

# Independence and Individualization in the Classroom

## Shirley George

**From the student's viewpoint, individualization means** the opportunity to progress at his own rate and according to his potential without being pressured to keep up to the pace of anybody else. **For the teacher it means** the responsibility to plan instruction to meet the needs of individuals in a happy environment. **A synonym for independence** could be "self-reliance".

To accomplish individualization and independence within a classroom, the Blended Sound-Sight Program of Learning offers some effective tools such as

1. **Agenda Time [Work Period]**
2. **Silent reading Comprehension Files [an item included in the agenda]**
3. **Writing [composition] lessons**

In these three areas, individualization will be evident in the form of this model:

1. Teach new concepts to the **whole class** in a friendly and safe family atmosphere.
2. To meet individual needs, use **flexible groupings** such as the following:
  - a. The teacher conducts pupil-teacher conferences to determine and meet needs.
  - b. A temporary group of learners who have a common problem are helped by the teacher before the group is disbanded.
  - c. A remedial group is helped daily and consistently by the teacher as long as the need remains. Participants may be added or redirected as teacher assesses needs.
  - d. An accelerated group or one with a common interest may work periodically on a project with some guidance by the teacher.

In a classroom where these flexible groups are working, students who are not involved in the group must be able to work independently. Training in this area can be given early in September when Agenda Time is in its embryonic stage.

**Agenda Time** is a period when students work through a sequence of basic language arts tasks independently and individually. After finishing each task, they place their completed work in the teacher's post office and move on to the next item. Hoping to reach the list of optional tasks, students are motivated to work diligently and take ownership of their learning.

Setting Up Agenda Time

1. Focus on character development
  - a. Solve your own problem.
  - b. Wait to be acknowledged.
  - c. Treat others the way you want to be treated
2. Organize and plan for routines and location of materials.
3. Give clear expectations of acceptable standards for work
4. Teach and demonstrate each item on the agenda one at a time.
5. Use resources for the Agenda which promote independence and individualization

### **Silent Reading Comprehension Files**

One of the items which can be included on the Agenda list is the Files. While providing practice in comprehension and written communication skills, the files also promote independence and individualization. To make the task different from working in a workbook and to try to imitate an office environment, which most students enjoy, the teacher places file sheets and dividers into boxes to represent a filing cabinet.

The A files have sheets which are numbered sequentially 1,2,3,4, etc. In the B files, there are three levels of difficulty. The practice pages, numbered 1a,1b,1c etc. give students opportunity to learn the concept. The application pages, numbered 2a,2b,2c,2d etc. allow students to apply the concept to a new situation. Finally the enrichment pages which are numbered 4a,4b,4c etc. challenge students to employ a higher level of thinking. In some files, there are test pages 3a,3b etc.

Teachers can create their own materials or purchase the Blended Sound-Sight files which cover a variety of skills in language and vocabulary as well as comprehension.

### **Writing**

Independence and individualization are incorporated into writing lessons. Teaching new concepts, such as introducing a new sentence starter, to the whole class, a teacher makes every learner feel accepted in the family setting. Contributing to oral suggestions and discussions, each student is exposed to the many repetitions needed for mastery.

Individual needs are addressed through these strategies.

1. assignments of various levels, with various expectations
2. writing checklists which focus on structure and style
3. individual conferences with the teacher to discuss student compositions
4. feedback from the teacher through lessons, comments or notes
5. sharing with peers to provide inspiration and increase learning
6. encouraging students to take risks because "A mistake is an opportunity to learn."

The development and promotion of independent work habits occurs all day long.

All of these techniques and strategies are explained in The Blended Sound-Sight Program of Learning by A.G. Ingham

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The writing aspects mentioned here are described in JB Webster's book, Blended Structure and Style in Composition