

FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

PREPARATION OF LIFE EXPERIENCE UNITS FOR TEACHING THE EDUCABLE MENTALLY RETARDED

By Edward L. Meyen¹

TEACHER PREPARED INSTRUCTIONAL UNITS

The emphasis on a "practical" approach to teaching academic skills and the teaching of social skills to the educable mentally retarded has resulted in unit teaching becoming a popular technique among special class teachers. In spite of the popularity of this approach, attempts to design and experiment with guidelines to assist teachers in writing and teaching units have been minimal, so, procedures for developing units tend to be unique to the teacher preparing them. This is reflected in the units which have been published, as well as in the large number of curriculum guides developed by local school districts. For the most part, such units tend to be more informational than skill oriented. Relevant information on a particular theme serves as the vehicle for unit teaching and to a certain extent sets the dimensions of the unit. However, the attention given to the systematic teaching of specific academic and social skills, within the framework of the informational aspects, might well yield the greatest return from the unit teaching technique.

Administrators, researchers, and informed observers have been quick to point out the inadequacies of unit teaching as typically applied in special classes for the mentally retarded. Their criticism centers on the lack of internal consistency and sequencing of skills within units, and the failure of most teachers to formulate a structure for teaching units. Such views are realistic concerns and warrant the attention of teachers and teacher educators who espouse the unit method of teaching.

This article is in response to the above stated concerns. The purpose is to present directives for the development of Life Experience Units, and to discuss their use with educable mentally retarded children. This material is not intended to suggest that unit teaching is a new concept in methodology, nor that the instructional skills required in teaching units to the mentally retarded are unique. Rather, the emphasis is on the systematic development of Life Experience Units. The suggested approach is based on the premise that the development of units should be more than the arbitrary selection of unit topics and the utilization of what may or may not be appropriate activities.

Teachers vary in the amount of emphasis they give to unit teaching in their instructional programs. Some use units mainly to teach information relative to special events. Others employ units as a major component of the curriculum. Regardless of the amount of use made of units in the educational program, it is the teacher's re-

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sponsibility to be as effective as possible in developing meaningful learning experiences.

Any discussion of unit teaching for the mentally retarded must acknowledge the significance of decisions made by teachers in the formulation of their instructional programs. Inherent in these teacher decisions should be a clarification of the emphasis given to unit teaching in the educational program. An equally important decision relates to the structuring of units which reflect both scope and sequence in the presentation of information, and the teaching of basic skills.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTRUCT

The Life Experience Unit approach is based on six core areas of learning experiences: arithmetic concepts, communication skills, social competencies, safety, health, and vocational skills.

The emphasis is on integrating skills and concepts from all core areas into each unit. This requires considerable planning on the part of the teacher. The reason for the integrated approach is to make the units comprehensive and to avoid an overemphasis on the informational aspects of units. While learning experiences in all core areas are developed for each unit, the relative emphasis on the different core areas will vary. For example, a unit on measurement lends itself more readily to the development of arithmetic skills than to skills in the other core areas. However, meaningful experiences in the other core areas can also be planned. The outcome is a unit with a major strength in one core area, but couched in a context which also allows for the teaching of skills from the other core areas.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication skills are probably the least difficult

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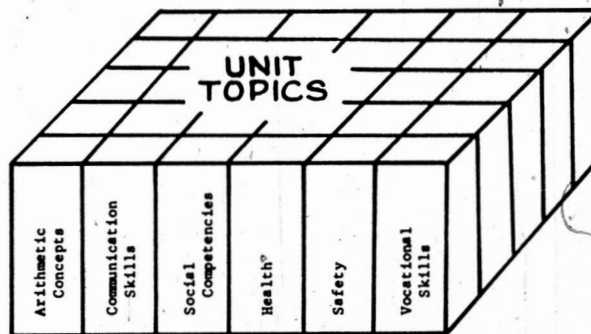
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of the core areas to integrate into a Life Experience Unit. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are the major elements. Although reading and writing experiences cannot be overstressed, speaking or the use of conversational speech should not be neglected. Conversational speech will generally be used much more by the retarded than reading or writing. The ultimate aim of this core is teaching a functional vocabulary for speaking, listening, and recognition.

ARITHMETIC CONCEPTS

The arithmetic core should be geared to the teaching of arithmetic skills, including number facts and an understanding of their uses. Consideration must also be given to teaching concepts of measurement, time, money, comparisons, etc. When developing units for the educable mentally retarded, one must capitalize on every opportunity to introduce arithmetic concepts.

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

The importance of this core cannot be overemphasized. Regardless of the child's achievement in learning other skills, the success of the retarded in becoming socially and occupationally accepted will depend, to a large extent, upon his possession of good attitudes and social traits. Most units offer unlimited opportunities for the introduction of this core. The retardate needs to be taught how to get along with others, the social graces of having guests and being a guest, desirable social habits expected by employers, plus many more of sufficient importance to be included in a curriculum for educable mentally retarded. It is the lack of acceptable social attitudes and traits that often sets the retardate off and away from his peer group. He becomes stereotyped because of social incompetencies.

HEALTH

The majority of units lend themselves to reinforcing this core. There is a strong tie, for instance, between the

health core and social competencies cores, for the retarded child must develop good health habits if he is to be accepted by society. Health should provide learning experiences relative to cleanliness, good grooming, dental care, food, growth, the preparation of meals, and other topics. These children should be taught proper health habits in using public facilities as well as personal hygiene.

SAFETY

The effect of the safety core is realized in the child's mobility, his participation in school, his use of leisure time, and in his occupational pursuits. The acquisition of comprehensive safety practices necessitates continued emphasis on this core, as the retardate must be aware of safety hazards at home, at school, and on the job. Almost every unit provides such opportunities. However, when selecting units applicable to a specific level, consideration must be given to those having potential for teaching safety habits that are consistent with present needs.

VOCATIONAL SKILLS

At the primary level, vocational skills will take the form of skills such as following directions, being punctual, and working cooperatively. At the junior and senior high levels, they will be more directly related to work experience. Increased consideration should be given to such vocational skills as (1) applying for a job, (2) completing application forms, and (3) good work habits on the intermediate and pre-vocational levels. However, the development of good attitudes and responsibility should begin at the primary level and continue to receive consideration at the upper levels.

DEVELOPMENTAL STEPS TO WRITING LIFE EXPERIENCE UNITS

Many teachers approach the writing of units by briefly noting the major points to be covered. Others develop an outline of content and resources relevant to a particular topic. Although some teachers may teach a successful unit in spite of minimal planning, there is considerable room for error. It is also likely that the unit will be less comprehensive than if a major investment had been made in planning the unit. Coupled with these disadvantages, the unit also has little meaning for other teachers.

In view of the paucity of instructional materials designed for use with the mentally retarded, it is important that care be taken in the structuring of teacher-made materials so they can be shared. This must be accomplished without adding to the burden of the teacher. If a conceptual framework can be agreed upon among special

class teachers, and if teachers are willing to write out their units, then the plans they teach from can also be exchanged with their colleagues. This approach will have a cumulative effect and will result in a resource of teaching materials.

The position taken here is that if Life Experience Units constitute a substantial portion of the curriculum, then the teacher is obligated to plan the units in detail. While the process of systematically developing units may be time-consuming, it becomes less difficult as the teacher acquires skill in writing units. Although the approach proposed here is not necessarily unique, it does require the teacher to complete prescribed steps. The process is divided into two areas: preliminary steps and lesson plans.

Preliminary Steps

Keep in mind that the purpose of the preliminary steps is to evaluate the potential of the unit, and in the process to generate a resource of ideas on content, materials, and techniques relative to the unit topic. To facilitate this effort, questions are used to introduce each step. It should also be noted that in preliminary steps the teacher is not attempting to write them in final form. Rather, the steps are merely intended as a planning process preliminary to the actual writing of lesson plans. The lesson plans will be the body of the unit and will be discussed following this section.

- I. **RATIONALE:** Select the unit you plant to teach. (What are the reasons for teaching this particular unit at the present time?)
 - A. When selecting a unit, you should consider the contributions that the unit can make to the total curriculum.
 1. Review the units that have previously been taught.
 2. Concern yourself with the needs of the class with respect to strengths and weaknesses in different core areas.
 3. Unless past experience with the class indicates a definite need for concentrated work in one core area, refrain from teaching more than one unit with major emphasis on the same core simultaneously.
 4. Your personal interest is a poor criterion.
 - B. State your rationale in the form of a broad descriptive statement.
 1. It should reflect the basic reasons for teaching the unit.
 2. The statement should also suggest the major results expected from that unit.

II. SUB-UNITS: A sub-unit is a fairly specific topic which is closely related to the basic theme. For example, food, animals, and family might be sub-units in a unit on a farm. (What are the possible related themes on which lessons can be grouped within the context of the unit topic?)

A. At this stage the actual generation of ideas about the content and direction of your unit begins to take place. These sub-units will later represent collections of possible lessons. It is also quite probable that many sub-unit topics will be deleted as planning progresses.

1. This is the first test of the potential of the unit topic. If it is difficult to develop a list of more than five sub-unit topics, then the basic theme is probably too narrow.
2. This is the *key* step in reducing later efforts. Two or three lessons can easily be developed on each sub-unit. If the teacher does a good job of identifying sub-units relevant to the basic theme, then the lessons suggested by the sub-units will be interrelated.

B. Determining Sub-Units:

1. The sub-units should reinforce the basic unit.
2. Sub-units can be utilized to strengthen core areas in which the basic units show evidence of being weak.
3. Listing possible sub-units will facilitate the organization of learning experiences and activities pertaining to the unit.
4. What appear to be logical sub-units should first be listed in random order.
5. Then they should be organized into a sequential pattern.

III. GENERAL OBJECTIVES: The general objectives should suggest areas in which lessons can be developed but they should not be as specific as the instructional objectives which will appear in the lesson plans. The purpose of this step is to ascertain the comprehensiveness of the unit through the development of general objectives related to the unit topic. (What are the major goals of the unit?)

A. Follow an outline form in stating objectives.

1. State the objectives.
2. Following the objectives, briefly list information which helps convey the intent.

B. Keep the ability level of the class members in mind when writing the objectives.

C. The objectives will later serve as a guide for the selection and development of lessons.

IV. CORE ACTIVITIES: It is important that the core areas be well represented in each unit. The intent of this step is to encourage teachers to identify actual activities which can be utilized to teach each of the core areas. In other words, the teacher is asked to list specific activities he might use to teach arithmetic, social communication, safety, health, and vocational skills. Later, when writing lesson plans, the teacher can refer to list of core area activities in selecting activities for individual lessons. (What activities can be used to teach the core area skills related to the unit topic?)

A. This is an important step in the development of a well-balanced unit. If this step is well done the task of writing actual lessons is made easier.

B. This step is also a "test" to determine the strength of the unit in the different core areas.

C. Organizing activities.

1. Sometimes it is helpful to list random activities that are related to your basic unit, then categorize them according to basic core areas.
2. Arrange activities in some order convenient for use. Review each core area and weed out duplications. Also, check to be sure they are properly categorized by core areas. Compare the activities with the pattern of sub-units developed in Step II. Again, the purpose is to generate ideas on activities and techniques so that a resource is available to draw upon when writing lesson plans.

V. RESOURCE MATERIAL: (What resource materials and/or people would be appropriate in teaching a unit?)

A. Compile a list of resource materials and people for possible utilization in teaching the unit.

B. There is generally an unlimited supply of materials for any given unit topic. These materials are available in many forms and from various sources.

1. Free and inexpensive materials from commercial companies, Chambers of Commerce, various civic departments, etc.
2. Field trips should be utilized to supplement units.
3. There is a wealth of material in the form of visual aids, films, records, magazines, newspapers and disposable items which may also be used to advantage.
4. The construction of model stores, banks, and post offices may be used when they facilitate the understanding of a concept.

C. Resource people may be brought into the classroom

for demonstration, discussion, evaluation, or stimulation purposes.

1. Resource people may be used to advantage prior to and immediately following a field trip.
2. This provides an opportunity to evaluate the children's oral discussion, and also their social attitudes in reference to having a guest in the classroom.
3. Use of Resource People
 - (a) They should understand the nature of their audience.
 - (b) The assignment should be clear to them. It may be helpful to provide them a list of questions in advance which could be discussed with the children.
 - (c) The children should be prepared for the visit.
 - (d) Their evaluation of the activity should be gained through a follow-up session.

VI. **VOCABULARY:** What words can most easily be taught in relation to this unit topic?)

- A. One of the principal contributions which a Life Experience Unit should make to the retarded child's education is that of helping him develop a useful vocabulary. This vocabulary should include words which are relevant for speaking, writing, listening, and reading.
- B. Compile a basic list of words which are particularly relevant to the unit topic.
 1. Be alert for opportunities to integrate these words into lessons in a meaningful way.
 2. Allow for frequent written and spoken repetition of the vocabulary words.
 3. Provide opportunities for the children to use these words.
 4. Provide opportunities for review of vocabulary words previously introduced in teaching other units.
- C. In listing the vocabulary words considered crucial to the unit topic, the teacher should keep in mind that the children will undoubtedly come up with additional words which should be included in the vocabulary list.

If the preliminary steps have been well developed the teacher should have a resource of ideas regarding the content and scope of the unit from which to draw in writing lessons. The steps were designed to require the teacher to test the potential of the theme, while in the process of preparing the unit. At this point each step should be reviewed in terms of its contribution to the lessons which need to be developed. The cumulative effect of complet-

ing the various steps should be kept in mind as each step is reviewed individually.

Preparing Lesson Plans

Having completed the preliminary steps, the task of writing the lessons should be relatively easy. Teachers will want to make frequent reference to the various preliminary steps as they enter the lesson writing phase. The major purpose thus far has been to maximize the teacher's knowledge of content and methodology most relevant to the selected unit topic.

The approach proposed for developing units places considerable emphasis upon the design of lessons. Teachers are encouraged to carefully write out the lessons in advance. This does not mean that each lesson should be written exactly as the teacher anticipates the teaching of the lesson. Rather, the lessons should be sufficiently descriptive so they are meaningful to other teachers. They should also be written so that the teacher, in reviewing the unit a year or more later, will be able to determine the basic information, concepts, and skills emphasized in the unit. This is important for the development of other units, as well as for communicating to future teachers the instructional program provided the pupil while in a specific class.

If the unit being planned is likely to require four to six weeks to teach, it may be advisable to write the first 10 to 15 lessons in detail, and merely to outline the remainder of the lessons. Once the unit is under way, and it is possible to anticipate whether you have overlooked any major area of content in your preliminary planning, the remaining lessons can be developed.

Suggested Format

Scope of Lesson and Instructional Objectives	Activities	Resource Materials	Experience Chart
Scope: _____ _____ _____			
Objectives: _____ _____ _____			

COLUMN I: *Scope of Lesson, and Instructional Objectives.*

Column I of the suggested lesson plan format provides for a description of the lesson to be taught, as well as

the specification of the behavior of the students which hopefully will be changed as a result of the lesson. Although the "Scope of the Lesson" and the "Instructional Objective" represent two distinct functions on the part of the teacher in writing the lesson, they are interrelated to the degree that they are completed as one task.

Scope of Lesson: The purpose of stating the "Scope of Lesson" is to require the teacher to decide the general content of each lesson prior to stating specific instructional objectives or selecting activities. Once the scope of the lesson has been decided, the alternatives relative to objectives, activities, and resources have been narrowed. In reviewing Steps II and III, of the preliminary steps pertaining to Sub-units and General Objectives, the teacher has an immediate resource of ideas from which to select meaningful lessons. Having organized the general objectives from Step III into a logical sequence, the task becomes one of taking a general objective from Step III and restating it as the "Scope of the Lesson." It should be noted that you may need to develop a number of lessons which are not initially reflected in the general objectives. Thus, in developing lessons, don't restrict yourself to the topics implied by the general objectives in Step III; situations will probably occur which will cause your unit to move in a direction you had not anticipated.

In stating the scope of the lesson you are actually writing a reminder to yourself as to the content of the lesson. In reference to Sample I, you will note that the "scope of lesson" resembles an objective. The differences are that it relates to the total lesson, does not focus on the individual student, and is placed in a context which suggests that it is written for you, the teacher.

Sample 1

SCOPE OF LESSON:

Introduce the students to examples of rules and laws.

Establish an understanding of the difference between rules and laws.

Stimulate thinking relative to the consequences of breaking laws.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

To be able to give definitions acceptable to the teacher for the words "rules" and "laws."

To be able to list people who enforce various rules and laws.

Although the statements should be kept brief, they should cover the major content, concepts, and/or skills which you anticipate teaching through the lesson. For many classes of retarded children, a lesson will focus on only a single concept. As a result, the scope of the lesson statement will also focus on only a single concept and be brief. With more advanced students their attention span will be longer and their comprehension better; thus, the scope of the lesson may be comprised of three or four major statements.

The advantage of identifying the scope of the lesson is that it helps you keep the lessons relevant to the unit theme. You can review the "scope of lesson" statements for 10 or 15 lessons and have an immediate check on whether or not you are keeping within the realm of your unit theme. This, of course, assumes that you teach what you imply in the "scope of lesson" statements.

In writing the scope of lesson statements, write them as notes to yourself. Say to yourself, "I am going to . . . teach, introduce, review, present, orient, establish, stimulate, etc." then proceed to indicate the information, concept, or skill involved. Complete sentences are not necessary if you consistently begin with a verb. This type of phrasing implies you are referring to yourself, the teacher, as the subject.

Instructional Objectives: In Step III of the preliminary steps, it was suggested that you identify the general, or major, objectives for the unit. While you were encouraged to be explicit, the point was made that, in the preliminary planning, you were concerned primarily with the overall unit and not individual lessons; it was permissible to be general in the statement of objectives. However, in stating instructional objectives for particular lessons the circumstances change considerably. It now becomes necessary to be very specific in stating objectives.

The instructional objectives determine all aspects of the lessons, with the emphasis being on the desires or behavior of the students. They provide the basis for selecting activities as well as resource people. They also influence the content of the experience charts. Unless the objectives are well stated, the teacher will probably enter the teaching of the lesson with only a vague idea of what the students should gain as a result of that lesson. Well-designed objectives are necessary for every lesson. The cumulative effect of stating instructional objectives for each lesson throughout a unit has its greatest impact in the realm of evaluation. In essence, the instructional objectives serve as the criteria for assessing pupil progress.

The instructional objectives should describe what the student should know or be able to do as a result of participating in the lesson. The objective should focus on the learner, not the teacher. In developing lesson plans for Life Experience Units, the instructional objectives serve as the basis on which the lesson is built.

Teaching is aimed at changing the behavior of the student. Behavior means the performance of the child. In other words, if you have been successful in teaching a particular concept to the student, then there should be some change in what the student is now able to do. This change may be reflected in his performance of selected overt tasks or in verbal responses. The objective may be to teach the child to count five objects. You must, therefore, structure a situation in which the child is called upon to count five objects. Then you can determine whether or not the objective has been met.

Suggested Steps For Writing Instructional Objectives For Life Experience Units.

1. Use the scope of the lesson statements and the ability of the students as your frame of reference. The objective should directly relate to the content suggested in the scope of the lesson. Knowledge of student performance is necessary if the objectives are to reflect reasonable expectation in terms of the abilities of the students.
2. Identify the specific behavior you wish to establish and determine the level of performance which you will accept as successful attainment of the objective. For example, if you are teaching the use of the telephone to a primary age group of educable mentally retarded youngsters, the desired behavior may be to have the students successfully dial their home phone numbers.
3. The instructional objectives should suggest the conditions under which the desired behavior should occur. For example, if you write John's phone number on the chalkboard and then ask him to dial the number, this is a less difficult task than asking him to recall his phone number and dial it accurately. An additional task would be involved if you merely gave him a person's name and asked the student to call him. In this case the student must also be able to use a phone directory. The student who is capable of handling the latter situation is performing at a level higher than the child who can only manage to complete the first example. Therefore, the teacher needs to make the instructional objective explicit so that the conditions under which the task is to be performed are also obvious.
4. In stating the instructional objectives, use phrases such

as "to be able to . . . write, recall, identify, contrast, solve, create, etc."

Sample 2

Examples of Instructional Objectives:

To be able to choose appropriate clothing, given an example of a social situation and weather conditions.

To be able to identify cities, towns, highways and rivers on a specific road map.

To show competence in check writing and bank book balancing by performing the assorted operations satisfactorily in a testing situation.

To be able to demonstrate understanding of the concepts of tallest, shortest, middle sized by choosing appropriate objects.

To be able to name a body part from a description of it.

To be able to read and verbalize the correct time, given various position on a demonstration clock.

5. Keep in mind that if you are to ascertain if the students have attained the objective, it will be necessary to evaluate their performance. Be alert for techniques which you can employ for this evaluation. In many cases the evaluation can take place through observation and other informal techniques. There will, however, be times when it will be necessary to develop test items, role playing situations, or other formal means of evaluation.

Column II: *Activities.*

In Column I, the emphasis was on specifying the content of the lesson and how the behavior of the students should change as a result of participating in the lesson. Thus, the direction of the lesson has been determined, and the task is now one of designing activities which can be used to carry out the objectives of the lesson. In Step IV of the preliminary steps, activities were identified which pertain to the unit theme and which are also applicable in teaching information and/or skills relative to the six core areas. Consequently, you have a resource of relevant activities from which to select in developing the experiences for each lesson in the unit.

Prior to deciding on activities for particular lessons,

review Step IV and V of the preliminary steps. This will remind you of the array of activities and resources which are relevant to the unit theme.

Conditions To Be Met When Selecting Activities

1. The selected activities must allow for the teaching of specified instructional objectives. This does not mean that additional information or skills cannot be taught. Rather, it is to reinforce the point that the objectives determine what is to be accomplished through the lesson, and the activities represent how the material is to be taught.
2. The activities must be commensurate with the abilities of the pupils. Many activities are not successful with retarded pupils because they are too difficult or because the tasks involved are foreign to the pupils. The teacher must know the ability level and experimental background of his pupils, as well as the subject matter of the unit given, prior to selecting activities for a given lesson.
3. As previously discussed, certain unit topics lend themselves to teaching information and skills in one core area, whereas they contribute fewer opportunities to present learning tasks related to other core areas. The teacher must take advantage of this situation. For example, if a unit on measurement is being planned, the teacher will want to select a number of arithmetic-type activities because the teaching of certain measurement concepts relates closely to arithmetic. The selection of activities must also be geared to the needs of the pupils in the different core areas.
4. Keep the activities meaningful. It is important for the mentally retarded to see some application of what you ask him to do. It is difficult for the retarded to understand that he may later have a need for something you want to teach him now. So, emphasis should be given to practical application.
5. Plan for evaluation. Since the activities column is used in this guide for recording how the lesson is to be taught, reference should also be made to evaluating what is taught. Some activities in a teaching sequence are evaluative in nature—for example, asking pupils to list specific information. In other cases the teacher may not record evaluation techniques for each lesson; however, he should make a practice of noting appropriate means of assessing pupil performance.
6. Plan for use of experience charts, since the approach taken in this guide to the teaching of units makes considerable use of them.

Guidelines To Describing Activities In The Lesson Plan Format

1. Sufficient narrative information should be included so that another teacher reading the lesson plan would be able to relate the suggested activities to the instructional objectives.
2. List the activities in the order you anticipate using them in your teaching procedures. Of course, the sequence should remain flexible; however, ordering the activities in a logical sequence will add meaning for persons who may read the lesson plans.
3. Resource materials or persons should be identified in Column III in close proximity to the activity in which they are to be used. Complete bibliographical data should be listed for books and other printed matter used.
4. If seatwork is to be used, it should be identified in the activities column but placed in the appendix of the unit or attached to the page on which the activity is described. The important thing is to sufficiently identify the exercise so that there is no question regarding which particular seatwork exercise is being referred to. Seatwork can and should involve things in addition to worksheets and other duplicated materials—for example, copying an experience chart story to include in a student notebook, comparing prices used in newspaper advertisements, etc.
5. Plan for teaching the vocabulary words identified in Step VI of the preliminary steps.

Column III: *Resource Materials*

Column III should be used to identify the resources you plan to use in your lesson. The selection of resources will depend on the activities which have been planned. In Step V of the preliminary steps, an inventory of resource materials, persons, and field trips was developed, and should be reviewed when choosing resources for the lesson. In the lesson plan, it is important that they appear alongside the activity in which they are to be used and that they be well documented. The latter involves including all necessary information for ordering a film, book or other instructional material. In the case of field trips the place, address, and key contact person should be specified. Resource people should be listed by name and address, or if you are mainly interested in using a person representative of a particular occupation, merely listing the occupation would be sufficient in the planning steps.

Column IV: *Experience Charts*

The use of experience charts has long been a popular tool for teachers of language arts, particularly, beginning

reading. Although the technique has retained its popularity, its application in the classroom varies considerably from teacher to teacher. Some teachers use experience charts merely to record information, e.g., daily weather report, student jobs for the week, and special events; others use them as the focal point in the development of stories in teaching. In the use of Life Experience Units with the educable mentally retarded, however, experience charts can serve a more significant purpose. They can provide a means for teaching subject matter, as well as an effective tool in the teaching of academic skills. This expanded use of experience charts is central to the process of unit teaching presented in this guide.

In regular classes we find a wide array of printed material through which the subject matter of the curriculum is conveyed. This is not the situation in special classes for the educable mentally retarded. While there are some texts specifically written for the mentally retarded, the teacher typically is forced to modify regular material to the needs of the mentally retarded. Herein lies a major use of experience charts in teaching the mentally retarded—they can be effectively used in teaching subject matter. As discussed in the introduction of this guide, Life Experience Units should be used to teach content as well as to develop skills. The content of a unit becomes the subject matter.

1. *They add continuity to your unit.* If an experience chart is developed as part of each lesson, an accumulation of subject matter evolves through the series of experience charts. Charts from previous lessons can serve to stimulate the thinking of the students on the theme of the unit. At the completion of the unit, the experience chart represents a text of the unit, with the order of experience charts representing the sequence in which the unit lessons were taught.
2. *They provide a source for review.* The experience charts can serve as the focal point for reviewing a particular lesson or the complete unit, and they become a permanent source of review. Even as much as a year later the charts can be used to review the basic content taught through the unit. Since the students contributed to building the chart and have read them numerous times during the teaching of the unit, the experience chart, as a review technique, is very concrete and meaningful. Without such a source, the review of units often falls into the realm of discussing scanty information on the unit topic, or the review of student projects which, typically, are not inclusive of all the concepts or information covered in the unit when it was originally taught.

3. *They serve as an attention-holding device.* Many teachers encounter difficulty in teaching units because they persist in "talking" rather than teaching. Even with good listening skills, such an approach is not very appealing. Although student participation in activities can be encouraged and various audio-visual techniques employed, a need still exists for a center of attraction. The experience chart fulfills this need if appropriately used. The experience chart should be developed through the lesson and not merely as a culminating activity. As the children contribute to building the chart, the experience chart comes to be viewed as the production of the lesson, and consequently the focus of their attention.

DEVELOPING EXPERIENCE CHARTS

Although the experience chart is placed last on the lesson plan format, the teacher must begin to think about what he hopes to record on the chart as he begins to specify the instructional objectives for a given lesson. When the scope of the lesson has been determined and the instructional objectives completed, you should have in mind the specific information you anticipate recording on the chart during the lesson. This is not to suggest that you should attempt to obtain from the students during the lesson the exact wording included in your lesson plan. Rather, the teacher should write down in the experience chart column the major points he hopes to gain from the students during the lesson. It then becomes the teacher's responsibility to stimulate discussion in order to obtain the desired response.

The content specified in the lesson plan, as well as the content which results from the lesson, should reflect the scope of the lesson statements and the instructional objectives. The activities listed in the activities column may or may not be referred to on the experience chart. If a demonstration is provided or a field trip is taken during the lesson, then the experience chart will probably contain information on the lesson activities. However, if the activities involve an exercise in making change, or a task which is incidental to the theme of the unit, it may not be reflected in the experience chart. Here are some suggestions for planning experience charts in your lesson plans:

1. Plan an experience chart for each lesson.
2. In writing your experience chart as part of the lesson plan, write it as you would hope the children will develop it. Don't describe it. For example, don't say, "Identify safety rules." Instead, specify the rules in your plan. The process of writing the charts out

in detail in your plan is excellent practice. It allows you an opportunity to evaluate the relevance of the content to the unit theme. It also affords you a chance to plan for the inclusion of specific vocabulary words on the experience chart.

3. Review the scope of the lesson statements and the instructional objectives prior to writing the experience chart in the lesson plan. Be sure the content of the chart relates to the scope and instructional objectives.
4. Review previous experience charts. Avoid redundant wording. For example, if a previous lesson begins, "Today we . . ." vary the beginning of the next chart.
6. Keep sentences short and avoid complicated punctuation. Sentence length should average about seven or eight words at the 10-12 age level; and twelve words at the 12-14 age level. Pictures combined with words should be used on charts at the primary level.
6. Plan brief, explicit experience charts. If possible, keep them to one page, gearing the vocabulary to the reading level of the group. In planning the experience chart keep in mind that their verbal responses during discussion will likely be beyond their reading ability.

If the teacher has planned the experience chart in advance, the task of stimulating appropriate discussion and obtaining the desired responses from the student will not be difficult. The strong emphasis on planning experience charts is due to their role in teaching the subject matter of the unit. If the experience chart were only being used in relation to the skills, less planning would be necessary, but the expanded use of experience charts requires more planning.

Suggested techniques in using experience charts:

1. Use an easel large enough to hold 24 x 36 newsprint or other lined paper. The easel should be sturdy and tall enough so that you can comfortably write on it and the children can clearly see it from their desks. At the secondary level, many teachers find the use of the overhead projector as a more acceptable means of developing experience charts.
2. Experience chart paper can be purchased in a variety of sizes. However, 24" x 36" paper provides enough space for sizable stories and is large enough to use for illustration purposes. Although experience chart tablets can be purchased, they are rather expensive. They are also restrictive in that they contain a standard number of pages. Lined newsprint can be in-

expensively purchased by individual sheets. The teacher can bind in tablet form the number of sheets he anticipates using during the unit. Heavy tag board can be used as a cover to protect the pages.

3. Use a black wax pencil. The type used to mark groceries works quite well. If you are using newsprint, magic markers will soak through. Crayons do not mark black enough to be easily read from a distance.
4. Use cursive or manuscript depending on the ability of your group. In a transitional group, manuscript printing may be used on the chart but the advanced students may be required to copy in cursive.
5. When possible, record the chart in paragraph form. Occasionally listing will be necessary; however, avoid frequent use of listing.
6. Prepare two or three leading questions in advance. The questions should be formulated to evoke responses relevant to the content you wish to develop on the experience chart.
7. While writing on the experience chart you can hold the attention of the students by directing questions to specific students. For example, you might ask about the spelling of a particular word, ask about needed punctuation, or merely ask a student to relate the comment being recorded. Such questions help to keep the discussion going while you are involved in the writing process. It also helps to prevent management problems.
8. Have students read the experience chart orally after it has been developed. Individual students may be called upon to read the entire chart or a portion of it.
9. If it is necessary to copy a chart over after class, avoid changing the content. Sometimes the legibility can be improved, if re-copied under more favorable conditions. If grammar or misspellings are corrected they should be brought to the attention of the class during succeeding lessons.

The teaching of Life Experience Units places considerable responsibility on the teacher in the development and use of experience charts. Many teachers will initially encounter difficulty in developing experience charts which sequentially present the content of the unit. The only short cut is through good planning and practice. Students soon become acclimated to the technique and assume a major share of the responsibility for constructing the chart during the lesson.

USES OF EXPERIENCES CHARTS

The use of experience charts is not restricted to the recording of unit content. Charts can be designed to meet

a number of uses. Once completed, experience charts can also serve a number of purposes.

Experience charts can be used to (1) record subject matter of unit, (2) develop academic skills, (3) present seatwork activities, and (4) administer short tests.

Once experience charts have been completed they can be put to a number of instructional uses, such as:

1. Reviewing a particular lesson or a completed unit.
2. Reading
3. Writing experiences
4. Source of discussion

The development and teaching of Life Experience Units to the mentally retarded makes considerable use of experience charts. They serve as a means of developing skills and teaching the subject matter of the units. They also add continuity to the unit and provide a permanent source for review purpose. It should be kept in mind that the experience chart plan which the teacher includes in the lesson plan format is merely a guide. The wording of the experience chart developed during the lesson must come from the pupils.

SUMMARY

The procedures for developing Life Experience Units discussed here have been used extensively by experienced teachers and teachers in training. While initial use of the suggested steps is time consuming, teachers soon become skilled in their use. Soon, the preliminary steps fall into a routine which the teacher follows with minimal effort while preparing herself for the actual writing of lesson plans.

The intent of these guidelines for developing units is to help teachers maximize the benefits which can be derived from the unit teaching technique. Particular attention has been given to building into units the opportunities for teaching specific academic and social skills. Attention has also been given to helping teachers avoid the pitfall of using units only for informational purposes. Reflected throughout has been a concern for planning units in terms of their relationship to the total curriculum. Units taught in isolation fall short of their potential as a contribution to instructional programs for the educable mentally retarded.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

The following references will be helpful to teachers interested in improving their skill in writing units.

Benjamin S. Bloom, editor, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives—Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay, Inc., 1956).

B. M. Chappel, "Are You Using Pupil-Made Charts?" *Grade Teacher* LXXIII, (April, 1956).

Virgil E. Herrick and Marcella Nerbovig, *Using Experience Charts With Children* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1964).

Lillian A. Lamoreaux and Doris M. Lee, *Learning to Read Through Experience* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).

Doris M. Lee and R. V. Allen, *Learning to Read Through Experience* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).

A. O. Liechti and J. R. Chappell, *Making and Using Charts* (Palo Alto: Fearon Publishers, 1957, 1960).

William W. Lynch, "Instructional Objectives and the Mentally Retarded Child," *Bulletin of Indiana University School of Education* XLIII, (March, 1967).

Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (Palo Alto: Fearon Publishers, 1962).

Lazar, May, et. al., *Experience Charts: A Guide to Their Use in Grades 1-3*, Educational Research Bulletin No. 18 (New York: Board of Education of the City of New York, May, 1952).

Starter Units, (Iowa City, Iowa: Special Education Curriculum Development Center, College of Education, The University of Iowa, 1968).

WASHINGTON REPORT

Teachers might with justification feel that the operations of the federal government have little to do with their day-to-day problems in the classroom. "Washington" is a far-off place where legislation is drawn up on a large scale and in omnibus language intended to cover thousands of individual cases. And so the language in which important legislation is advertised may be alienating or simply baffling. And yet, though the distant government cannot be concerned with specific problems in a specific classroom in one of our school districts, government programs can ultimately improve the teacher's lot.

The government (specifically the Office of Education) is trying to foster the growth of local resources which can provide the teacher with information and assistance geared to his needs. One manifestation of this effort is the establishment of instructional materials centers for the handicapped throughout the country. There are 13 regional instructional materials centers, a majority of which serve 4-6 states. These centers have assembled li-

braries of instructional materials which could be used with the handicapped (both books and manipulative devices), as well as professional journals and information pertinent to the special education teacher's concerns. But a prime function of the centers is to help the individual states set up similar units at the state level, from which in turn a network of more local centers can be developed. So eventually a teacher will be able to go to an instructional materials center in his own school district to browse rather than writing to a regional center in the next state to borrow materials.

Much of the effect of national legislation is diffused to the local classroom through the state departments of education. For example, on December 11, 1968, the Office of Education announced grants to expand educational services to handicapped children in state-operated and state-supported schools. "Educational services" covers a wide range of possibilities. It was stated that programs for handicapped children may be expanded to include diagnostic centers, preschool classes, language development laboratories, occupational training centers, and summer camp programs. Grants may be used to make available parent counseling, curriculum enrichment activities, orientation and mobility instruction for the visually handicapped, financial assistance for transportation, and the like. It is estimated that more than 100,000 handicapped children will be affected. However, Dr. James J. Gallagher, Associate Commissioner, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, commented that over 40,000 handicapped children in state schools will still remain without educational aid.

At the time of writing it is too early to tell how the change of administration will affect the possibility of continued growth of government support for education of the handicapped.

ISSUES & TRENDS

Lloyd Dunn, in the September, 1968, issue of *Exceptional Children*, presents a reminder of the dilemma being created by special education through the perpetuation of the self-contained special class concept. He focuses his concern on the disadvantaged who represent the majority of children placed in special classes. While the efficacy studies of the past two decades has also cast shadows on the effectiveness of special classes for the educable mentally retarded, Dunn's position is a call

for change, not a mere value statement on current conditions and past errors. He cites the influence of general education on the special education curriculum and proposes a course of action. The plight of children from disadvantaged environments who, when encountering learning difficulties are vulnerable to our system of placement in special classes, is candidly described.

He proposes a clinical approach which eliminates the emphasis on disability labels and centers attention on specific learning problems. The child's learning problem is then approached from the perspective of prescribed developmental tasks. Inherent in the clinical approach is the application of sophisticated diagnostic and clinical education skills. For the most part, teachers of the mentally retarded have not been prepared to fulfill a significant role in this approach.

It seems somewhat ironical that the special class teacher by circumstance is placed in a precarious position. She is hired to teach in a situation which is determined by general and special education administrators and allied professionals. When the special class concept is challenged, in essence, the teacher's effectiveness is also challenged. Yet, had the structure and the instructional guidance been different, she may have functioned quite differently. The teacher must now reconsider her curriculum while the system itself is being questioned. This places her at an extreme disadvantage.

Typically, in reviewing a position paper on the present system of special education, the reader is inclined to read the paper with a concern for the author's views on the organizational system. The teacher who has little influence on the structure but responsibility for the instruction offered children through the system, would do better to approach reading such a paper from the perspective of ascertaining the implications for her teaching methods. The purpose of citing this particular article is to encourage teachers to read the article and to point out that, while a revolution might be necessary within special education to maximize educational gains for handicapped children, the teacher—through an investment on her own part—can make a contribution to change. The research of Rosenthal on teacher expectancy cited by Dunn has considerable relevance to the mildly retarded in the special class. Teachers can also, by reassessing the subject matter of their curriculum, and by considering the specific instructional needs of their pupils, begin to improve their own skills.

To overcome the inertia of the establishment will require not only a change in teacher training, but a rehabilitation of the teaching force in the field which will remain there in the future.