

DO SCHOOLS NEED IPI? YES!

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EDUCATORS and parents across the country seem to agree that a system of individualized instruction is much needed in our schools today. This has been evident to any parent who has raised more than one child and to every teacher who has stood in front of a class. The big question has always been: "How do you do it?"

Background

Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI) represents one approach to individualization for children. The original developmental effort of the IPI system took place at the Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh. Field testing, field development, and dissemination have been conducted by Research for Better Schools, Inc. (RBS), located in Philadelphia. IPI has been carefully engineered with quality control during installation. Teachers and children have had a lot to do with its development. Robert G. Scanlon of RBS says¹:

IPI is not a new set of ideas but a reexamination and re-assembly of many curriculum developments. IPI is a vehicle that allows the

teacher to monitor each child's progress but more important it allows each child to monitor his own behavior in a particular subject.

IPI is a systematic approach to learning. Scanlon points out:

It is based on a set of specified objectives correlated with diagnostic instruments, curriculum materials, teaching techniques, and management capabilities. The objectives of the system are:

1. To permit student mastery of instructional content at individual learning rates
2. To ensure active student involvement in the learning process
3. To encourage student involvement in learning through self-directed and self-initiated activities
4. To encourage student evaluation of progress toward mastery
5. To provide instructional materials and techniques based on individual needs and styles.²

IPI is currently being used in over 300

²Robert G. Scanlon and Mary V. Brown. "Individualizing Instruction." *Planned Change in Education*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.

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¹ Robert G. Scanlon. "The Expansion of an Innovation." *Audiovisual Instruction* 13 (9): 946-48; November 1968.



Photos courtesy Research for Better Schools, Inc.

Programmed instruction seeks to provide mastery at individual learning rates.

elementary schools, with 85,000 students in the program. Feedback from these schools has expressed many advantages for the students, teachers, and parents. Let us look at IPI from a visitor's viewpoint.

School Visit

Upon entering the school, I was informed by the secretary that the principal was not in his office. She explained that he was in the conference room with four teachers, having their twice-weekly conference relating to individual students. We were invited to sit in on the session.

It became evident to me immediately that the conferees seemed genuinely interested in their discussion of individual student problems. The principal had reviewed the progress of each student in the teachers' classes. He pointed out that some of the students had not gained in achievement within the past week. Plans were made to improve the progress of each student. The principal reminded each teacher that progress would be reviewed again the next week. The teachers seemed to show that the old possessiveness complex that "these are my 30 kids and you tend your own 'store'" had fallen by the way.

The principal was politely active in the conference, showing that he was interested in the progress each student was making.

He wanted to get to know about his own school problems and progress and made it plain that if he is to be held accountable for his school's progress, knowledge about the curriculum is necessary. Obviously he preferred to spend his time making instructional decisions instead of taking care of bus schedules and collecting milk money.

A sixth grade student came to the conference room to give me a short orientation upon what to look for during a visit to the classroom. During this time and later, in conversations with students in the hallway going from their classroom to the material center or vice versa, I found their views intriguing.

One fifth grade boy said: "I like IPI because it really puts your brain to work to get smarter." A fifth grade girl said: "You don't have any homework. You don't do work you already know." Another said: "I like IPI because I can go as fast as my brain can go." A sixth grade boy said: "The only thing I don't like is waiting for a prescription, because while you are waiting you lose time to work." A fourth grade girl said: "One thing I don't like about IPI mathematics is that if you don't know something, in the other mathematics I could go on but in this mathematics I wait to learn it." A fifth grade boy said: "I like everything about IPI, so I don't have nothing to say."

Walking from classroom to classroom,



Students seem to have greater interest in schoolwork with IPI.



Individual conferences enable the teacher to monitor each child's progress.

noticing the freedom in the halls, I took the opportunity to ask a second grade student just where he was going. He remarked: "I've just been to the material room to pick up my post-test and I hope you won't talk to me too long, because I'm in a hurry to return to my classroom and take this test."

When I entered Mrs. Davis' classroom, the partition to the next room had been rolled back and an IPI mathematics class was in progress. It was interesting to note the work of the teacher's aide. Mrs. Davis said that "The aide's most important function is the scoring, recording, and filing of students' test and skill sheets; but aides do interact with students and are often asked to take further responsibilities within the classroom."

Mrs. Davis spoke of a recent IPI Teachers' Conference and related statements that were made by the teachers in their summarization of the changing role. She is no longer a dispenser of information but a diagnostician of learning problems. Furthermore, a shift of responsibility from the teacher to the student, with the teacher being more responsive to students' needs, is obvious. For IPI to be effective, more communi-

cation and cooperation among teachers and administration are needed. Teachers are less active and more re-active to students.

The teachers pointed out that parents at first were somewhat confused, especially with the grading system. One parent remarked that she was astounded when her third grade boy came home with an F3 for his mathematics grade. She said her son was quick to inform her that this grade was good; it meant that he was really doing what she knew as fourth grade mathematics; that he was on level F, unit 3, of the mathematics curriculum. And the parent remarked that she was pleased with the system because there was so little, if any, homework required, and the interest in attending school was most gratifying. Still another parent remarked that her children seemed to have a greater interest in what they were learning.

In summary, individual differences do exist. Most teachers want review materials and management techniques to help meet their differences. IPI is a step toward the superior classroom, because the system includes material that can be used independently, allowing each child to learn at his own rate and realize success. The technology, training program, and management technique give the teacher tools for assessment, mastery measurement, and specified management techniques. One of the best



The IPI system includes material that can be used independently.



Instructional materials and techniques are based on individual needs.

features of IPI is the assumption that it is never completed; and with the feedback mechanism, it can constantly be renewed.

IPI is one system that can meet the needs of our exciting changing world; if for

no other reason, it has helped change the attitude and interest of many students in learning to learn. Furthermore IPI brings a new instructional technology and classroom management to the teachers of America.

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