stories about junior high school pupils. From this impetus students may be encouraged to read to see how many other stories also have 12 or 13 or 14 year olds in minor or major roles. Through discussion in small groups, they can evaluate the truthfulness of the textbook characterizations of teen-agers.

Textbooks and Human Relations

Textbooks are human relations resources. When we understand the developmental needs and tasks of the age group, when we see that language arts books have many uses, we will find and utilize the human relations resources in textbooks.¹

Human relations materials have meaning in relation to cultural expectations and student experience. Textbooks in language arts, for example,

¹ Helen K. Bottrell, *A Critical Analysis of Human Relations Materials in State-Adopted Textbooks in Language Arts and Social Studies in the State of Texas in 1953-1954* (Houston, Texas: University of Houston, 1954). Doctoral dissertation, unpublished. Design for identifying human relations materials in textbooks and for measuring quantity and evaluating quality of materials related to needs of youth.

present many reports of human relationships and experiences.² When related realistically to the local cultural setting and to problems that are presently important to students, understanding, insight and application are bound to occur.

Basic areas of human relations materials can be identified. One useful classification provides eight areas of human relations materials:

1. Patterns of Family Life
2. Community Contrasts
3. Economic Differences
4. Differences Between Generations
5. Adjustment to New Places and Situations
6. How It Feels to Grow Up
7. Belonging to Groups
8. Experiences of Acceptance and Rejection.³

*Human relations materials in textbooks can be adapted to particular situations.*⁴ Children at all levels need to be able to put themselves in other people's shoes. Reading for one or more of these areas increases sensitivity, teaches insight into human problems and the child's own problems, imparts knowledge of how people in other circumstances feel under given

² Cf., Helen K. Bottrell, "Child Society: A Further Look at Children and Youth," in Harold R. Bottrell, Editor, *Applied Principles of Educational Sociology*. Harrisburg: The Stackpole Company, 1954, Chapter 7, p. 135-157.

³ Intergroup Education in Cooperating Schools, Work in Progress Series, *Reading Ladders for Human Relations*, Revised and Enlarged Edition. Washington: American Council on Education 1949.

⁴ John J. DeBoer, and Others, *Reading for Living, An Index to Reading Materials for Use in Human Relations Programs in Secondary Schools*, Circular Series A, No. 51, Illinois Curriculum Program Bulletin No. 18. Springfield: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1953.

conditions. Opportunities to identify emotionally with human beings on the printed page are among the best practical substitutes in the classroom for face-to-face contact. Prejudice and intolerance due to stereotypes, mis-information or lack of knowledge of how others live, think, and act can be reduced as the human relations resources of the textbook are appropriately utilized.

Language arts books in modern schools are used for developing critical ability, for increasing appreciation of the art of writing, for obtaining information, for enjoyment. Further uses—particularly essays, drama, fiction, biography—include development of a personal value system, personal adjustment, understanding of common needs and problems, and realization of differences among people, their values, problems, opportunities and expectations.

Textbooks in the Classroom

Use of the "extra-purpose" materials of the textbook makes for creative use of these resources, aids boys and girls in seeing everyday need for education, and contributes to their achieving satisfying group living as peers and as adults.

Use of the textbook for tying in with news items stimulates good research techniques and teaches reading for selective purposes. Any news story teen-agers read because *they* are interested in it (child adoption, scientific developments, manners and etiquette) can arouse small group interest in checking textbooks for similar themes. Oral discussion can branch out into many fields in which textbook information is available. Some students

will accept the need for checking science, health, civics, social studies textbooks for further explanation and discussion of directly related or allied topics. When a group combines information found in other textbooks in preparing a report in English, learning is facilitated and student experience is broadened.

In letter writing, students can itemize types and subjects of letters written by members of the class within the past year. These situations can be made into a supplement to be put into the textbook. Paper can be cut to book-page size, examples written carefully and inserted in the unit as an instructional aid.

During any activity within the classroom, the more adept students can help in teaching skills. An adept student can use the textbook to explain, to simplify, to clarify the difficulty. Teen-agers often listen more closely to their peers, and the "teacher" will spend extra time to be sure of his own information. The group with low reading ability can use the good reader for learning reading skills, while others in the classroom may be working to master capitalization, spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure. When this is done in connection with interest reading and writing, the handbook sections of the grammar textbook will be used frequently for learning.

The needs of youth can be the point of departure for student reading and discussion. Reading selections which bring out how it feels to grow up, for instance, can provide a setting for comparing, contrasting, discussing, dramatizing, interpreting, debating. The individual or group may write a radio

play, or a quiz program, prepare a symposium or a panel discussion for presentation to the entire class. Thus, students gain insight, knowledge and ideas that apply to their own experience. Skills in writing, reading and speaking are combined, although only a few textbooks may be available.

One group mentioned distastefully how often their parents remarked, "Now when I was young, I didn't get to do that." This became the topic: "What life was like when our parents were 12-13-14." They listed the things they remembered hearing their parents say. These were sorted according to topics: money, clubs, marriage, clothing, work, respect toward adults, use of car, social privileges, dating, etc. They checked all textbooks for stories written in the years represented by their parents (a fairly wide range of years among a class of over thirty pupils). They used other materials, and interviewed other adults besides their parents. They made a study of present-day standards (using what the group said was done within their families) for each of the topics. Differences between generations, economic and family differences, sectional differences became apparent. The wide variety of practices among the members of the class was significant.

Interest in some phase of science can lead to reading material of all types and degrees of difficulty. A group having access to ten or twelve textbooks can study how scientific facts are used in various types of literature and in various occupations. Science fiction of a generation ago can be read to check with scientific facts of today. Modern textbooks have much special-

purpose materials, but it takes skilled teachers to realize and use these resources to meet the needs of children.

Community concern about juvenile delinquency can lead to the study of juveniles in textbooks. How did they meet adult standards? What was delinquency a generation ago, or in some other definite era? What is delinquency now? How can the group defend teen-agers today? What are teen-agers really like in our community? Each student can take a two- to four-block section around his home and determine how grown-ups appraise the group. This can be put into a composite picture. In so doing, the student is using many techniques and skills, gaining all the time in understanding how behaviors and values are shaped by social conditions and group influences.

The problem in most classrooms is: How can textbooks be more adequately and more creatively used? By understanding the needs and problems of

the boys and girls in a particular classroom, the teacher realizes that the textbook, providing as it does a form of emotionalized experience, is a guide meant to facilitate, not dictate, learning. Thus, the teacher seeks to put situations in the context of student experience when and as the interested student has reached readiness for understanding.

As a tool, textbooks are useful. They are here to stay. Most teachers consider them the primary source for instructional purposes. The textbook is a powerful instrument, but better teaching results when the teacher thinks of the textbook as a crane, not as a shovel. By understanding the needs and problems of the age child he teaches, by utilizing the human relations resources within the textbook, by relating textbook resources to home, school and community experiences of students, the teacher is on the way toward using the textbook creatively and resourcefully.



New Edition

Just Released

Selected Bibliography for Curriculum Workers, 1955 Edition.

Edited by

J. Murray Lee

Includes annotated references of interest in the areas of elementary and secondary school and of general readings.

Also includes selected references to books and pamphlets treating child development, anthropology, sociology, and other "related areas."

Price: \$1.00

Order from:

**The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington 6, D. C.**

Copyright © 1955 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.