**Introduction**

**Declaration of Independence**

Teachers and parent-teachers can't go it alone. They need good materials to assist them. With good materials students will work independently and will persist at their work. With good materials your teaching task is manageable.

It is virtually impossible to individualize instruction without individualized learning materials. Having students work on their own is a hallmark of individualized instruction.

Section I provides background. Section II makes suggestions about how teachers can best manage students' independent work. Section III provides lists of available independent-learning materials. Section IV is a list of the publishers referred in Section III.

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**Section I**

**1. Background: Principles of Teaching. Two Kinds of Assignments**

Teachers make both closed and open assignments.

Closed assignments are a follow-up of material taught. Often, they are practice. All students do the work of the assignment in the same way. Examples of closed assignments are:

* Do all the calculations on page 120 of the book.
* Write the transcription twenty times as carefully as possible.
* Memorize the poem on page 50.

Open assignments provide for student diversity. Examples of open assignments are:

- Write a half page about your weekend.

- Find three new words in the dictionary and write sentences using them.

- Continue working in your workbook.

Using the techniques taught to the whole class, draw a picture with crayons illustrating the season. Although closed assignments are necessary for the sake of mastery, they do present problems:

- Students vary in how long they take to complete an assignment. Take an example. The teacher teaches a whole-class handwriting lesson on forming the capital B. Posture, hand position, and how the pencil is held are all taught in the lesson. The students are then given an assignment to practice the formation of the capital B. The fast students get the work done in short order. The slower students complete only part of the assignment.

What should be done with the students that finish the work quickly?

Should the laggards be required to complete the assignment?

This frustrating situation exists every day in every classroom in the world. There is no excellent solution. However, the students are least frustrated when the work seems easy to them. Rather than gearing the assignment for the average student, the teacher can gear the assignment for the below average. Students who complete the work quickly can turn to open assignments.

The effect of this is that the slowest students work on closed assignments most of the time, while the fastest students work on open assignments most of the time.

**2. Assigned School Work: Part of a Continuum?**

The great thing about a textbook, workbook, or kit is that is continuous - the student can see that he or she is progressing systematically. Each assignment relates to what came before and what will come ahead. Students see the educational purpose of textbooks, workbooks, and kits.

Teachers who teach from a textbook have the problem solved of how to organize work so that it is continuous.

There is a problem in the more open style of teaching found often in elementary schools. Usually, textbooks are used in some subjects, such as math and spelling. Occasionally, social studies, science, language, and health textbooks are used. However, when a decision has been made not to use a textbook as the organizing structure for a school subject, what can a teacher do to make the work continuous and to have students see it that way?

One technique is to use a syllabus and to share it with students.

Another technique is to use contracts. The assignments are all listed together, and the student progresses from one to the next. Either the student or the teacher puts initials next to each assignment as it is completed. Contracts are most often used in assigning "extra work."

Another technique is for the teacher to select an educational objective from the "scope and sequence" curriculum guide and to pursue it for a stretch of days or weeks. The educational objective is displayed in the classroom and is referred to by the teacher as the unit or task underway.

Students benefit from seeing their progress. When handwriting exercises, spelling tests, creative writing, and math tests are saved in folders or notebooks, students can see their progress over time.

When a notebook containing new vocabulary words or a notebook containing new sight words is kept, students can review the words they have learned and see their progress.

**3. Mastery: Is It Practical?**

Mastery is the goal of all teaching. In a classroom there is a special problem: the students vary so much in knowledge and abilities that it is impractical to expect all students to master the material taught.

Even in first grade not every student masters the material for the grade. When it was common practice to "hold back" students, many students failed first grade. Although nowadays few students are held back in first grade, nevertheless not all students master the material for the grade.

As students grow older, the gap in knowledge and abilities among them widens, and getting all students to learn the basic materials for the grade or course becomes even more difficult than it was in the early grades.

Should teachers throw up their hands and give up on the slower learners? This is a mistake that some teachers make.

Slower learners respond to conscientious instruction. There are several strategies that teachers employ:

1) The teacher teaches a single student or a small group during class time or after school.

2) A faster student is assigned to help a slower student.

3) The teacher finds special instructional materials for slower students to work on independently either during school time or at home.

4) The teacher enlists the parents to teach the child at home using instructional materials supplied by the teacher.

5) When mastery is sought, as it should be, the importance of testing is readily apparent. With test results in hand, both teacher and student can see how well the student has learned, and plans for next steps can be made.

**4. School Work: Do Students See It as Purposeful?**

Can anyone argue with the idea that students should feel that their school work is meaningful/purposeful/ important? Everyone recognizes that they should see it that way. Nevertheless, it is commonplace in classrooms for students to work on assignments day after day just because the teacher says to. These students do not see the long-range purposes, such as these, provided as examples:

In first grade, learning sums to 12, recognizing a basic list of words, knowing the parts of our bodies, etc.

In fifth grade, learning meaningful long division with decimals, understanding the meaning of a paragraph, understanding the contributions of ancient Bactria and Khorezm to our culture, etc.

When students do not see their school work as meaningful/purposeful/important, they rely on the teacher to urge them to work. When they do see their school work as meaningful/purposeful/important, they are self-reliant - they learn for themselves.

What can a teacher do to make school work purposeful to students?

1) Talk up the goals and objectives of a course or unit of study or school subject at the beginning of the year and periodically as appropriate - before work is begun.

2) Let students know, through pre-testing and other means, what they don’t know so that, as they progress, they have a sense of learning and of having learned.

3) Keep folders of work completed so that they can see their progress.

Class instruction is the norm virtually everywhere, even though students vary enormously in their abilities and knowledge. Beginning reading is taught in kindergarten and first grade, long division with decimals is taught in fifth grade, Uzbekistan government and law is taught in ninth grade, and physics is taught in eleventh and twelfth grades.

Why is this so? Anyone who has taught a class knows the answer.

It is beyond the capacity of any one teacher to teach a whole class of students each at his or her own learning edge. Can you imagine teaching the intricacies of long division by decimals one student at a time?

Much important information would remain untaught if there were no standard curriculum grade by grade.

Many students benefit from learning in the company of other students - together they hold discussions, plan and present programs, etc.

However, there is still room for individuals' needs and interests. Advanced students are given extra projects and assignments, sometimes as a group, while slower students are given make-up assignments or are put on a separate track with their own workbook. Help is enlisted from home.

What about grades? No one has learned how to prevent slower children from comparing themselves unfavorably with advanced children. However, teachers don't have to reinforce these unfavorable comparisons by a harsh grading system. Parents (particularly, those of the most able children?) will probably always pressure schools to parcel out the A's and the F's, but teachers can soften this harsh system:

* Report home the results of standardized tests.
* Grade for student effort and application.
* Broaden the curriculum to include special projects, and include the results in reports home.

Some parents, recognizing the enormous individual differences among students and seeing the harm done by unfavorable comparisons, have chosen to educate their children at home, where work can be given at students' learning edge. They have made the decision that individualized instruction is more important than interaction with peers at school.

**5. Asking Students Questions**

There are two parts to any school's curriculum - one, the curriculum prescribed by the school, and the other, the curriculum determined by the teacher.

The prescribed curriculum is often laid out in manuals or guides written by committees of teachers and principals, either at the school system level or the state level. These manuals or guides list learnings and suggested means of achieving them by grade level. The prescribed curriculum goes hand in hand with textbooks. As students move upward grade by grade, the textbook plays a greater and greater role, until in secondary school it takes a commanding place.

The part played by teacher-determined curriculum is considerable, particularly in the elementary years, before the advent of courses. This is to say that teachers have much latitude in what to teach. There is no teacher who only covers what is in the textbook or what is in the curriculum guide. One reason for this is that the teacher is responsible for making the learnings relevant to daily living. Our fast-changing world demands that new developments in any field are taken into account. Our times are so complicated that students are always challenged to understand and make sense of their lives, and they challenge the teacher to help them.

Another reason for the large part played by teacher-determined curriculum is the great variation among students, not only in knowledge and ability but also in interests and world-view. Teachers who test often and test widely see needs aplenty and feel a responsibility for accommodating them. It is in this environment that a variety of learning materials becomes so important.

**6. Whole Class Instruction: Is It Out of Date?**

Assessment of students' knowledge and abilities is the teacher's absolutely best educational tool. It is so powerful because it is an inspiration to the teacher's creativity. When the teacher sees where students' educational needs lie, his or her mind begins to work on what to do about them. An analogy with a politician is in order: the politician who goes out to meet and talk with the people learns what the needs are and then thinks up strategies for meeting them; the politician who lacks the common touch, on the other hand, generates ideas that are often inappropriate. Similarly, the teacher who assesses students' knowledge and abilities begins to think out appropriate educational strategies, whereas, with the ivory tower teacher, there is often a mismatch between what is taught and what is appropriate for the students. When tests are administered in advance of teaching, the teacher sees where the needs lie, and the students realize that there is much to learn - the test results are an inspiration to student humility.

Assessment helps prevent the teacher from teaching over the heads of the students. When the teacher knows that a student is unsure about step 1, there is no point in going on to step 2. For example, if a student doesn't understand subject and predicate, there is no point in teaching sentence diagramming; if a student can't multiply or subtract, there is no point in teaching long division.

Many classroom tests come from textbooks. Math textbooks provide many tests, as do some basal reading series.

Some of the best assessments are the simplest. For example, a teacher's dictating a paragraph, where the students are required to write down what is dictated, is very simple but very effective. Finding a paragraph to dictate is no problem, and student shortcomings in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and handwriting are immediately apparent to the teacher.

Excellent resources are now available for finding tests. Buros Mental Measurements Yearbook and Buros Tests in Print have for many years been an excellent resource, and now, in addition, there is the Internet[[1]](#footnote-1) accesses the Test Locator. Responding to the "Enter a database query" in the Test Locator brings up a list of tests for almost any school subject or topic.

Educational Testing Service publishes its own catalog of tests available from many publishers called "ETS Test Collection Catalog"[[2]](#footnote-2) (Oryx Press).

In addition to assessing students' knowledge and attitudes before a study begins, many teachers assess students' interests as the study progresses. They recognize individual differences among students and make room in a study for students to go off on their own in some area. For example, in a study of Uzbekistan students might be asked to express interest in pursuing knowledge of Uzbek authors, Uzbek warriors, Uzbek law, Uzbek architecture, Uzbek cities, or Uzbek regions, among other topics. Students would then go off on their own and come up with a true-false test or a short report on their topic to share with the class.

The content of most classroom assessment is specific to the curriculum of the grade or class being taught. For example, if a unit is to be taught on Uzbekistan, the teacher will make a list of the vocabulary words to be taught in the unit, geography concepts, famous Uzbeks, wars, and so on, and will then test the students on their knowledge. The answers are usually open-ended: who was Abdulla Kahhor? Who is Abdulla Oripov? What is the name of the sea west of the Republic? The results tell the teacher - and the students - what the students don't know; implied in the results are what the students need to know. Teacher and students are then ready to embark on the study.

There are knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are the responsibility of all teachers and all students, and the teacher will do well to assess this knowledge and these skills and attitudes. There was a time in American education when a high school social studies teacher, for example, would say that the teaching of punctuation and capitalization was the responsibility of the English teacher, not the social studies teacher. The team approach in secondary schools has done away with this compartmentalization, so that now during team meetings teachers cooperatively discuss educational needs and then plan strategies to meet them.

Similarly, all teachers take responsibility for students' being able to speak correctly, to write good English, to expand vocabulary, to add and subtract, to observe good health habits, to be safe, to have good attitudes toward school, and to learn about current events. The day of sending a student back a grade to learn something is, for the most part, a thing of the past.

Therefore, in addition to teachers' assessing students' knowledge of specific grade level curriculum or subject matter,it comes within the purview of most teachers to assess students' English proficiency, understandings about health and safety, attitudes toward school, and knowledge of current events. Students come to see how much there is to learn and share in developing educational strategies.

The following tests, drawn from the Test Locator, are illustrative of tests that many or most teachers can use profitably, since the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they test are the responsibility of many or most teachers.

**Chapter II**

**1. Strategies for Managing Students' Independent Work**

General information

Check Up Tests in Science. These tests for ages 10-11 test children's ability to make reasoned judgments from observations of the material that is presented. Students record their answers in words, diagrams, charts, and graphs. The material is based on the scientific background that an average 10-11 year old will have built up from experience. There are 22 tests with 40 answers each. The tests are available from Macmillan Education Ltd., Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG21 2XS, England.

Check Up Tests in General Knowledge. These tests for ages 10-11 are designed to be used as a general education resource. Subject matter includes literature, science and natural history, vocabulary, geography and history, sport, civics, music and the arts, mathematics, and religious education. There are 22 tests, each taking about 30 minutes.

Check Up Tests in Workskills. These tests for ages 10-11 include reference skills, comprehension skills involving assimilating information so that instructions can be followed, and interpreting data and presenting answers in visual form. There are 22 tests, each taking about 40 minutes.

Knowledge Master. This pool or library of 100,000 high school test items is available for either Windows or Macintosh. Subsets for junior high and elementary teachers are available. Items can be selected by topic and/or by level of difficulty. Covers American history, government, world history, geography, economics, law, current events, mathematics, geometry, word problems, biology, health, psychology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, meteorology, geology, oceanography, building trades, sports, fine arts, English, spelling, vocabulary, literature, mythology, Shakespeare, social studies, life science, earth science, and physical science. A separate short series is produced for "Knowledge Bowl"-type competitions. New sets of secure questions for local, regional or state competitions are produced yearly. Available from Academic Hallmarks, P.O. Box 998, Durango, CO 81302 (800-321-9218) (http:// www.greatauk.com).

Diagnostic Test of Library Skills. This test for grades 5-9 evaluates students' knowledge of library skills in these areas: title page; table of contents; card catalog; library arrangement; and reference books. All items are multiple choice. Available in both paper-and-pencil version and computer version. Available from Learnco, Inc., Box L, Exeter, NH 03833.

English proficiency and reading

Primary Reading Survey Tests. Level AA for grade 1 is a word recognition test. Level BB for grade 2 tests both word knowledge and comprehension. Levels A-D are for grades 3-6. These tests are available from the Australian Council for Educational Research, P.O. Box 210, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia 3122.

ACER Word Knowledge Test. This test for grades 9-11 measures knowledge of word meanings. It may be used by teachers as a screening test to assess vocabulary knowledge and verbal skills. The test is available from the Australian Council for Educational Research, P.O. Box 210, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia 3122.

Test of Word Knowledge. This test is designed to assess a student's skill in reception and expression of semantics, which is the meaning system of language. They can be used to evaluate and identify students who may be having difficulty with semantics. The test probes word knowledge on three levels: ability to match spoken words with referents and to name pictured referents; knowledge of word definitions and opposites and synonyms; and metalinguistic aspects of word knowledge related to multiple meanings and uses, figurative usage, and use of transition words and conjunctions. Norms are provided for students from 5 to 17 years of age. Available from the Psychological Corporation, 555 Academic Court, San Antonio, TX 78204-0952.

Attitudes to School

Attitudes to School Inventory. This test was developed to measure children's affective and cognitive attitudes toward school. Conclusions can be drawn about children's enthusiasm for school, enthusiasm for a particular class in school, dislike of disruptive behavior, relationships with teachers, academic self- concept, social adjustment to school, and achievement orientation. Available from Kevin Marjoribanks, University of Adelaide, GPO Box 498, Adelaide, South Australia 5001.

Health

Know Your Body Health Survey. Three tests are available: grades 1-2, grade 3, and grades 4-6. The questions cover nutrition, exercise, safety, personal physical facts, and eating habits. The survey takes 30- 45 minutes. Available from Tests in Microfiche, Test Collection, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ 08541.

Knowledge Test in Nutrition. A test for each grade level 1-6 is available. Concepts assessed are a variety of foods, vegetables, dental health, and snacking. Available from Tests in Microfiche, Test Collection, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ 08541.

Quicktests Across the Curriculum

An interesting series of tests is published by Globe/Fearon called Quicktests Across the Curriculum. Each book offers 50 reproducible tests. They are designed for grades 6-12 (reading level: 4-5). These are the test books in this series:

American Government Quicktests

Applied Mathematics Quicktests

English Reading and Writing Quicktests

Fundamental English Quicktests

Fundamental Mathematics Quicktests

General Science Quicktests

Interpreting Literature Quicktests

Life Science and Health Quicktests

United States History and Geography Quicktests

World History and Geography Quicktests

Searching the Internet

A search in the Internet book store Amazon can yield interesting finds. For example, Quicktests (see above) are listed there.

http://www.amazon.com

A general search in Google or one of the other search engines can also yield results. For example, entering "tests of knowledge" or "quiz" along with the subject-matter area can yield many interesting tests.

The following are illustrative of tests available from the Internet:

FunBrain Quiz Lab - many home-made quizzes, classified by grade level and by subject:

http://www.funbrain.com

Ohio Proficiency Tests:

Ohio Practice Test

Sample tests from Missouri Elementary Mathematics Contest:

Practice for Missouri Elementary Mathematics Contest

Elementary science practice test:

Elementary science practice test

Virginia Standard of Learning sample tests:

Virginia practice tests

A math problems generator is available at

Math problems generator

Navigate to Home Page "Students Can Learn On Their Own" - http://www.teacherneedhelp.com/ students/

**2. Choosing Work According to the Curriculum**

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In addition to assessing students' knowledge and attitudes before a study begins, many teachers assess students' interests as the study progresses. They recognize individual differences among students and make room in a study for students to go off on their own in some area. For example, in a study of Rome students might be asked to express interest in pursuing knowledge of Roman authors, Roman warriors, Roman law, Roman architecture, Roman cities, or Roman colonies, among other topics. Students would then go off on their own and come up with a true-false test or a short report on their topic to share with the class.

The content of most classroom assessment is specific to the curriculum of the grade or class being taught. For example, if a unit is to be taught on Rome, the teacher will make a list of the vocabulary words to be taught in the unit, geography concepts, famous Romans, wars, and so on, and will then test the students on their knowledge. The answers are usually open-ended: who was Tacitus? Who was Cicero? What is the name of the sea east of Italy? The results tell the teacher - and the students - what the students don't know; implied in the results are what the students need to know. Teacher and students are then ready to embark on the study.

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Similarly, all teachers take responsibility for students' being able to speak correctly, to write good English, to expand vocabulary, to add and subtract, to observe good health habits, to be safe, to have good attitudes toward school, and to learn about current events. The day of sending a student back a grade to learn something is, for the most part, a thing of the past.

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**4. Keeping a Studious Classroom**

Over the door in one studious classroom is a sign reading, "Quiet, please. Learning underway." Another classroom has a poster that says, "You are here to work." All the students not with the teacher are working independently. One student is writing an unknown word on the whiteboard, where the heading reads, "New vocabulary words." Later, the class will discuss the word, and each student will enter the word with its meaning in a notebook. On a corner of the whiteboard are the assignments for the day; separately, there are the assignments for the week - "Write one half page on your pet." "Find information (no more than half a page) on Apaches." "Write a number problem requiring division for the class to solve." "Look through the dictionary for a spelling word ending in 'tion'." Students are busily engaged in completing these assignments. Several students are finding information on Apaches, a current class topic; one student is using an encyclopedia; another is in the Internet. The student in the Internet has found some resources to write away for. Other students are working on worksheets and work from kits.

The teacher is not harassed. Students in this classroom are eager to produce and to have their work checked and sometimes expect more of the teacher than one person can do; consequently, the teacher limits his or her commitment: weekly written assignments must be no more than a page, monthly reports must be no more than two pages, etc.

Discipline in the studious classroom is a matter, first, of convincing the students of their ignorance. When a student misbehaves, the teacher calls out, "Who was the fourth president of the United States?" If the student answers, "James Madison," the teacher calls out, "What is the capital of Hungary?" The wrong answer is followed by a short lecture on how much the student has to learn and how short is the time for learning. Students in this classroom are not time wasters because they realize how much there is to learn.

Discipline in the studious classroom is also a matter of liking to learn. Students are convinced not only of their ignorance but also of the desirability of overcoming it. They diligently write vocabulary and spelling words in their notebooks. They use the dictionary, the encyclopedia, and other reference books. Each student keeps a notebook of half-page comments about books read.

Much teacher time is spent at the teacher's desk with a student. The teacher reads and corrects written assignments with the student. Math assignments are checked individually. Workbook pages are corrected. Since the teacher's time is valuable, work with any one student is limited to a few minutes; however, a few minutes devoted to overcoming a student's specific weaknesses or mistakes can be more valuable than much full-class instruction.

This is not to say that full-class instruction does not exist in the studious classroom. The teacher introduces new topics, explains principles and rules, such as in spoken and written language or math, and hears student reports. However, in general the students are working on their own.

At one time in the development of schooling it was thought that students should be generally social. Since many students would rather talk than learn, the consequence of a social classroom was much talk and little learning. Students have plenty of time for socializing outside of the classroom. The purpose of being in school is to learn. A poster in a classroom says, "There is a place for socializing. This is not it." Fortunately, learning can be interesting, and students who would rather talk can become absorbed in their work. Although being a student in the studious classroom is work, the rewards of this work are great.

Periodically, the teacher meets with each student to evaluate progress and to make decisions about appropriate learning materials. Because of limitations on the teacher's time, plans for work to be accomplished must cover at least a month. A student placed in a workbook or a kit works in that workbook or kit over a period of time. One criterion in selecting a workbook or kit is, how suitable is it for long-term use.

Students who lack commitment to their independent work find many ways to avoid it - horseplay with the student in the next seat, finding excuses for leaving the classroom, or bothering the teacher with questions. The committed student, on the other hand, devours more and more knowledge. Basic to the success of independent work is a student's commitment to it.

When a student recognizes his or her own ignorance and sees work as the way to overcome it, commitment grows. If the teacher tests often and tests widely, the teacher can say, you are weak in this area, and here is our plan for overcoming your weakness. The student, seeing his or her own ignorance, has a purpose for doing work. When the student is retested at the end of a period of independent work, he or she can see improvement.

When students are not naturally motivated, there are things that a teacher can do to obtain student commitment. The first question for a teacher to ask is, of course, is this work appropriate and not too difficult. Next, the teacher can give recognition to work accomplished. Putting a sticker on a child's completed work is still a welcomed sign of recognition. A gold star gives recognition on a checklist. An "A" at the top of a paper gives satisfaction (although anything less than an "A" does not). Positive recognition of a student's work, then, is basic to obtaining his or her commitment to it.

Record keeping, also, is basic to student commitment, because the student can see progress in the record. The student in a workbook or kit needs to keep a checklist, most likely in a three-ring binder, listing the work in the workbook or kit and showing checks for work completed. Sometimes, teachers make a wall chart with students' names and work undertaken; however, such a chart, put up for all to see, can be a daunting experience for the slow student, who sees very little on the chart next to his or her name compared with those galloping along.

**5. Obtaining Student Commitment to Independent Work**

First and foremost among learning materials for the independent learner are, of course, trade books and reference books. The wealth of offerings in all academic fields is staggering. The student who is a dedicated reader can find a great deal of interesting material, both fiction and nonfiction. The teacher looking for curriculum-relevant materials can take home an armload of books from the library.

However, anyone accompanying a class of students on a visit to the library will notice much aimless wandering among some students. It's as if there were too much offered, as if the offerings were overwhelming. From all this wealth some students can't find a single book they want. There are several reasons for this disappointing fact. First, the books that children look into are often too difficult for them. Poor readers in elementary schools shy away from "baby books" out of shame - they would rather walk away with nothing than have other children notice their weakness. Second, their interests are not well defined - they look here and there, not knowing what section of the library they want. The children interested in sports or animals or history are in those sections finding books, while the wanderers see so much and at the same time see nothing. Third, they have a poor understanding of library organization - they are in the fiction section when they should be in nonfiction or vice-versa.

Librarians and teachers, well aware of these problems, respond in several ways. Many of them construct grade-by-grade reading lists and then establish book clubs so that children receive credit for the listed books that they have read. While still in the classroom, teachers meet with students to set up objectives for a library visit so that even the wanderers have a purpose for the visit.

Several publishers, too, have come up with book lists. Learning Links, Houghton Mifflin, DC Heath, Harcourt Brace, and Dandy Lion, among others, offer sets of children's literature by grade level. These and other publishers also offer sets of theme-related trade books. Houghton Mifflin, for example, offers sets of mathematics-related trade books by grade level. Learning Links offers sets of graded books related to many topics: adventure, adult friends, animals, children as victims, city tales, coming of age, coping with divorce, country tales, and so on through survival and young classics; other sets of trade books from Learning Links are related to social studies, such as exploring ancient civilizations, immigrating to America, remembering the Holocaust, and saving our planet, among others. DC Heath offers sets of books by grade level. Royal Fireworks Press offers sets of Aesop's fables graded according to reading difficulty. ECS Learning Systems offers a set of trade books related to American history and another related to world history. The Harcourt Brace classroom collections are related by theme and author to their Student Anthologies.

Poor readers do better reading many easy books than reading one "challenging" book. If they are guided to the easy books and become enthused about reading, their reading abilities will grow. If they feel obliged to tackle the "challenging" book, they will become stuck; furthermore, their liking of reading will plummet, and the hope of their becoming lifelong readers will suffer a setback.

The enthusiastic, dedicated readers are never, as we all know, a classroom problem. They are eager to finish their assigned work so that they can get to the book waiting for them in their desk. They can then be seen absorbed in a world of history, science, sports, biography, humor, or fiction. Theirs is a great gift, which virtually everyone respects. As adults, they are the ones who can be seen on an airplane, bus, or subway transfixed by a book.

**6. Providing for Student Management of Classroom Materials**

Workbooks have often been criticized for being a mish-mash of lessons. A spelling workbook, for example, which is probably the most popular type of workbook, is often a mixture of spelling words, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization. It is no doubt true that not every student needs every exercise in a spelling workbook; however, individualization of instruction has not gotten (anywhere near) to the point where a student is working only on work that he or she needs. Many or most of the exercises in a student's workbook are probably useful. Workbooks are a marvelous invention and should not be readily dismissed. When students are properly placed in a good workbook, the workbook can keep them purposefully learning hour after hour. When students are working in a workbook, the teacher is free to work with other students.

Many of the learning materials referred to in the subject-matter lists (accessed from Chapter III ) are on blackline masters, that is, they are reproducible by the page. They can be copied in quantity and stored in folders, or they can be laminated as single copies. In any case, these kits must be organized and clearly labeled. One-time use of a kit is probably counterproductive because of management problems; a student who uses a kit should use the pages sequentially over a period of weeks or months. Records of a student's use of a kit must be kept, both by the teacher and by the student. The student manager of a kit must keep it orderly and stocked.

Because setting up a kit is time consuming, and keeping them stocked and in order is a problem, teachers should add kits slowly. They are wonderful only when well organized and purposefully used. A few kits in a classroom are often as many as a teacher can handle.

The kits to choose first are those that many students can use, such as creative writing kits, research project kits, or language skills kits. The kits for slow learners can come later. Also, it is best to choose kits that students can stick with for a period of weeks or months. The kits that students complete in a few days only add to the teacher's management problem.

**7. Choosing Learning Materials for the Independent Learner**

Novadays, there are thousands of available educational CD-ROM's and software programs ones that are curriculum related. However, there are many that a teacher might be interested in. One resource is the Children's Software Review, a database in America OnLine sponsored by HomePC magazine of more than 1,500 reviews of children's software. All product reviews are catalogued by title within an alphabetical index. Another resource is Superkids, available at

http://www.superkids.com

Still another review site on the Internet is

http://school.discovery.com/parents/reviewcorner/

Also available on the Internet is a comprehensive list of software - Children's Educational Software, categorized by grade level, available at

http://www.smartkidssoftware.com/grade.htm

There is a magazine called Children's Software Revue (note spelling). If you subscribe, you are authorized to see software reviews on the Internet.

When computers become more commonplace in classrooms, CD-ROM's and software will become more and more practical. With several computers available to a class, several students can use them; with workstations, the high cost of some software won't be such a drawback. As things now stand, with a limited number of computers in classroom or school, computers are soon overtaxed, and a school's or classroom's collection of available software is limited.

**8. Using Internet for self-independent learning**

There is such a wealth of information on the Internet that it must soon be a part of anyone's search for knowledge. At one time I was (mistakenly) diagnosed with a condition of excess iron in the blood called hemochromatosis. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the condition. My search, terminating (finally) with "medical articles," resulted in more than one hundred references to the condition. I selected three that seemed least esoteric and was able to download them for $1.50 apiece. Another time, I wanted to know the names of the full cast of the movie Pride and Prejudice with Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson. A search on the Internet gave me a list of all of the cast members. A search on almost any topic brings up an array of responses, which will grow as the Internet expands.

These searches do take time. The search for information about hemachromatosis took a couple of hours, and the search for the cast of Pride and Prejudice took at least three-quarters of an hour.

Practice with searching is necessary - the student can learn with practice to limit his or her searches so that Internet provides dozens instead of thousands of responses. www.altavista.com allows the user to surround a phrase with quotation marks, thus limiting the number of responses.

Before using the Internet, students will probably benefit from using a guide, such as Every Student's Guide to the Internet (Glencoe/McGraw Hill) or The Portable Learn the Net, found at www.learnthenet.com/english/index.html, which is the site, also, of on-line courses teaching use of the Internet.

The ACT Laboratory, through its Digital Education Network, has created InternetDEN, which offers online lessons that explain basic Internet tools and navigation: http://www.actden.com/

Most of the Internet's value to a student is the same as to an adult - providing information. However, there are some sites on the Internet specifically for students and children. Some of these are not as good as a book. Others, however, offer beautiful graphics, and still others are interactive.

The Internet is most valuable when the student has a purpose for using it. Without a clear purpose, a student can drown in a sea of trivia. Furthermore, in contrast with a book, magazine, or newspaper, on the Internet it is not easy to skim information, and so pulling information off the Internet can be less productive than getting information from a book, magazine, or newspaper.

Should classroom time be provided for gathering information from the Internet? In some cases, yes. However, the Internet can eat up much valuable classroom time. Certainly, it can serve as a supplement to classroom work when accessed from a student's home or from a school computer outside of classroom time.

**Sending Independent-Study Work Home**

How should a teacher respond to a student's request to work at home on independent-study materials? The teacher certainly doesn't want to stifle a student's interest; on the other hand, some students race through work so quickly that, instead of really learning, they are just covering ground. Furthermore, school materials that are safe in school are sometimes lost or damaged at home - "My dog chewed on it," the student says! Lastly, if the work requires checking, at a student's home the teacher is not at hand to check it. It is true that some parents are just as good at checking student work as the teacher, but others aren't. Then there is the student who does work at home and brings an armload of work to school for the teacher to check, expecting the teacher to spend an inordinate amount of precious class time doing so. For sure, the question of whether to send independent-study work home is not a simple one.

If the teacher does decide to allow independent-study materials to go home, the teacher must be particularly diligent to work with the student managers of kits and collections to be sure that they are keeping track of the materials. As any librarian knows, lost materials are a major headache. If possible, the teacher should keep a backup copy of the materials.

To those students who arrive at school with an armload of completed work, expecting the teacher to check it, the teacher should say, "Excellent! You have done a lot of work. Let's spot check it to see how conscientious you have been. If there are many mistakes, back you go to redo it."

Students who allow materials to be lost or damaged cannot be allowed to continue on their destructive path. On the other hand, their sentence shouldn't be forever. Once they commit to more responsible behavior, they should be given another chance.

Parents who are willing to work with their children are a godsend not only to their children but also to the teacher. The teacher provides the independent-study materials; the parents do the checking. However, sometimes parents are not knowledgeable enough to check their children's work, so the teacher must continue to spot check.

Navigate to Home Page "Students Can Learn On Their Own" - http://www.teacherneedhelp.com/ students/

1. See for example, http://www.ets.org/testcoll/index.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: ETS Test Collection Catalog" Oryx Press Pub. Barcelona 1992 or http://ericir.syr.edu [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Excellent resources are now available for finding tests. Buros Mental Measurements Yearbook and Buros Tests in Print have for many years been an excellent resource, and now, in addition, there is the Internet: http://www.ets.org/testcoll/index.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)