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ABSTRACT

The design of the reading curriculum presents a vision of what will be stressed in reading instruction. A first ingredient to discuss in developing the reading curriculum emphasizes the degree to which different curriculum areas should be related in teaching and learning. Reading then could be taught as a separate subject matter area from the other disciplines in the curriculum. Separate instructional objectives would then be in the offing for reading instruction only. In moving toward an integrated reading curriculum the emphasis could be gradual. The first step might be correlation with spelling instruction. Moving toward the integrated approach, the reading teacher may stress the broad fields/fused approach in which reading might be related to the teaching of social studies. This paper considers the advantages and disadvantages for stressing the separate subjects versus integration approaches. The paper also discusses scope and sequence in the reading curriculum and objectives in reading instruction. It states that, in designing the reading curriculum, individual differences among students need adequate consideration, and it lists different talents students might possess, focusing on how students with individual differences could be grouped for reading instruction. The paper concludes with a discussion of philosophy of assessment in reading achievement. (NKA)

Designing the Reading Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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DESIGNING THE READING CURRICULUM

Teachers in the school setting need to be highly knowledgeable of how to design the reading curriculum. The design emphasizes the framework of teaching and learning situations as it relates to reading instruction. There are selected ingredients which should be inherent in the design. Each needs careful thought, deliberation, and attention. The design presents a vision of what will be stressed in reading instruction. Each pupil needs to achieve as optimally as possible. Thus, pupils individually should attain well in subject matter, in applying that which has been learned, and in evaluation results when using formal as well as informal means of assessment.

Separate Subjects Versus an Integrated Reading Curriculum

A first ingredient to discuss in developing the reading curriculum emphasizes the degree to which different curriculum areas should be related in teaching and learning. Reading then could be taught as a separate subject matter area from the other disciplines in the curriculum. Separate objectives of instruction would then be in the offing for reading instruction only.

In moving toward an integrated reading curriculum, the emphasis could be gradual. The first step might be correlation in which reading would be correlated with spelling instruction. Moving further toward the integrated approach, the reading teacher may stress the broad fields/fused approach in which reading might be related to the teaching of social studies. The objectives of instruction here should stress the two curriculum areas as being fused, not isolated from each other. The final stage of teaching diverse subject matter areas as being related might well be integration of content. Here, subject matter areas lose their boundaries and borders. Reading is then an inherent part of each curriculum area. There are definite advantages and disadvantages for stressing each plan of the separate subjects versus integration approaches. For example, in the separate subjects plan of instruction, the teacher may focus entirely upon reading instruction; the disadvantage of the separate subjects plan is a fragmented reading curriculum whereby the learner fails to perceive the relationship of ideas in the curriculum. The design of the curriculum then needs to take into consideration the separate subjects versus the integrated reading curriculum (Ediger, Marlow, 2001, Chapter Fifteen).

Scope in the Reading Curriculum

Scope pertains to the breadth of objectives to be emphasized in reading. Scope may stress a narrower or a broader breadth. Thus, a narrower scope may focus heavily upon a systematic procedure of teaching phonics. Inherent in teaching phonics might well be the following:

- 1. grapheme/phoneme relationships as objectives for pupil achievement.**
- 2. syllabication skills to unlock unknown words.**
- 3. structural analysis to determine new words and their identification.**
- 4. identification of unknown words in context.**
- 5. development of a basic sight vocabulary in reading.**

Toward the other end of the continuum, the scope of the reading curriculum may emphasize whole language approaches of instruction. For example, after background information has been developed for reading within learners, the inherent procedure of instruction might then pertain to the following:

- 1. reading entire selections with the total class or a committee focusing attention upon the Big Book which has predictable content and which all can see clearly.**
- 2. pupils with teacher assistance reading the selection as the former points to the words and phrases as the oral reading continues.**
- 3. the selection being reread as often as necessary in its entirety so that pupils develop familiarity with a core of new words in reading instruction.**
- 4. subject matter read involves different academic disciplines such as social studies, science, and mathematics, among others.**
- 5. the focus being upon ideas being read with pupils comprehending content in the selection read (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Fifteen).**

A systematic approach in teaching reading emphasizes pupils learning to read whereby specifics are being taught such as sound symbol relationships and then eventually reading subject matter to secure ideas. Thus, the tools of reading are stressed first such as phonics and then reading for ideas becomes important. Whole language procedures emphasize pupils reading the entire selection, from the beginning of the

young child's experiences in learning to read. The teacher might call attention to such factors in the selection as words beginning with the same consonant letters and/or words which end alike.

Sequence in the Reading Curriculum

Sequence answers the question, “When will each objective in the reading curriculum be stressed?” In answer to this question, the teacher may teach a selected initial consonant sound within a systematic sequence in phonics instruction. This may be followed by a different phoneme/grapheme construct and eventually include vowel letters/sounds as well as ending sounds within specific words. The sequence or order of the entire phonics program be then be placed in chart form to follow in reading instruction.

Whole language approaches might well involve a sequential listing of story content to cover, which contains content from all academic disciplines.

Sequence in the reading curriculum is based upon the following, be it systematic phonics or whole language approaches:

1. from the easier learnings to those which are gradually more complex. The teacher determines the sequence in systematic phonics instruction whereas the teacher, in whole language instruction, chooses story content to read for young pupils with increasingly choices being made by learners such as in individualized reading. Once readiness is in evidence, the pupil then may choose library books to read sequentially in individualized reading.

2. when state mandated objectives of instruction are in evidence, the order for their attainment may be determined by the teacher based upon knowledge of individual pupil achievement.

3. the teacher in a logical sequence arranges the order of objectives for pupil attainment. In a psychological sequence, pupils individually or within committees are rather heavily involved in determining what comes first, second, third, and so on, in objectives to be achieved.

4. learning styles theory whereby the teacher emphasizes what harmonizes best with the pupil's appropriate way of achieving optimally, be it with direct or indirect teaching procedures (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).

5. the teacher emphasizes diagnosis and remediation which stresses what a pupil needs to improve upon in reading achievement. The need may be phonics instruction to unlock

unknown words or reading for meaning in which whole language instructional procedures are a necessity.

Not everything in reading can be learned at one time by a pupil. Thus, the teacher needs to spread out over time which ordered objectives learners should achieve in sequence. A teacher directed or learner choices made in context may well determine the sequence of activities in reading (See Gunning, 2000, Chapter Eight).

Objectives in Reading Instruction

Objectives for pupils to achieve in reading should stress three broad categories. Knowledge objectives are important and usually come first in priority in the teaching of reading. Thus, the teacher desires pupils to learn much subject matter from reading. Important facts, concepts, and generalizations are selected as objectives for learner attainment. A second category -- skills -- emphasizes that pupils use or apply what has been attained be it ideas gained, word recognition techniques acquired, and/or higher levels of thinking. Attitudes are a third category of objectives which probably are least emphasized of the three categories. And yet, attitudinal ends may be as vital for pupils to achieve as the other two. With good attitudes, a pupil may achieve well in knowledge and skills ends. Thus, good attitudes go a long way in doing well in knowledge and skills achievement.

Objectives may be stated broadly as general objectives. The following are examples:

- 1. to develop within the pupil the ability to achieve main ideas in reading subject matter.**
- 2. to develop within the pupil skill to think critically and creatively, as well as to be able to solve problems.**
- 3. to develop within the pupil an attitude of wanting to achieve more optimally in reading.**

General objectives provide guidance, in general and in a broad way, what pupils are to learn and achieve. These kinds of objectives were quite common in the 1950s and 1960s.

Presently, with the measurement and testing movement in vogue, objectives are stated in measurable terms. Each objective then needs to be stated precisely so that it can be measured if, after instruction, it has/has not been achieved by learners. With state mandated tests, test results from pupils are highly important for the following reasons:

- 1. pupils may need to score at a certain level if they are to be**

promoted to the next grade level. Or a pupil may be denied a high school diploma if the individual test score is too low in high stakes testing.

2. a single test score describes what a pupil has learned. The every day accomplishments in schools do not matter when a single test score determines a pupil's future.

3. an assumption is that the state mandated test is valid and reliable. Statements need to be made by the developers of the state mandated test in terms of how it was validated and evaluated for reliability. There are state mandated tests which were not pilot tested to take out the kinks.

4. the same mandated test is given to all pupils in a state and yet there are tremendous differences among learners in terms of abilities, intelligences, and learning styles.

5. accommodations for the handicapped are not made in most states with their mandated tests (See Olson, 2002, pp 6,7).

In addition to specific objectives being used in state mandated standards and tests to measure if these goals have been achieved by pupils, the ends of instruction too frequently stress factual recall of information. In school and in society, there is a greater need for objectives stressing critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving, compared to the heavy emphasis upon factual recall with multiple choice items on each test.

Providing for Individual Differences

In designing the reading curriculum, individual differences need adequate consideration. When visiting any classroom of pupils, the author in supervising university student teachers in the public schools noticed rather soon how pupils differed much from each other. Pupils differed in being attentive in class, in interests possessed, in persevering in an ongoing learning activity, in working together diligently with peers on a given task, in responding to questions raised in class, and in attitudes, among others. Multiple Intelligences Theory (See Gardner, 1993) emphasized that pupils individually possesses the following talents:

- 1. verbal, such as in reading and writing.**
- 2. mathematical, as in reasoning and logical thinking.**
- 3. musical/rhythmical as in writing verse and setting it to music. Responding to music in a rhythmic manner also stresses this category of intelligence.**
- 4. intrapersonal intelligence whereby the pupil reveals**

achievement best in individual endeavors.

5. interpersonal intelligence in which the learner shows leadership skills and cooperation in collaborative endeavors.

6. bodily/kinesthetic whereby the pupils shows abilities in manual dexterity, and athletic prowess endeavors.

7. scientific in which the pupil demonstrates quality abilities in objective thinking.

8. artistic whereby the pupil indicates best what has been learned through creative work in art processes and products.

Individual differences may be provided through grouping pupils for reading instruction. The following may be used within a classroom depending upon the involved purpose:

1. heterogeneous grouping which has mixed achievement levels in a specific group.

2. homogeneous grouping whereby learners of a uniform ability group are taught together in reading.

3. individualized plan in which a single pupil works alone, as in individualized reading.

4. peer grouping as in two or three pupils discussing a self selected paperback by themselves.

5. large group instruction in which the teacher provides background information to the total number of pupils in the classroom.

6. cross grade grouping whereby a group of pupils from two grade levels are taught together such as in two third graders and two fourth graders being taught collectively.

7. team teaching as in two or three teachers planning together the objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures for a given set of learners. These teachers then teach reading in large group instruction, in committees, and in individual pupil settings.

8. nongraded grouping whereby pupils are taught collectively using reading materials harmonizing with the present reading achievement level of the involved learners. The materials of instruction used may not be on the inherent grade levels of the pupils being taught.

9. peer teaching in which one pupil teaches the others, specific items in reading.

10. programmed learning involving the B. F. Skinner psychology of step by step reading with carefully and closely sequenced objectives of instruction (See Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Eighteen).

There are then a plethora of approaches which may be used

in the teaching of reading. Each pupil needs to attain as optimally as possible. There are selected philosophies of teaching which may be used in reading instruction: (1) A basics approach stresses teachers selecting essential learnings for pupils to achieve. The basics in phonics and syllabication, as word recognition skills, as well as selected fundamental comprehension techniques are then taught systematically to pupils. (2) A strong basal textbook, worksheet, and workbook approach provides major learning opportunities for pupils in reading. (3) Essentialism may be contrasted with an activity centered procedure in teaching reading. A hands on approach may then be implemented such as pupils constructing objects/items or doing art projects to reveal that which has been achieved in reading. (4) Quite different is measurement driven instruction which focuses upon pupils achieving predetermined, specific objectives of reading instruction. Feedback from achievement, or lack thereof, on objectives achievement, is used by the teacher to make sequential instructional decisions. (5) An ungraded philosophy attempts to have pupils move forward as rapidly as possible in reading, depending upon readiness characteristics displayed. No grade levels are emphasized here. Pupils in groups move forward as rapidly as abilities and achievement permit. (6) An interdisciplinary approach, as a different philosophy, emphasizes a reading curriculum which has all boundaries of academic disciplines eliminated. Literacy efforts here stress reading across the curriculum, regardless of the involved academic subject matter (See Tiedt, 1983).

Philosophy of Assessment in Reading Achievement

Teacher developed and implemented informal means of assessment may be used. These include teacher observation of pupil achievement, use of rating scales and checklists, teacher written tests, anecdotal statements, diary entries, and journal writing, pertaining to pupil achievement and progresses in reading.

State mandated objectives and testing are used in 49 out of 50 states in the union to measure pupil achievement in reading. These tests are developed on the state level and provide a single numeral, such as a percentile, to indicate achievement. The amount of pressure on the teacher and pupils to attain high expectations depend upon each state. The following are used to meet high pupil standards within a state:

1. annual testing to notice achievement.

2. report cards showing how one district/state compares with the others. The results, called report cards, are printed/reported in the news media.

3. high stakes testing whereby a student may not be promoted to the next grade level due to a low test score. Also, a pupil may be denied a high school diploma due to not meeting state expectations from test results.

4. education bankruptcy laws in which a state may take over a school or school system due to low average scores on these state mandated tests.

5. teachers may be replaced if low pupil test scores are continually in evidence.

District wide tests may also be developed and implemented to assess if pupils are achieving school wide objectives of instruction. A variety of kinds of test items may be used here such as multiple choice, true/false, essay, matching, completion, and short response. Test items on any level, be it state mandated or district tests, need to be valid and reliable, pilot tested, and possess clarity in their writing (See Ediger, 1998, 161- 166).

Designing the reading curriculum needs to be done with much thought and deliberation. Each facet of the design is salient to emphasize so that pupils achieve as well as possible in reading!

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