

Learning about Individualized Teaching

This study by a school system of its program for the gifted has important indications for the teaching of all children.

TO DISCOVER and make provision for individual differences in pupils is one of the most challenging areas in the field of education. Much research has been done to learn how to provide worthwhile experiences for individual learning, but further study is needed. Significant gains can be made by teachers working in their own classrooms to discover new approaches and techniques. In one school system an attempt is being made to look at the problem from many angles and to plan together for more individualized teaching and learning experiences.

District 110, Johnson County, Kansas, is a part of the Greater Kansas City area. In 1952 the patrons of two large elementary school districts decided to merge to provide better educational opportunities at a more equitable tax for the boys and girls in this area. At the time the two schools merged each was composed of kindergarten through eighth grade with a total enrollment of 2200. In 1954 the seventh and eighth grades became part of a large secondary school district when junior high schools were organized. District 110, a separate elementary district, now has 11 schools

with a total enrollment of approximately 5400 boys and girls in kindergarten through the sixth grade. This historical résumé will show that the most pressing problems of the district have been to provide staff members and physical facilities to care for the great increase in school population.

Soon after the organization of District 110 the Board of Education established a policy of a 200 day contract for teachers—180 days in the classroom, and the remainder for professional work which includes one week for orientation at the beginning of each school year. This action was taken with the idea that teachers are not always credited with the many professional tasks undertaken in addition to regular classroom work. A number of approaches were used in attempting to make the professional days accomplish what the Board of Education intended and to meet the needs and desires of staff members. In conducting curriculum study it is most important that the incentive come from the entire staff and that each person work on the problem or problems which are important to him. J. Cecil Parker expresses the idea in this way: "People work as indi-

viduals or as members of groups on problems that are significant to them."¹ He goes on to explain that a problem becomes significant to an individual as he sees its relationship to some part of his system of values, and becomes involved in it emotionally as well as intellectually.

Curriculum Program

In the spring of 1958 the program and professional relations committees of the Teachers Association met with the administration to plan for the curriculum work for the 1958-59 school year. The Board of Education agreed to a proposal from this group that the professional days be credited, not by days and hours, but with the completion of professional responsibilities decided upon by the staff and evaluated by them. As a part of the plan, school is dismissed one day per month at 1:45 p.m. in order that all staff members can spend the remainder of the afternoon working on curriculum problems.

A Teachers Association questionnaire returned by all staff members indicated areas in which they wished to work. About 30 persons indicated an interest in learning more about classroom research and in using it to improve teaching techniques. Other groups had previously been working in the areas of science, arithmetic, reading, health and physical education, music and the gifted, and are continuing this year.

Building committees, working with their principals, and district grade groups have been concerned with needs of individual pupils and have worked together in many ways to provide worthwhile experiences to meet these needs.

¹J. Cecil Parker. "Guidelines for In-Service Education." *In-Service Education*, Fifty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

The social studies program in the sixth grade and work in the area of the gifted are examples of some of the work being done.

Working together, the sixth grade teachers devised a plan for teaching social studies from a variety of texts and other materials. The school district purchased the texts which the teachers selected, several copies each of five series, and a number of single copies, as well as an adequate supply of reference materials. The texts and other materials cover a wide span in difficulty to meet the reading needs of all children. In an average sixth grade class there will be a reading differential of several years, so it is important to have a wide range of material.

The teachers in this group hold a one-day workshop each year during orientation week. They have developed a tentative guide but teachers are free to vary the program according to individual needs and abilities. The pupils work individually and in small groups, trying to learn, not just facts, but the underlying factors and reasons. This development of critical thinking and ability to do research work is an important element of growth necessary for youngsters to work at the junior high school level.

Objectives of the social studies program as listed by the teachers are:

1. To develop an understanding of the cultures of the people in other parts of the world
2. To create an awareness of interdependency among the nations of the world
3. To help children look for the many things people have in common rather than stressing points of difference
4. To develop skills in the use and interpretation of maps, globes, charts, and other reference material
5. To develop skills in discussion and the presentation of materials

6. To develop skills in group participation by realizing responsibilities and privileges as a group member.

The social studies program in our sixth grades is quite inclusive. We find youngsters studying aviation and the space age, the International Geophysical Year in various parts of the world, what to eat on a trip to Morocco, how much it would cost to take a trip to Mexico or some other distant place. Each child is encouraged and challenged to progress as rapidly as he can with the many activities provided in this type program. Teachers find that this kind of teaching requires much preparation both for themselves and their pupils and it is more difficult than teaching from a single text. At the beginning of the year it is necessary to move slowly especially with some groups. Certain kinds of readiness are needed for work in small groups or committees to help pupils learn to accept responsibility for leadership and for self discipline. In evaluating the program both teachers and pupils feel that this is a most interesting and practical way to teach and learn and is worth the extra effort.

Program for the Rapid Learner

In the fall of 1956 a concerted study was begun on a program for the more rapid learner. A district steering committee was selected to work with the administration and with the committees which were organized in all buildings. A part of the 1957-58 report of the steering committee follows:

When the formal study of how to provide specific help for gifted children in this

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district was begun about two years ago, the reports of existing programs throughout the country were carefully considered.

In view of the organization and composition of our local schools it was decided that our first approach should be one of enrichment in the regular classroom rather than segregation of the gifted pupils.

There are innumerable forms of giftedness, but for our study and program we are working first with the intellectually gifted. Various authorities define intellectual giftedness as a mental capacity indicated by an intelligence quotient of at least 130 or 140. A group intelligence test is not a completely reliable measure of ability. To be sure to include all who might be in the gifted range, we set our base at 120. According to group tests, there are over 600 students in District 110 with a 120+ I. Q. Our committees selected arbitrarily about 10% of these as a "pilot group" for careful study and work. We expect to expand the program to include all intellectually gifted.

A. Objectives

1. To identify pupils of superior potential, and make sure that teachers are aware of their capabilities

2. To insure, in our teaching, that these children are stimulated to work to the limit of their capabilities

3. To give teachers aid in planning programs and securing adequate materials that they may teach these children better

4. To help locate, develop, and make available to teachers, those types of projects which most nearly fit the needs of superior pupils

5. To devise an improved method of sharing enrichment ideas among the schools of the district

6. To inform the public of this program for the gifted, and promote their better understanding of its operation.

B. Procedures

1. Organizational procedures

a. Central steering committee

(1) Formulates over-all plans

(2) Reports and shares ideas and

accomplishments of schools in District 110

- (3) Distributes information about other studies and school systems

b. School committees

- (1) Regular meetings in buildings
- (2) Share enrichment ideas
- (3) Discuss special cases
- (4) Distribute information

2. Identification procedures

a. Group intelligence test scores (examining first all those with score of 120 or above)

b. Examination of achievement test scores with special attention to those over two grade levels in advance of present location in school

c. Teacher's recommendation based on originality of response or thinking or evidence of unusual talent or ability in a special field

d. Individual Stanford-Binet test

3. In-service procedures

a. Special consultants

- (1) J. Cecil Parker, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, lecturer and consultant
- (2) Elizabeth Drews, Department of Teacher Education, Michigan State University, lecturer and consultant
- (3) James Marshall, Kansas State Director of Special Education, testing and consultant work

b. Special meeting and workshops

- (1) Delegates attended state meeting in Lawrence in May 1957 of schools working on state program
- (2) Six members attended workshop at Kansas University in summer of 1957
- (3) Delegates attended sessions of International Council for Exceptional Children in Kansas City in April 1958.

C. Accomplishments

1. Building committees

a. Teachers have shown increased understanding of the possibilities of special interest projects and are looking more carefully at the results

b. A case study file has been developed on all children in the pilot group; some schools include others than just those given individual tests

c. Many projects have been worked out in the schools, and mimeographed materials shared with other buildings in the district

d. Some small special interest groups have been established this year and many more are planned for fall, meeting with teachers who have special talents, interests, or abilities

e. Reference libraries of current books, periodicals and newspaper articles are being built up, in the central office, and in each building.

2. Individual

a. During the year 87 boys and girls were given individual intelligence tests using the Stanford-Binet. Forty-four were also given parts of Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children. The I. Q. scores on the Stanford-Binet ranged from 122 to 170+ with the mean of 144.6. On most of the children in the pilot group, achievement test records are available for at least the past two years. In surveying enrichment work done in classrooms during the year, the building committees studied all special folders of the pilot group. Portions of those records devoted to descriptions of projects and procedures ran into several hundred pages. These projects covered the whole scope of the curriculum. They included special work in arithmetic, social studies, creative writing, creative dramatics, science, art and more than a dozen other closely related areas.

D. Suggestions and Recommendations

1. Place the identified superior children more than one to a room in order that they may challenge one another

2. Encourage each teacher to follow an individualized type of teaching with his one

or two most capable students regardless of formal identification

3. Explore the idea of using the committee within each building as a panel to discuss individual programs with teachers having gifted children in their classes

4. Standardize the forms to be used in gathering information on gifted children, and define more carefully the way anecdotal records should be kept

5. Encourage all teachers who have gifted children in their classes to work more closely with the gifted committee and share more in activities and planning

6. Expand the idea, developed in several schools, of setting up small clubs or seminar groups around special interest areas for gifted pupils

7. Work out a more effective system of communication between the buildings, thus enabling all to benefit from shared ideas, projects and resources

8. The Steering Committee should develop more extensive policies for working with teachers, parents, and lay groups in this program

9. Develop further a program for bringing parents of gifted children into the planning

10. Continue in-service training of teachers, stressing the work of specialists brought in for consultation

11. Locate and secure more usable materials for gifted students on appropriate levels in the fields of their interests

12. Continue the collecting of study materials in the central office available for teachers' reading

13. Work toward the time when a specialist will be available to help teachers identify the gifted, study their abilities, plan their program, and secure needed materials.

A school psychologist has been added to the staff this year whose chief responsibility is further testing and counseling with this group of children.

Our study of the gifted has had a

marked effect on the teaching of all children. In identifying children who are intellectually gifted, a great interest has been created in identifying special interests and talents of other children. It has also led to a careful examination of the curriculum and exploration to discover where individualized teaching can be utilized. A number of teachers in the group which is studying classroom research this year are working on specific problems in the area of the child who seems not to be achieving at the level of his potential. Some are approaching it from the angle of social adjustment. This is a field which needs careful application of what is already known and more research to assist teachers and administrators in curriculum planning.

Even though the entire staff feels it is just beginning, it seems as if one of the greatest values gained is that everyone is involved in the study. There is continued professional growth as each person assumes his responsibility in some phase of the program. Curriculum study should never be considered an added chore, but an opportunity to do better the most important work of all, helping children grow, physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually.

How Well

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Let there be no doubt as to what is being said. This is the way children really learn, no matter where they are found and no matter who teaches them. The major problem facing teachers is not how to eliminate individual differences, but rather how to cope with them.

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