

## Learning and the Learning Center

*Objective: an eagerness for growth.*

IS IT pertinent to the topic to ask how we learn? By questioning, examining, exploring, experimenting, even sometimes when browsing without purpose. To help pupils learn more effectively, it is necessary to make available as many of the tools of learning as possible. To learn independently and at maximum potential for each pupil, instruction in work-study skills is basic. Such instruction can be enhanced and accelerated by the use of a wide range of materials and resources, in addition to books.

For the past two years work-study skills have been taught to elementary school children in Shaker Heights, Ohio, using large group instruction, and with the aid of an overhead projector. This approach grew out of an experimental plan that was tried for a year and then was presented to the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Advancement of Education for a possible grant. Purpose of the project was to help develop ideas for further experimental study. In May 1962, a matching grant was given in the amount of \$45,000 to be used over a three year pe-

riod to teach work-study skills and develop independent study habits. This involved pupils in grades 4, 5 and 6 in two schools: Lomond, with an enrollment of 625, and Ludlow, with 300 pupils.

Self-directed, independent study skills generally have been considered as suitable to the college and graduate study level. This experiment is attempting to prove that these skills can be acquired and used by pupils at an earlier age.

We must recognize that as the volume of knowledge becomes greater the teacher can no longer have all the answers. Consequently, there must be a shift in emphasis from the teaching to the learning aspect. We now see the self-motivated child bringing information to the classroom as a result of independent study which becomes a sharing, with teachers learning from as well as teaching pupils.

This requires a revolutionary shift in the teachers' thinking. Can Johnny actually learn without the teacher being present? We believe he can and does, as he has access to a wide range of mate-

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*Study carrels and reference area at Lomond School.*

rials, direction from teachers and librarians, and as he has motivation to interest him in finding answers, reports, truths, and in how to use these materials to his own best advantage.

Many school libraries today are known as materials centers where all types of materials are provided to enrich and support the curriculum. However, "materials center" does not truly describe the activity taking place there, but rather suggests a place to store or house materials. For the schools in this project a more unique term was wanted that would indicate activity and the role of the library in the learning process. "Learning Center" was selected as the best descriptive term.

### **The Learning Center**

To implement this project, program changes in physical facilities were necessary. In the larger school a wall had

to be removed to enlarge the room to about three and a half classrooms in size. Free-standing double-faced shelving is arranged in U-shaped areas down the middle of this large rectangular room to hold the 10,000 volumes. We find that books arranged this way absorb sound and allow several alcoves to accommodate children simultaneously doing different things without noise interference.

At one end of the room are five built-in study carrels, each with an electrical outlet and a filmstrip viewer, well lighted with cork board space on the walls which allows notes and papers to be tacked up for easy viewing. These carrels are extremely popular with the children and help to make their research and viewing a satisfactory and individual experience.

The listening area was developed by building a shelf in a small offset of the former main room and installing jacks so that earphones can be plugged in for

student use. Tapes and records are also used here.

Another alcove has filmstrips and viewers on a built-in shelf. Here are also programmed materials in the following areas: Organizing and Reporting; Reading Graphs, Charts and Tables; and Basic Library Skills. These are used independently by children, or assigned by the classroom teacher or librarian.

At the smaller school the center moved into the kindergarten room, the largest and one of the most attractive rooms in the school. Here perimeter shelving is used and is adequate for the 7,000 volumes. In this center six free-standing commercially built carrels are used instead of built-in carrels. These have a shelf where encyclopedia sets can be shelved and, with books in proximity,

can create a reference area. The viewing area was formerly a closet, but by building a shelf on three sides, boys and girls can sit on stools and use the viewers which are placed on the shelf. The listening area is a table with earphones in one part of the Learning Center.

With this available space and a wide range of materials—books, filmstrips, pictures, recordings, tapes, transparencies—the tools of learning are readily available to the advantage of the learner. Learning becomes attractive in this kind of situation and achievement brings its own satisfactions.

A guide, outlining large group lessons, was used last year in grades four through six. This was rewritten this summer and expanded to two booklets, one a guide, "Suggested Activities To Motivate and

*Close-up view of study carrels at Ludlow School.*

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Follow Up Large Group Lessons" for the teacher and the other, a "Curriculum Guide for Large Group Instruction in Work-Study Skills," for the librarian.

### Teaching Needed Skills

Last year large group lessons were held every other week. This year the group lessons are being held every week, leaving the second semester for reviewing and reteaching skills where needed and for enrichment lessons. From the first year's experience it was learned that all the skills need to be taught as early as possible rather than spacing them throughout a school year. What was taught last May would have helped children use the skills more knowingly if they had been taught as needed.

The basic lessons outlined in the guide are as follows: Orientation to Learning Center; Listening; Card Catalogue; What Study Is; Outlining; Note Taking; Dewey Decimal Classification; Reference Books and Tools; Using the Audio-visual Section of the Learning Center; Techniques of Reporting; Oral Book Reports; Graphs, Charts, Tables and Diagrams; Using Many Sources in Preparing Reports; Map and Globe Studies; Bibliography; Parts of a Book.

These lessons are not listed in the order in which they are being taught, some are repeated in all three grades, but the scope and development varies for each lesson according to the grade level. These lessons are taught in the auditorium weekly by grade level. By teaching all classes of a grade at one time, the center is free from rigid scheduling and blocks of time are thus made available for practicing skills taught and for individual research.

For these lessons pupils are seated on folding chairs to which an arm has been attached to permit them to write. Each

child is given a participation sheet which has blanks to be filled in as the librarian teaches the lesson. When completed, these sheets provide a good summary of what has been taught and are also helpful for absentees who miss the lesson.

Transparencies, shown on the overhead projector, have proven to be a most effective teaching aid, and the participation sheets have been the best method of getting total class participation which is not possible orally with a large group.

Last year lessons were taught by the three librarians, one being a former teacher who had recently completed her master's degree in library science. She taught the units that would ordinarily be considered classroom areas, e.g., maps and globes, outlining, graphs, charts, tables and diagrams. This year some lessons will be conducted by teachers and children as well as by the library personnel.

The total staff for this project includes, besides the three librarians, a library aide in each school, an audio-visual clerk and a half-time technician in the larger school. Having a technician to produce transparencies for use with the overhead projector is helpful to staff and students. They are used, not only for large group instruction, but also for class purposes, or for students giving special reports.

Overnight books and reserved book shelves have usually been associated with secondary and college levels. However, the project program has made it necessary to initiate these practices in our two program schools.

Teachers are asked to observe each lesson for their own information and for help in classroom follow-up. They are asked to write constructive criticism for whoever conducts the lesson to strengthen and improve wherever possible any future presentations.

Also this year the classroom teacher is to emphasize follow-up of lessons and utilize specific skills taught in large group lessons by applying them to use in current units in their daily teaching and thus make them more meaningful.

### Help for Individuals

Last year's emphasis was on the facilities and their use in the Learning Centers. This year the teacher is to play a more important role by utilizing skills in classroom follow-up and by checking and helping individual children improve their techniques.

In grades 4-6 there are no regularly scheduled library classes except for large group instruction. Instead, teachers are urged to permit pupils to come to the Learning Center as the needs arise logically in the classroom. In talking with teachers, they agree that this is the most difficult change to make in their teaching day. Their teaching methods have not changed, but their concepts of learning are being shifted. Children are not sent to the Center after work in the classroom has been completed, but rather as class discussion requires or provokes the need for immediate information.

One of the problems is what to do with the children in the classroom while six or ten of their classmates are sent to the Learning Center. With emphasis on independent study and individual learning according to ability, the individualized reading time is best to free children to do research without loss by being separated from the group, according to many teachers. Also available are times when children are working individually on projects in science, mathematics or social studies and no class presentation by the teacher is in progress.

Because good teachers are concerned



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*Technicians making transparencies  
in Lomond workroom.*

about what and how much the children in their care learn they are naturally reluctant to allow them to leave the classroom and go off "on-their-own." However, after a year of trial, persuasion and observation, teachers are altering their thinking, revising their classroom schedules and witnessing children studying independently, using many kinds of materials on problems of real interest and value to them.

### Eagerness for Growth

In summary, the "Activities" guide describes the goals of this experimental program in these words: "If we subscribe to the theory that children *want* to learn, that they are *eager* to grow in knowledge and their ability to apply this acquired knowledge to purposes which are meaningful to them, then we are ready to accept the basic goals of the experimental program in teaching work-study skills

and in independent study. If the assignments we make to children in the intermediate grades have real meaning for them in that they help them to find answers to their immediate questions or to fill some present need (rather than as preparation for some nebulous career in the future), the children will not need to be *driven* to finding answers, nor will they need us, as teachers, to stand over them forcing them to study. These children will be ready for *independent study*, the ultimate goal of the experimental program."

After one year, the guide has been rewritten to become two, one for the teacher and one for the librarian; shifting teaching emphasis from factual to conceptual, emphasis has been shifted from the Learning Center to follow-up in the classroom; teaching large group lessons will now include teacher and student personnel. Additional changes will be made as experience warrants these.

Interest in this experiment has brought many visitors and inquiries for information and materials. To free the librarians and principals from conducting tours and answering correspondence, additional funds were granted this year by the Fund for the Advancement of Education. This money provided for an Information Officer to coordinate these duties; also to arrange visitors' schedules, and to publicize and promote the project. In the past month more than 150 sets of the "Curriculum Guide" and "Suggested Activities" books,<sup>1</sup> which were requested have been sent out.

How does one evaluate this project? The Iowa Work-Study Skills Test and the Educational Stimuli Library Skills

<sup>1</sup> Available for \$5.00 from Information Officer, F. A. E. Project, Shaker Heights City School District, 15600 Parkland Drive, Shaker Heights 20, Ohio.

Examination are being used but are inconclusive in their results to date. However, there is no test, to our knowledge, that truly measures how children have grown in independence in using the varied resources in the Learning Center. The use of the card catalogue and the location of materials improved considerably during the year, as did pupils' ability to work independently. Perhaps with more experience a test can be developed that can objectively evaluate this type of program.

While only two schools are involved in this experiment, all of our elementary schools have either moved libraries into larger existing quarters (kindergarten rooms or auditoriums), or have plans to enlarge by moving or enlarging existing libraries. It has also necessarily affected our secondary schools. If children are being taught work-study skills and have the opportunity to work independently in the Learning Center, this must continue in junior and senior high school.

The most important consequence of this experiment, hopefully, will come through the experiences children have in this program. If they can be developed into secondary and college students who pursue their academic interests in an independent, meaningful and increasingly successful manner, the true purpose of learning will have been served.

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