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Honors Project

Learning Centers

Tanna Murry
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Learning Centers

Individualized learning through the Learning Center method is becoming more and more popular in today's classrooms. For this reason I chose to develop two basic Learning Centers--one for math and one for language arts--for my honors project. I plan to use these centers and others when I begin to teach.

In preparing these Learning Centers, I used two basic handbooks: Invitation to Learning; the Learning Center Handbook by Ralph Claude Veight and Learning Centers: Children on Their Own prepared by the Association for Childhood Education International. These two sources helped me to sort out and apply ideas of my own and ideas from other sources to the Learning Centers I developed.

In general Learning Centers, when fully developed, imply certain characteristic behaviors on the part of the teacher, an enlarged learning environment, greater independence on the part of the learner, and revised physical arrangements in the classroom. The basic idea behind Learning Centers is that each child will grow at his own rate, in his own style, and to his uniquely personal potential. The Learning Centers can provide a highly personal experience for the child and can facilitate learning through a feedback system.

The individualized learning through Learning Centers has caused the role of the teacher to change. New teaching skills and attitudes are

necessary as a teacher moves from a role of imparter of information and occupant of the center stage to that of an observer, stimulator, guide and assistant to each of the children. The teacher must also become a manager of time, space, and materials, as well as a student of learner behavior. An increased understanding of the learning process is essential for the teacher in the individualized, open classroom. The teacher needs to assist children to learn for themselves rather than from fear of rejection or desire for praise. Records must ^{be} kept on each child, noting where the child is, what he has accomplished, what learning he has achieved.

For a long time teachers have relied on someone else's textbooks, curriculum guides and the like to provide a formal classroom structure. But today individualized learning places a larger degree of responsibility for the design and implementation of learning squarely on the shoulders of the teachers. The Learning Centers call for the use of diverse materials which need not all be commercial. Some of the best materials are those developed by teacher and the children themselves from everyday components found in the community.

A number of interest centers provide a setting for children to develop their skills, understanding and appreciations. Learning progresses at the rate appropriate to each child's capacities, interests, and needs; rather than at a rate prescribed by the teacher, curriculum or graded groupings. Choices for the children are broad, creating many opportunities for successful experiences that nurture a positive self-concept. When properly handled it permits older children to help younger, brighter to assist less bright, and also it encourages development of appropriate self-discipline without undue reliance upon the authority of the teacher.

In the following paragraphs are descriptions of Learning Centers as they have been described and classified in Invitation to Learning; the Learning Center Handbook.

The first type of center is the INVENTORY LEARNING CENTER. The purpose of this center is to assess the development of the children in arithmetic, reading, problem solving, creativity, etc. Emphasis is usually placed on this center at the beginning of the year or when a new student joins the class.

The PRESCRIPTIVE LEARNING CENTER is the follow up of the Inventory Center in that the curriculum in this center is designed to meet the needs of the children as established in the Inventory Center.

The teacher is the key or the organizer of the PROJECT LEARNING CENTER and its program. There is a central point around which the program revolves. This center presents a major problem and many sub-problems on which the student is free to decide which one to work. The problems are open-ended and each project has a multi-level activity section. A contract is made between the child and the teacher to aid in child-teacher planning and to help in evaluation.

The PROGRAMMED LEARNING CENTER contains a commercial kit or materials used for cognitive development in a content area or to emphasize psychomotor activities in a skill development area.

The PROGRAMMED-PROJECT LEARNING CENTER is a combination of the Project Center and the Programmed Center in which a commercial kit is adapted by the teacher to meet the particular needs of a class. The teacher may make a project book or assignment sheets in order to meet these needs and to meet the interest of his class.

The UNIT LEARNING CENTER is organized by the teacher with the central theme coming from a problem area of the class. The format for the Unit Center reflects the use of exposition to attract interest and to stimulate questions, and the use of skill-building activities to acquire information and to develop concepts and generalizations.

The COOPERATIVE LEARNING CENTER is planned jointly by the student and the teacher. They discuss the topic of interest to the student. Then the student plans and evaluates the details of the center, including the time limits, under the direction of the teacher.

In the STUDENT LEARNING CENTER the student designs the Center around an interest of his own choice, and then shares this interest with his teacher and his classmates. The student establishes objectives and carries forth a planned experience. The teacher provides guidance at the student's request.

The purpose of the SKILL DEVELOPMENT LEARNING CENTER is to develop a skill, psychomotor in nature, through practice by the learner. These Learning Centers facilitate the development of single (simple) or multi- (complex) skills by providing appropriate activities that foster their development. The teacher is encouraged to approach this facet of teaching with all the creativity he can muster. The Single Skill Learning Center assumes the child can already perform the task and that the accuracy and efficiency will develop through the practice provided by the activity. The Center can have one task assignment or be open and provide a variety of task assignments from which to choose. The Multi-Skill activities are characterized by their complexity and their sequence. These assignments are usually problem-centered and require the student to use a variety of materials in resolving the question while the major objective remains acquiring proficiency in the skills involved.

In the FUN LEARNING CENTER the learning process may never be identified because the educational task is self-imposed and enjoyed without being justified. In other words, the child learns through a fun activity without knowing he is learning.

The COMBINATION LEARNING CENTER is simply a combination of two or more of the Centers described into one Center.

The two centers I developed for my honors project are Skill Development Learning Centers to be used in grade one. The math center is a single skill center to help develop the accuracy and efficiency of the child in the addition facts from one to ten. The language arts center is a multi-skill center. The purpose of this is to develop a child's skills in listening, reading, and sound discrimination. The remainder of this paper will be concerned with the descriptions of the centers I made for this project.

For the math center I made three games to help the child develop his skill in working with the addition facts from one to ten. The first game is the "Postman Game". The child is the postman and takes the letters, small cards with a number fact on each one, to deliver to the appropriate houses. The ten construction paper houses are mounted to a strip of card board and numbered from one to ten on the pocket on the front of each one. The child places the fact cards in the correct pockets. An example of this and other games can be found in the appendix.

The second game is "Lace-Up Cards" made from pieces of card board. Each card has three number facts and answers on it. Strings are used to lace a number fact to the correct answer.

The last game consists of card board puzzle pieces. A number fact is one half of the puzzle and the child must find the other half with the correct answer on it.

In addition to the games this center includes a poster with all the number facts from one to ten to be used in checking answers in the games. Also, I made an addition table to use in this center. Counting men and counting beads will be added later.

For the language arts center I made three games to help the child learn to listen to sounds and to discriminate between initial sounds in words. Also I made a tape to be used with headphones in a listening lab.

The first sound discrimination game was "Find the Sound That's Different". This game contains sets of cards that have pictures of words that begin with like sounds and one that begins with a different sound. For example, one set has four cards of pictures that begin with the "n" sound and one that does not. The child finds the card with the sound that doesn't match the others and looks at the back of it. If there is a star on the back then he knows he is right.

On larger cards I made another game, "Find the Sound That Is Different From the First Sound". These cards have three sounds on them. The child says the first word (illustrated by a picture) in the row listening to the initial sound. Then he says the second word to see if it starts like the first one and so on until he hears a beginning sound that is different. He covers the different sound with a circle.

The third game is "Match the Sounds". The child says all the words, illustrated by pictures, on the game board. Then he takes a card from the envelope, says the word, then matches it with the picture of the word on the board with the same initial sound.

To improve listening and reading skills I made a cassette tape of the stories in Fun In Story to be used with headphones in a listening center.

I was given six copies of Fun In Story by an elementary school who didn't use it anymore. On a cassette tape I recorded the stories in the book. The child can listen and follow the words as I read the stories. This gives him practice in reading and listening and also most children think it is lots of fun, too. For review of the new words, I made a poster of pictures of the new words in the book with pockets beside each picture. Word cards can be placed in the pocket by the correct picture. Also I recorded stories and nursery rhymes for just-for-fun listening.

I feel like these two Learning Centers will be to my advantage to have as I go out into the teaching world. I enjoyed doing this project and I feel I learned a lot about a new concept in teaching.

APPENDIX

On the following pages are examples and illustrations of the games I made for this project.

THE POSTMAN GAME:



LACE-UP CARDS: an example is inserted after this page.

6 + 3 = 10

2 + 8 = 6

5 + 1 = 9

FACT PUZZLES:

2+4

6

FIND THE SOUND THAT'S DIFFERENT:



FIND THE SOUND THAT'S DIFFERENT FROM THE FIRST SOUND:



MATCH THE SOUNDS:



(actual size: 7 x 31 in.)

New Words:



dog