CHAPTER THREE
SETTING UP

Visualize a fully functioning student-centered environment. Most of the time, small working parties are doing different things at the same time. A working party is a pair, a small group, or an individual. Some may be silently reading or writing. Others may be discussing a text they have read, transcribing a tape they have made, or working out how to dramatize a story. Sometimes the whole class comes together for sharing products or carrying out large projects or doing other communal activities. Within this extended family small families and partnerships form and re-form in a warm, relaxed atmosphere of cooperation. Everybody tries to help each other succeed. Students take charge of their own learning.

They choose what to do from a full repertory of authentic language activities and materials constantly arrayed for them. Instead of following a packaged program, they make up individual programs with the teacher. This is a non-textbook approach. Instead, a classroom has its own library of books and tapes, to which is constantly added those that the students themselves create. Organization is decentralized so that activities and materials are not funnelled out from the teacher but made readily available to everybody at any time. Directions for how to keep a reading journal or write reviews or perform a text are posted at learning stations or placed on activity cards cross-referenced to appropriate materials. Students who know what they want to do and how to proceed often initiate their own activity. Everybody just picks up where they left off from one occasion to the next.

The classroom we envision participates in a larger learning network extending as much as possible throughout the school and into the community. Working parties can go during class to the school library, media center, or other facilities and areas. They have access to other teachers and specialists. Either the class is multi-age, or older and younger students are routinely scheduled for time together, as when eleven- or twelve-year-olds buddy up with primary children to play, read, and write with them. Adult volunteer aides slip in and out of the classroom at any time to facilitate working parties and tutor individuals. Storytellers, authors, actors, and other experts come in regularly or by special invitation. Students arrange to visit, interview, and research out of school. If fax machines and computers with modems are available, students can communicate rapidly with other knowledge sources and exchange writing with students elsewhere.

This learning environment pulls together a lot of practices that have been done or are being done separately but that would be more fully realized together.

Team teaching, learning centers, student contracts, and electives, for example, aim to individualize and integrate but will work better if they go farther, in concert. Nongraded and open classrooms, community apprenticing, artists- and writers-in-the-schools, "reading and writing across the curriculum," and the "whole language" approach parallel each other and come together in thoroughgoing student-centered learning.

For secondary school, we recommend general English courses every year, within which individual interests can be pursued, rather than requiring some set courses followed by electives. Individualization makes electives unnecessary and makes possible a wider range of choices than can be offered by scheduling separate courses. Access to teachers who are expert in the area of one's interest can be arranged other ways such as periodic conferring. With advising from one or more on-site teachers and perhaps off-site experts as well, a group or individual can pursue virtually any interest without sacrificing the benefits of being in an all-purpose, heterogeneous language environment and without having to make a project come out even with a semester or other arbitrary time frame.

The first thing to consider in setting up this environment is the use of human resources. The reliance of schools on commercial programs has made students interact with materials instead of people. Only human interaction and social experience can teach how to use language. It has seemed simpler to manage things than people. And running something through the market has been the chief way of certifying it in our society—even curriculum. But this is changing, as it must.

The proposals here and in following chapters emphasize the primacy of human resources because of the social nature of language in particular and of learning in general. But we recommend some equipment and materials that facilitate the interaction of individuals with language and with each other. Where some kinds of learning might be accomplished through *either* things *or* other people, we try to assess the options. Some materials that would indeed serve learning well are not commonly made available to schools and may have to be sought rather than bought, or made in school. Teachers have little time for seeking or making materials, we realize, but as with so many other practical problems, the solution can itself become an educational activity. In a student-centered curriculum, students are not waited on; they work. Finding and making materials can be part of their learning how to learn. Let them help you set up.

INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS

Each student selects among a wide range of activities and thus has a different set of experiences, though often she is choosing to work with others. With your counseling, she determines the sequence of her pursuits and keeps track of what she does. Many different activities teach the same language arts skills. The precise routing makes little difference for the ultimate goal but makes a critical difference in the attitude of the individual learner. The routing is not haphazard, however, because it fits a learner's precise needs and timing. When she controls what she does, being influenced rather than ordered, she feels positive and powerful. With that power, colleagues, and an attractive array of materials, she can do a lot.

How then does a student decide which activity to pursue? She may move into a project in any number of ways:

1. Her own interest may prompt her to seek out the materials or directions that will enable her to do what she wants. If she doesn't already know where to find these, she looks or asks.
2. Some book, tape, prop, learning station, or activity card may attract her eye as she browses.
3. Classmates may ask her to join in an activity someone else has already selected. Picked at random, as a friend, or for a special talent, a student may be introduced to activities she otherwise might not have thought of or have preferred. This is one safeguard against the limitations of personal choice.
4. A youngster may be introduced to an activity by seeing what some other working party produced from it—the booklet, tape, display, or performance. In seeing the results of the activity she is inspired to try it herself.
5. The classroom materials themselves can be cross-referenced to one another so that, for example, when a student finishes an activity, the card or poster suggests several related follow-up activities and gives routings to these.
6. You may advise a student at any time to do a certain activity or join a certain group. See "A Charting and Counseling System" on page 25 and, for assessment, page 248.

Whenever possible, give the learner choices about what to do so she accepts as normal the responsibility of deciding on her own. Simply help her become aware of her options and what's involved in the choices among them. Your suggestions allow for both her interests and the present limits of her awareness.

LEARNING WITH COLLEAGUES

A student should get experience working alone, in small groups, in large groups, and in groups structured for different activities. The whole class gets together for sharing and celebrating the accomplishments of small groups, for collaborating on complex projects, for receiving general information, and for certain other activities mentioned in other chapters. It will always be important as a pool of resources and as a community.

Small-group process is the matrix for most activities in this curriculum—discussion, reading, dramatic interplay, writing for real purposes and audiences, and responding to both books and the writing of other students. Learning through group process starts in the home, goes on outside of school, continues into college, and will continue throughout the learners' lives in the workplace and community. Group learning fosters motivation and confidence leading to independence and mastery. As students regularly work with partners, their emotions, their understanding of others, and their responsibility mature along with their intellect.

■ DURATION OF GROUPS

Some groups might stay together as briefly as ten minutes or as long as several weeks. How long a group stays together depends on the nature of the task and the maturity of the participants. After finishing one activity, a group may choose to do another together, or perhaps some members will so choose but others will decide

to do something else or to join another working party. Short-term random groups have the advantage of getting students used to working with all sorts of people. Long-term groups have the advantage of both developing a deeper familiarity and trust among members and of experiencing the kinds of group dynamics that can evolve only over a long period of time.

■ WAYS OF FORMING GROUPS

Helping individuals form appropriate groups is a paramount role that you take on as you drop the role of emcee. Some students unused to grouping may just want to be with friends or other students they feel comfortable with. Social closeness may well be more important to them at first than any activity they do together. Until they become accustomed to collaboration, you should probably let them choose at least some of their partners. But encourage mixing as early as possible. You can count on chance, their own interests, and the many cross-influences of the classroom to start mixing them also.

You can help students learn how to:

1. Come together when they want to do the same activity or share a similar interest.
2. Find others who are shaking free at the same time and available to form a new working party.
3. Assemble an effective working party that contains people with different abilities and skills for a project they've settled on.
4. Mix different temperaments or complementary personality traits or different backgrounds in such a way that they can better utilize their human resources and take advantage of differences in outlook, background, or dialect.
5. Put together long-range groups whose members might become over a period of weeks or months a semipermanent workshop in which strong trust grows and members become familiar with each other's needs, habits, and ways of expression.

A student may well be in more than one kind of group at once. For example, one of the groups, such as a newspaper editing and proofreading group or a writing workshop, might not need to meet every day and can run concurrently with a student's other activities. One of your responsibilities is to pick up on and counsel a student who has competing responsibilities that preclude her effective participation in any one group.

■ GROUP SIZE

The number of persons a group needs depends largely on experience and the activity they pursue. Veterans will often know how to group themselves, but you may need to help some groups determine an appropriate size, given their activity or purpose.

For most discussions, around five is an ideal number, providing enough variety of viewpoint to stimulate interaction but at the same time minimizing the risk of shy individuals retiring because the group is too large. Five can be a good size for

some writing groups if the kind of discourse they're writing is fairly short, like limericks or fables, but since some kinds of writing take more time and thought for group members to examine each other's compositions, size might sometimes be limited to three members. For improvising, except for the crowd-scene type, it is best to keep the groups down to two or three so that interaction is tight and close and the action keeps moving well without confusion or dropping out. Experienced improvisors, however, can still be effective in a larger group.

Some students may need to work into small-group process by participating in pairs or trios first. The classic problems of groups—inattention and dropping out, interrupting each other, not responding pertinently, not sticking to the subject, becoming distracted—are sharply reduced when only two or three are interacting. The price, of course, is a loss of ideas and stimulation afforded by more minds. But if the priority is to get inexperienced kids into small-group process, follow a general principle of starting small and building up. When students are choosing an activity and forming a working party, check out group size according to the nature of the activity and the maturity and experience of the students.

DYNAMICS OF SMALL GROUPS

Generally, each group size up to six has a different basic dynamic that makes it appropriate for certain tasks. Two people are good for activities that might also be done alone but that some youngsters are not yet ready to do by themselves; or for two-part reading aloud together, as with riddles, brain teasers, and other question-and-answer texts. Sometimes a highly skilled independent worker chooses to work and share with only one other person.

Trios are better than pairs for discussion, but they sometimes pit two against one, which is a problem unless used as a way to balance an overbearing personality. They also provide a minimal number for vocal interaction among students who would fall apart in a larger group. Three is a good number for building trust in a writing workshop. Groups of four tend to split into pairs, which can polarize discussion, but four fits well many game formats and other tasks not featuring discussion. A group of five allows many internal relationships to develop, and it also provides maximum stimulation without being so large that it's inefficient.

Groups larger than five should probably be justified by special considerations such as a task requiring a lot of division of labor, a drama calling for a large cast, or simply the desire to include everyone who wants to be on board.

FOSTERING SMALL-GROUP PROCESS

Many teachers feel that it won't work just to start in but that they should instead train groups one at a time until they are ready to do without the teacher. This seems reasonable, but in practice what usually happens—and this is the classic problem of inaugurating small-group process—is that in the very effort to show youngsters how it's done, the teacher only succeeds in making them more teacher-centered. As both adult and teacher you are a powerful figure; and though this varies a lot with the teacher, most youngsters have great difficulty not talking to and for you if you're in their group, even if you try to take only an overseer role. Those learners who most need initiation into peer interaction are the ones who will focus most on you.

The only way to avoid this trap is to assume nothing, play by ear, and be ready to operate in any of several different ways. Beginning groups limited to two or three members may never have any trouble—if the project or topic really animates the group. You may just stand by and listen in rather than sit in. This way your presence may not interfere with the interplay among group members but still reassure them and enable you to make observations or suggestions about their functioning. If you feel a group must have you because you have tried other ways unsuccessfully, then your sitting in may be worth the risk, especially if you play a role expressly aimed at weaning them from you. That is, you would do best to refrain from leading the group in the usual sense or trying to get ideas across. Rather, you should attempt to model a typical-member kind of participation.

Setting a model for good interaction means listening alertly and responding pertinently. This often includes questioning a previous speaker, but it's critical that the questions be honest efforts to have the speaker clarify or elaborate what she has said, not answer-pulling to get her to say something you may have thought of. Remember that the goal here is purely to initiate a process of exchanging and expatiating between learners. Some teachers have found that asking an experienced group to model effective interaction in front of the class helps novices to grasp how a focused, serious group works. Mixing experienced with inexperienced students also provides models by the ripple effect.

You may find that very young children have little difficulty operating in small groups. Older students who have been in school a long time but have never participated in small groups may have more problems. These students need to be thoroughly persuaded that small-group process is a serious and staple part of the whole language curriculum and not just a teacher's whim. They may not take it seriously for a while and may therefore test your own seriousness sometimes by seeming not to make it work. The initiation does take some faith and patience.

Game materials can help considerably. Both older and younger students may best ease into group process by playing card and board games, which substitute game rules for teacher direction and accustom players to addressing each other and functioning autonomously. From game materials they can shift to activity cards for talking, reading, and writing together. If you have not operated in an activity-card system, you may not be able to imagine how much cards can structure and maintain group process. They can actually substitute for teacher leadership of the group by providing directions and suggestions. In reading and discussing the directions, participants are already interacting on their own. You are nearby for questions. As soon as possible you want the learners to be able to take off from the written directions without your help.

■ PLAY-IT-BY-EAR TEACHING STYLE

Your job is not to lead small groups but rather to move from group to group and help set up, observe, counsel, suggest strategies or materials, troubleshoot, respond, evaluate, and so on. If a group of students is having trouble using certain equipment, you either show them how to do it or ask an experienced classmate to do so. If another group of students is arguing over the directions for a game or activity, suggest that one of them reread the directions to the others, but do not arbitrate the dispute lest the group become dependent on you. If, as you watch a group doing an improvisation, you notice that one of the participants seems to

misunderstand the point of the scene, you may ask the others how they see her role. At a later time you may discuss the improvisation with her alone as well.

What you do not do is set yourself up as sole problem-solver. You note problems, keep your own record of the kinds of experiences each student is having, and then guide her into new areas when she's ready. Your goal is to keep the process alive, not necessarily to intervene to improve the end products that the students are working on.

This play-it-by-ear teaching style requires an involved interaction with students that takes energy, patience, interpersonal awareness, and courage. You play to what you see. When you respond rather than initiate, the students become the active users of language. On the other hand, if you set yourself up as the decider or explainer or presenter, they may quit learning how to learn, which is their main job. The invigorating task of choosing and thinking for themselves is lost. Letting students initiate while you respond may not look as organized as if you were controlling everything and casting yourself as the star of the show, but be assured that the more active students become, the more they learn.

This is not to imply that you will never impose your will. You will whenever behavior by a student becomes not only unproductive but destructive of responsible group process. A student should not have the choice of whether or not she can destroy the work of another, whether the destruction be physical (tearing up a display or messing up a learning area) or psychological (booing or ridiculing a presentation by another child or group). Teachers set limits of acceptable behavior in student-centered classrooms just as they do in any classrooms. This function is not inconsistent with student-centering, which actually makes it easier to handle disruptive individuals. In small groups they're more likely to find personal peer relating a valued social role. You're also freer to deal with them one to one.

OTHER HUMAN RESOURCES

In building toward student independence even as you give help, you can use as aides all sorts of paraprofessionals such as parents, seniors, older students, or student teachers in a natural and relaxed way not possible in teacher-centered classes. They can talk and play games with individuals, read to them or take dictation from them, counsel them on the choice of an activity or coach them. They can help groups form, sit in on them and model the ideal participant, be an audience for a performance, give feedback to a writer, or lend expertise to a project.

Employing community aides has never seemed very realistic nor proved very popular in whole-class instruction, but its feasibility should be completely reconsidered in an individualized, small-group approach. Activity cards and learning centers allow aides to enter at any time and start helping right away, without your having to stop and explain activities and give directions, though you will want to lay down guidelines for aides helping with coaching and counseling.

Part of the purpose of restructuring school management as called for in today's educational reform should certainly be to make better use of human resources. This can happen only if we think beyond the isolated teacher in the self-contained classroom. Language learners need people and social experience—the more the better. Utilize fully the people already in the classroom, through plentiful and varied interaction, but draw also on those outside. Mixing ages and

experience levels permits rippling, one of the most powerful of learning forces, which schools destroy by segregating ages. If your classes can't be multi-aged, at least arrange with teachers of other grades to exchange halves of your classes on a regular basis. Buddy pairs work beautifully and are very emotionally satisfying for both. Larger working parties of mixed maturity allow the younger to learn quite naturally from the older how to function in a group and to carry out a self-chosen project. And, of course, all sorts of substantive knowledge and skills can be passed down in the process. Putting one adult off alone with a group of student peers represents the poorest use of human resources.

MATERIAL RESOURCES

A classroom needs the widest possible array of materials and activities for students to choose from. Such variety becomes possible in an individualized, small-group curriculum because only a few copies of each book title are needed and only one copy of each game or activity card. Also, teachers can share the same materials by letting the learners go from one room to another or to a common center to get what they need. Materials should initiate and facilitate every language-related activity you and coworkers can imagine that your students might have the ability and interest to benefit from. Materials can be cross-referenced to each other so that each item mentions as optional routing at least two other items from which a student can choose a follow-up activity.

A holistic student-centered approach needs no textbooks or worksheets, only good reading matter of every sort and some manipulable materials. You may inherit, of course, traditional textbook series and workbooks—basal readers, exercise booklets, language and composition textbooks, literature series, speller series, and other books for which most school districts have special adoption categories. Virtually never will these accommodate real individualization, and we regard them generally as ineffective and unnecessary. The book form itself locks activities into a single sequence, but the main defect is that textbooks and workbooks contain unneeded material that gets in the way of learning. All that is needed is authentic reading matter.

Large textbook publishers want to put out total curriculum packages for a subject and for a long span of years like K–8, the usual adoption period. Unable or unwilling to create their own curriculum, most schools have simply bought it outright in a box—a series of textbooks replete with worksheets, tests, manuals, etc. This is extremely dangerous, because education can't be entrusted to the mode of operation of large profit corporations, and the adoption committees that actually purchase these packages have to compromise among so many pressure groups that sound learning principles can't be maintained. Moreover, the very existence of adoptions in language arts and reading assumes the necessity of textbooks and thereby builds into schooling a bias for the sort of curriculum that does indeed need them, the conventional sort that breaks down learning into unreal bits. A major reason that the holistic "active learner" approach has been so hard to establish in schools is that it is too cheap. It doesn't require all those special materials that the particle approach and daily lesson plans require. In our consumer society an approach that costs little and is not embodied in marketable materials seems insubstantial and incredible.

The fact is that the language education most recommended today by professional organizations no longer fits into the educational-industrial complex. As a teacher you're caught in this conflict. Many commercial materials come emblazoned with all the labels that in the marketplace inevitably become trendy slogans and buzzwords—"process approach," "cooperative learning," "whole language," "student-centered," etc. Don't be fooled. Prepackaged curricula have always blocked improvement of language learning because they *inherently* contradict its personal, social, and spontaneous nature, which simply cannot be planned in enough detail to incarnate in physical materials for masses of students.

If school reform is to mean something, the purchasing of educational materials must be restructured. The people who have to use the materials must be the ones to select them. You and colleagues must make clear what you think is worth buying and what's not and stress with administrators that if they force a curriculum package on you, *they* have to take responsibility for the results.

You can run the best language arts program without any materials especially made for school. Tell administrators that you want to put the money into other things—namely, trade books and certain nonbook gear. For beginning literacy, students can benefit from materials besides books—bi-media materials and manipulables as described on page 129. For writing, the only educational materials needed are stimulants and activity directions, both of which are far more effective as cards or posters, which are visually better and not presequenced. If publishers make these available independently of a mixed package, buy them. The money wasted on grammar and composition textbooks can buy equipment for an excellent writing program—word processors, copiers, faxers, and computer-printer combinations for desktop publishing. Since making activity cards and posters for all the language arts is admittedly a big job and replaces textbooks, money would be well spent on good card stock, a lamination machine, software for graphics, good color printing, and perhaps some outside professional consultation. (Creating activity cards with students is itself a great language arts activity!) For reading, all you need are lots of good trade books.

But you can often salvage parts of textbooks. Buried in some composition texts, for example, may be good photos for writing stimulants and directions to the student for good writing activities that you can put onto activity cards. Most elementary readers and literature series contain some good selections and so can be utilized simply as anthologies for individualized reading without regard for their framework, order, or extraneous matter. Ignore the questions and exercises at the ends of selections and the editorializing about the selections, which just creates contexts that interfere with the reader's own responses.

Although multimedia materials and a rich classroom environment are desirable, a resourceful teacher can do the best part of this curriculum with just paper, pencils, old literature textbooks, magazines, newspapers, and odd books scrounged here and there. The minimum is a collection of reading matter and classroom-produced activity cards. Many of the activities presented in this book appeared before on cards created by teachers and students for their own use. If there is a cassette recorder, students can also make their own recordings. You can make it all work through some combination of buying, making do with old stuff, making things yourself, getting students to make them—*as well as* begging and borrowing.

But even the richest school district can't afford all the materials needed if schooling is really successful. This embarrassing fact has been masked by doling

out to students only so much as can be contained in the amount of textbooks that *can* be afforded. By holding everybody back to the pace of some mythical generic student, the spoon-feeding materials make the students and the money come out even at the end of the year! Once students really do become hooked on books, however, it isn't possible to purchase enough of them. The same for recordings and other materials. But really active learners advancing individually not only use up materials far faster, they also create further sets of materials. Following activity directions, they themselves produce other books, activity cards, recordings, games, photos, films, and computer disks to augment the class stock. Involved and active students also scour the community for what they need. So this curriculum helps to solve the desirable problem that it creates.

■ FOUR STAGES

Among the many traits that make textbooks and workbooks undesirable is that they are usually broken down into yearly grades, as most adoptions require or expect. The students in any one classroom span a far greater range of difficulty and interest than can be included in materials designed to cover one year and to cover it at the standardized pace of an "average" student. The only way to individualize is to give each class access to far more materials than any one student can work through in a year. This means that students live with the same materials for several years' running. The breakdown must not be by the year but by a much larger time unit such as a bloc of years constituting a growth phase, and even then the units will overlap.

We suggest breaking down materials and activities for the whole of elementary and secondary school into four stages, each of which spans several years. Place your own class within one of these blocs of grades and put together for it a set of materials covering the whole range of capacity and interests that may arise during those years. When in doubt, include more. Only in this way will you cover every possibility for every student in your class or classes.

1. During the "primary" period of age five or six to seven or eight, the child
   - is still closely tied to parents and home.
   - is not much allied with a peer group yet.
   - may still be developing small-muscle control and perceptual discrimination.
   - is very given to communicating with the body.
   - thinks very concretely.
2. During the prepubic "elementary" period of age seven or eight to eleven or twelve, the child
   - is rather well socialized and fairly independent of home.
   - still complies with adults but has consolidated a peer group.
   - acquires main physical and mental competencies.
   - has strong drive to get good at what the society values.
   - is most suggestible and receptive to others' ideas and influences, hence can be most highly absorbed in reading.
   - objectifies thought more into significant imagery and into concepts.

3. During the period of initial adolescence of age twelve and thirteen to fifteen or sixteen or later, the youth
   - vacillates between lingering dependence on adults and real independence, creating a second version of "the terrible twos," or self-contradictory, "irrational" behavior.
   - attaches tightly to the peer group and follows its criteria, treading a delicate way between peer-group conformity and compliance with adult demands.
   - shows interest in the wider world beyond immediate locality.
   - develops sexual powers and feelings.
   - uses abstract logic apart from physical operations and from imagery.
4. During this period of virtual adulthood, which only some youths reach while still in high school, the student
   - still values highly her peer group, but her peer group more nearly coincides with the general adult public.
   - reaches or approaches full physical growth.
   - focuses seriously on mate and career selection.
   - possesses full human mental capacity but suffers the limitations in thought of early conditioning and of inexperience as an adult.

The breakdown of materials and activities into four stages gives maximum assurance that students will go as far each year as they are truly able. At the same time, less advanced students will not be constantly humiliated or have their confidence eroded by being expected to move along with the others. All students have access to at least three times the range of difficulty and variety found in a conventional classroom and so will be able to find both their level of development and the particular points of entry into speaking, reading, and writing that are necessary for them but not predictable.

Another extremely important advantage of the broad four-stage breakdown is the fact that it can accommodate the basic human need to rehearse what one has learned and to circle back to it from time to time. One can see this easily in youngsters who like to reread the same book, months or years apart, or in other students who seem to have learned something but who resist rather strenuously the efforts of adults to tear them away and push them onto some other, newer learning. There's always a real reason why youngsters want to rehearse learning or mark time or circle back. While on occasion it may be something negative (which can be brought out and overcome), usually this desire means that the learner needs to strengthen her confidence, reassure herself of her mastery, or simply enjoy the experience again. Sometimes she's tired of challenge and wants the security of doing something she knows how to do well.

At other times, when a learner is facing an entirely new kind of reading or writing, she may ease herself into it by choosing material that in a conventional classroom might be considered beneath her level. With so many options, on the other hand, a student may at any point experiment—may challenge herself with very difficult material without having to wait until she has "graduated" into it. If she finds it too hard, she can pull back. There isn't the sense of failure that comes when a student is moved lock-step with her class to the next assignment before she's ready. You can expect that your students will advance, return to touch base, and venture forth once more.

■ THE CLASSROOM LIBRARY

A classroom library replaces reading textbooks. Reading matter consists of any sort of books, periodicals, manuals, pamphlets, and so on. Students can campaign in the community for donations of such things and can set up a special part of the classroom library as a central exchange to lend their own reading matter to each other. Since reading is individualized as soon as children start to read at all, single copies are fine. In purchasing, five or six copies of any one title usually suffice for members of a small group to discuss, act out, or otherwise share reading material. As a general strategy in procuring books, trade off number of copies for number of titles. Class sets of one title are a waste and a contradiction of individualization. If you can get funds, subscribe the class to some magazines and newspapers. Discussing which to choose will itself educate.

Try for a variety of reading matter that covers different individual interests, multicultural backgrounds, and all areas of discourse listed on page 18 and dealt with chapter by chapter in Part Three, "Kinds of Discourse." In representing types like memoir, reportage, and haiku, or topics like sports, mystery, and science fiction, try to do so by books that contain nothing but the one type or topic. This not only teaches literary forms by clumping samples of each but facilitates organizing the classroom library for coordination with other language arts. Students writing, acting out, or discussing myths, for example, can easily find and take out myths for their activity without removing other matter from circulation, as happens when myths, say, are bound into an omnibus reader. You might cut apart literature textbooks so each type of literature can be separately "bound." Indeed, the more modular all the materials, the more things you and the students can efficiently do with them.

Organize the library with your students according to categories that will themselves teach about reading matter as class members go about searching and replacing items. Actually, working out and maintaining with your students a cataloguing and placement system may be a kind of blessing, because they will learn a lot about books and libraries from this. To some extent you can mesh your class system with that of the school and local libraries as a lead to the use of those.

For suggestions about criteria of selection and for other descriptions of reading matter, see page 166 and following in *READING*.

■ AUDIO RECORDINGS

Audiotapes are allotted a large role in this curriculum for reasons explained on page 150 regarding general reading and on page 118 for beginning reading and writing. Professional recordings serve also as a model for the performing activities described in *PERFORMING TEXTS*.

BUYING RECORDINGS

Some trade publishers sell recordings of texts along with the texts. Such a combination is certainly a major factor to consider in selecting books. Though more expensive than making your own recordings, commercial ones offer the advantages that professional readers can bring to the rendering of a text. Look at whether:

- The reading matter itself is truly first-rate.
- The oral interpretation is appropriate for the kind of text and really interesting to youngsters (and avoids the conventional saccharine and condescending tone).
- The reading is slow enough for literacy beginners to follow without spoiling absorption.
- The stress, pausing, and intonation indicate punctuation clearly.
- Voices of different age and sex are used for variety and identification.
- Different dialects are represented.
- Texts indicate which selections are recorded.
- A recorded signal indicates bottom of page in texts for small children.
- Format facilitates searching for a cassette and for a selection on a cassette.

Take time, perhaps with other teachers, to listen to a lot of the recordings and to deliberate over their value for teaching both literacy and literature and also for inspiring student performing of texts.

MAKING RECORDINGS

The advantages of making recordings in class are saving money (though the cost of even blank tapes can mount up) and having recordings for texts on hand that are not commercially recorded. But especially, making the recordings can be a fine learning activity for students. See *PERFORMING TEXTS* for procedures in rehearsing readings. Knowing in advance that their vocal rendering can be added to the classroom listening library provides excellent motivation for students to work up and tape a reading of some text available for classmates to follow visually as they listen.

You want to have your students contributing to the stock of recordings even if you buy commercial ones or even if you and other adults are also making recordings. (Some of what one records will be student writing.) Explain that certain standards of clarity and expression have to be met in recording for the classroom listening library, because other students will be using their work to learn from. The class can follow the guidelines above.

Mixing professional, adult, and student recordings makes sense. Not many selections in either trade books or textbooks are accompanied by a tape or disc, which leaves a real need for local supplementation. Professional renditions inspire emulation, while student renditions will foster identification and encourage classmates to try recording. To get especially talented adult readers, recruit among school staff members, parents, and actors in local theater groups.

Set up the listening library, like the reading library, as an easy and attractive place to browse in. Label and organize the tapes by the same system you do the books. Putting both book and tape in a plastic bag and hanging them together on a rack works well. Or place in the book a simple directive for locating the tape. Texts that have been recorded should be flagged some way on the outside. Headphones for tape players help keep down noise, and bookcases, screens, and carpets can baffle sound.

■ VIDEO RECORDINGS

A camcorder is an ideal learning tool, and most classrooms have a television monitor or access to one. Taping allows students to replay and critique their own

discussions, improvisations, and performances. This feedback is invaluable. These tapes can then be erased and re-used or kept for other students and teachers to view and discuss as orientation or staff development. An improvisation or performance might be taped several times for the best "take," which students can then edit and place in a class video library with professional tapes. When a tape is a rendering of a text, this might be signaled on both items. Such a library becomes a repository of class oral work for many uses, including assessment.

■ ACTIVITY CARDS

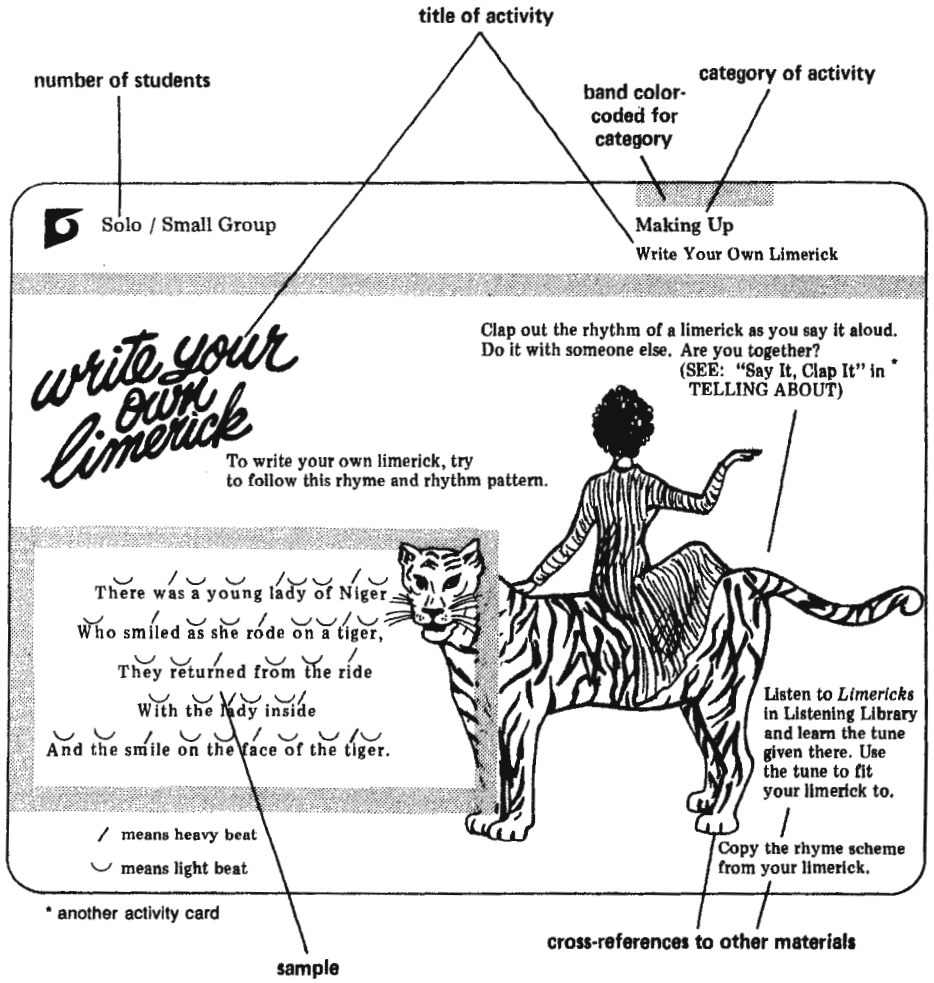
One reason for not putting activity directions in books is that books lock them into one sequence, whereas most language arts activities should be unsequenced so that individuals can put together their own sequences. Also, if not posted already at an activity center, directions should be separately portable and in a durable form so that they can be carried to and propped alongside a work place. An activity card or poster serves as a focal and reference point for a working party. Students can look back at it from time to time, and you or an aide can stop and help without having to ask what the party is doing or having to recall what the directions are. A set of activity cards arrays choices for students in addition to projects they originate and games or other materials bearing their own directions. Through cross-referencing, they lead students to books, recordings, games, and other materials either needed for the activity or suggested as follow-up.

These activity charts or cards can be either commercially produced or made by students and teachers. Those from publishers may well not contain the activities you want and may, besides, come packaged with a whole undesirable program. So you may have to make them with colleagues and students. Heavy stock laminated with plastic is durable, but if that is too expensive, any five-by-seven-inch or larger cards will do. Posters work well for younger children but can be part of a learning station for any age. Each activity card, poster, or chart could list the materials needed for the project, the number of people who can do this at one time (ranging from a single individual to a whole class), and the step-by-step procedure. Illustrations are highly desirable and often necessary for the activity. Cards can be grouped by categories such as "Making Up Stories," "Finding Out," or "Acting Out" and different categories placed in different parts of the classroom. Study the sample activity card in Figure 3.1 before reading on. It illustrates one format in which the front captures the gist of the activity, with the aid perhaps of a sample, and the back gives specifics.

We suggest that you conceive an activity so that it can be usefully repeated some time later by the same party, like our sample for writing limericks. If each card covers an activity so specific that it can't be usefully repeated, you'll have thousands of cards. If activities involve authentic sorts of discourse such as one finds outside of school, the purpose will probably be apparent and the activity will make its own appeal.

Activity cards replace teacher-presented lessons and conventional textbooks in reading, composition, spelling, and so on. They may be thought of as pages from a teacher's manual—enlarged, made more durable, addressed to the learner, and laid out where students can get at them directly and individually. These directions are the single most important means of individualizing a classroom, because they array the wide range of activities from which students may choose at any

FIGURE 3.1 SAMPLE ACTIVITY CARD (FRONT)



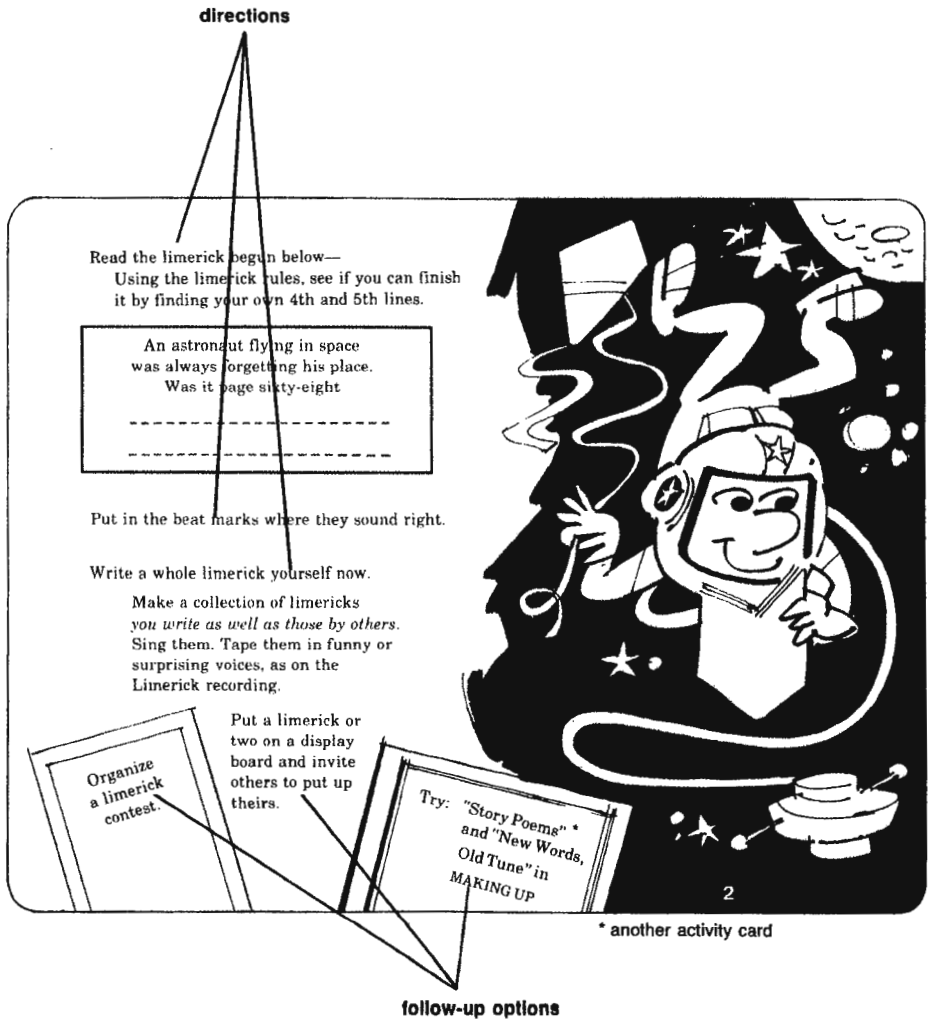
given moment and at the same time prompt them to think of their own activities. These cards also free you to work closely with individuals and small groups.

Activity cards are important stimuli for composition, especially as they suggest forms but leave content to the author. Most commonly, a written task is embedded in an attractive small-group social process, thereby providing an easy pathway from familiar oral activity into writing. The cards also provide circumstances for reading in each of the ten areas of discourse. See page 172 for their place in the reading program.

■ GAMES

Important learning games exist or can be created for all ages. Some games require no special materials and can be conveyed on an activity card alone, but some

FIGURE 3.1 SAMPLE ACTIVITY CARD (BACK)



require card decks, game boards, or other manipulable materials. Many of these games teach word-making and word recognition (see page 129). Some "creative" or educational toy companies put out good learning games. Browse in game stores, look through ads in teaching magazines, and look in game catalogues. Textbook publishers seldom put out game materials because schools have shown little interest. Too many parents, teachers, and administrators still do not understand how valuable for learning very entertaining games can be. Powerful prejudices keep game materials, for example, from being adopted or otherwise allotted funds in many localities. Even in an age of great technological advances, widespread application of game theory, and sophistication about media, many people still don't believe learning can occur without books. Games on computer software are now getting into schools, but since computers are used for so many other things as well, and children shouldn't spend too much time head to head with an elec-

tronic monitor, social games with manipulable materials provide an important alternative medium.

If you analyze virtually any old folk game, you can see how it may have originated as a learning practice for some skill. Before schools were free and universal and taught practical things, much important learning of skills and knowledge was embodied in games for both children and adults. In Blind Man's Buff and Hopscotch, one learns to do without a sense organ or a limb. Dominoes teaches numbers. Chess and checkers teach logic through play strategies. The standard card deck teaches classification and seriality as one makes hands of suits and rank ordering. Educators should utilize in school these folk ways of learning.

Card games, for example, are not only fun, they also have built into them some very important and natural kinds of learning:

- Social interaction
  discussing directions
  heeding each other's behavior
  arbitrating differences
- Attention, concentration, and recall
- Strategic decision-making
- Vocabulary, systematic and interrelated
- Coordination of words and illustrations
- Reading and following of directions
- Classifying
  seeing similarities and differences
  conjoining and disjoining attributes
- Sequencing by serial relations of lesser and greater
- Logical deduction
  drawing inferences from available clues
  calculating possibilities
- Factual information from science or social studies

For the now meaningless categories of conventional decks—clubs, diamonds, hearts, and spades—substitute some categories from science and social studies. Then the decks can be played by familiar rules of Rummy, Concentration, War, Old Maid, Poker, and other rules based on putting like items together ("melding" a "book") or on ranking items by some order (animal hierarchy such as poodle, canine, mammal, vertebrate, for example, instead of ten, jack, queen, and king). Most well-known card games are played by classifying or serializing, that is, by making "flushes" or "straights" or by making both at once.

Playing card games in which items are depicted and named on the card faces can teach vocabulary in a special way—as interrelated sets of words, that is, as nomenclature. Card decks having science or math or social studies material, for example, depict and name items that form a system—classes of animals, say, or kinds of transportation or communication. In these games, the total deck creates a context for learning the vocabulary given on each card. Thus, the new words are defined not just by the pictures or symbols shown on the cards but also by the system within which the cards are played. A deck of cards bearing labeled pictures is really a kind of modular, manipulable chart and relates to booklets and activity

cards for charting, labeling, captioning, and dictionary-making. Furthermore, in playing the game, players usually have to utter the new words and therefore have to find out how to pronounce them. This is an example, by the way, of how a game context can supplant a communication context as a legitimate way of treating sub-structures of the language such as words and sentences.

For other kinds of word and sentence games see *WORD PLAY*.

■ CONSUMABLE BOOKLETS

Be wary of most consumable booklets. The traditional workbooks and worksheets build in many misguided approaches that should be abandoned or replaced. Only a very few consumables, usually put out by small publishers for the home market (like Mad Libs), fit this curriculum. Booklets of crossword puzzles, word-find mazes, and other language games are fine. Very helpful also for some students are comics with empty balloons to fill in with dialogue.

■ BEGINNING LITERACY MATERIALS

For basic literacy, some multisensory manipulables are desirable, such as physical letters, card and board games, bingo materials, letter cubes, and other items as described in *BECOMING LITERATE*.

■ EQUIPMENT

For reasons already mentioned or made clear in later chapters it's very desirable to have somewhere on the school premises:

- audiotape recorders and earphones
- a camcorder
- a television monitor with VCR
- one or more still cameras
- a copier
- a computer with software for word processing, graphics, desktop publishing, etc., and with modem for telecommunicating
- a versatile color printer for desktop publishing
- a thermofax machine

A raised platform for drama production is useful but not essential. A puppet theater and materials for making puppets are desirable in elementary classes. A corner for house or store play is good in the early years. Students can make many drama props themselves.

Art materials of all sorts need to be available at all levels. Painting easels, finger and other paints, colored paper, tagboard, porous pens, and poster paper are popular materials. In general, the wider the array of art media, the better. Not only art supplies but art objects—paintings, sculpture, designs—all can stimulate language production. Materials for physically making and binding books—cardboard, dry mount, and cloth—provide a powerful motive for writing.

■ CARE, STORAGE, AND DISTRIBUTION

Games composed of many small pieces must be put back before the students leave a game center, equipment well secured after use, and books and activity cards replaced where others can find them. Make sure everyone knows how items of equipment are operated and where stored. Affix matter-of-fact directions everywhere—to machines, supplies, and work or storage areas. These are part and parcel of becoming literate in order to operate the environment. Not only are learners frustrated by each other if they fail to take care of materials, good housekeeping goes with the feeling of community and of ownership that is part of good education.

Each student will need a place to store personal supplies and works-in-progress, but this need not be a desk. A cubbyhole, bin, plastic washbasin, or cardboard box stored along a wall or on a shelf will do. Decide whether portfolios and individual tracking charts can go here with one's other materials or be filed somewhere else with those of classmates. Active learners produce a lot: a writing file fast becomes a box. Some productions will be audio- and videotapes and works in other media. Some of all this should be saved across the years to facilitate individual continuity in following years. Computer disks may be the best place to store and pass on writing and other textual records.

CLASSROOM LAYOUT

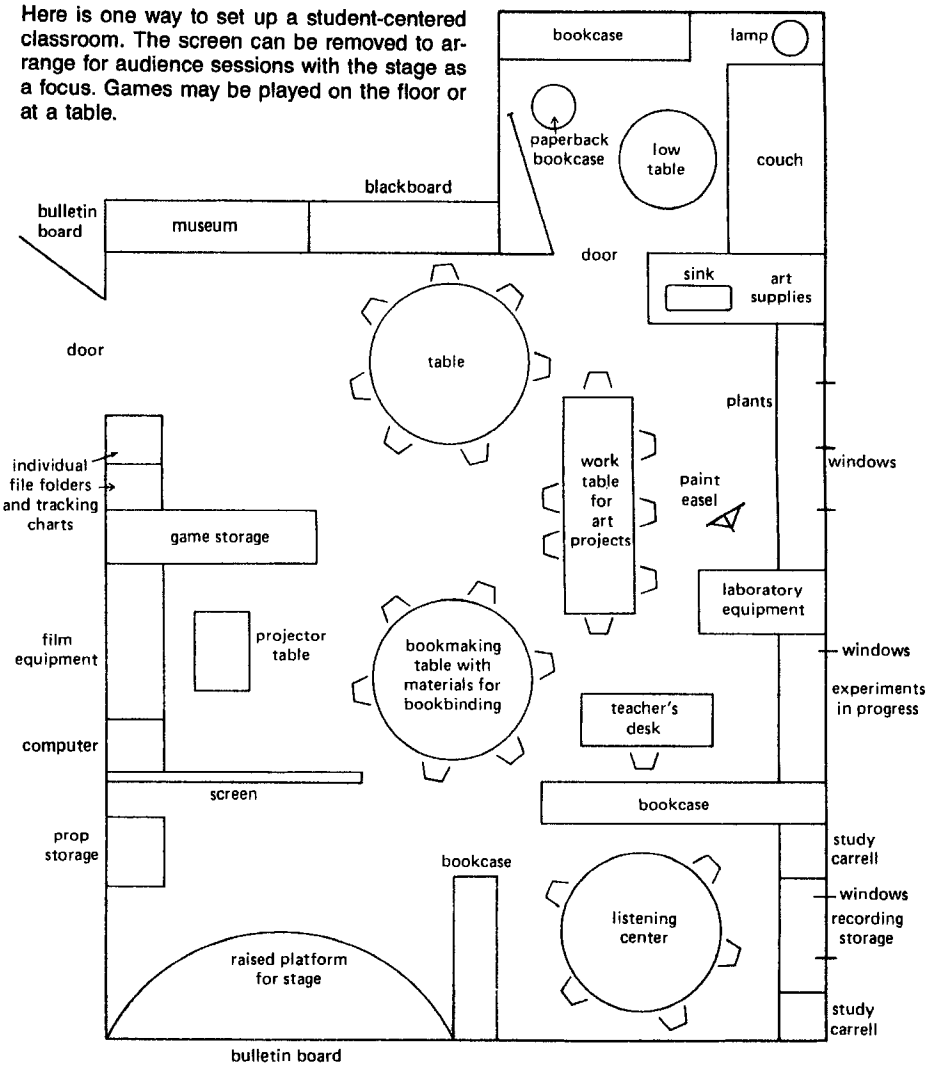
If you're free to arrange furniture, you can set up and equip a learning environment that provides areas for several different types of activity—reading, listening to recordings, acting out, writing, playing games, or watching films or slides. An area does not have to be a "corner"; there are not enough of these in any classroom. If your desks are still bolted to the floor, don't assign them to students but to activities, or ask to have them unbolted. Loose chairs and tables facilitate group work and multiple activities far better than traditional desks, which assume individual paper work only. If you can, move bookcases perpendicular to the wall to divide up space for small-group work and to utilize the backs of the bookcases for additional display space. Designate these activity areas and place there the appropriate activity cards and gear. Posted nearby along with rules for keeping the area in order can be a chart where a youngster can sign up or hang her name tag for a particular activity at a certain time. This is especially helpful when the number of people doing a particular thing at any one time has to be limited. Also, a list of youngsters who have already done a particular activity can be useful to students who might want to call on them for help.

At all grade levels you may find the following types of areas convenient for small-group work. For a sample arrangement, see Figure 3.2. Adapt according to your situation.

■ READING AREA

This is a place where a large part of the classroom library is displayed and where students can sit comfortably to read. This can be a depressed floor area, a grouping of comfortable chairs or a couch, a round table with chairs, or if nothing else, a group of school desks. For individual reading or other work, study carrels are

FIGURE 3.2 ARRANGEMENT OF A STUDENT-CENTERED CLASSROOM



desirable. Large refrigerator cartons can serve if equipped with desks, lamps, and even curtains for privacy. One teacher fixed up a small teacher's office as a quiet reading room with pillows and lamp.

■ LISTENING AREA

Here are stored a record player or cassette recorder—ideally one equipped with earphones—and the class library of discs or cassettes. Youngsters can bring to this area books that are recorded and follow the text as they listen to a recording.

■ DRAMA AREA

Ideally, a hallway, odd room, or other vacant space in the school can be used at least part of the time for improvising, doing creative dramatics, or rehearsing a performance, but an area in the classroom that can be somewhat partitioned off ought to double for drama work when needed and, with the partition removed, accommodate an audience. Wooden pallets can be quickly placed together to make a platform and stored out of the way "between the acts." Simple costumes or props are welcome, but elaborate trappings are unnecessary, since the kinds of drama we recommend leave most of that to the imagination. The drama center in a primary classroom may well be the same as the playhouse center since much of the acting out at that age calls for household props anyway. A puppet theater or roll-a-story box could be part of the drama center.

■ ART AND SCIENCE AREA

A classroom sink can serve as center of both an art and science area. A great many language activities from kindergarten through high school are stimulated and followed up by illustration and other graphic arts. Dramatic productions are facilitated by artfully suggestive sets, masks, and costumes. And books, newspapers, and magazines students produce can be illustrated using various art media. A sink, counter or table space, and storage space for a wide range of art supplies are very desirable in secondary as well as elementary classrooms.

Unless the school has a room or rooms equipped as laboratories, each classroom needs a place where various scientific experiments may be set up, watched closely, and recorded in a variety of ways. The area can have growing plants, live animals, and other physical objects for observation, manipulation, and experimentation. A table where classroom museums and collections can be assembled is important.

■ GAME AREA

Students often want to take a game off to themselves, and this has to be allowed in a multifarious classroom, but game materials need a storage home with perhaps some carpeted floor space nearby. Many games have lots of small parts that can get scattered around a classroom and crunched underfoot. To avoid the frustration of missing parts, everybody has to make a special effort. If holes are drilled in game boards, they can be hung and their parts stored in drawstring bags hung beside them. Rig nifty containers for plastic letters, rubber stamps, and other recommended manipulables, which can be stored in this game area.

■ TRAVELING LEARNING CENTERS

In many schools, especially in junior and senior high school, teachers do not have their own teaching room where they can set up places for students to do small-group work. They move from room to room. If you're one of these, you will have to rely on activity cards to play a much greater part in creating different learning centers quickly. You may have cards and other materials in boxes or large envelopes, each container complete with all that the students need for a set of activities of a specific type. These can be quickly placed throughout the room

when you arrive. Light equipment and books can be kept on a rolling cart to go with the teacher. A prop basket, art materials, or other items not used every day may be stored in a place where students who need them can get them to bring to the class. More reliance will need to be placed on students to bring in their own materials and quickly set up their own work centers. Also, students will have to store more of the "in-process" work such as books they are making or newspaper copy in their lockers rather than in the classroom. If bulletin board space is limited or unavailable, halls and display cases can be used.

■ SHARING AREA

At all grade levels there needs to be one large space where an audience can gather for a presentation—film, slides, drama, interpretive reading, project report or whatever. This could be in or out of the classroom. Better in, if out discourages arranging for it. If students get used to gathering on a carpet in a part of the room that is used for small-group work at other times, moving of furniture can be pre-arranged. In one small classroom a student committee made a map showing where each desk was to be moved to make room for an audience. These sessions for presenting something to the whole class can be scheduled at a regular time or arranged impromptu whenever a small group or individual has something ready to present.

Because most work is shared, you need to plan for ample display space for student writings, charts, graphs, art products, museums, and so on. When the bulletin board and wall space are used up, students can string up cord and hang their displays from the ceiling.

GETTING STARTED

Explain at the beginning of the year the gist of how the class will operate and briefly why. Tell older students that some activities that they expect may be missing but that the new ones are meant to teach the same things, only better (vocabulary, usage, and sentence structure, for example, by talking, reading, and writing rather than by lists and formal grammatical analysis). Take them on a tour of the different areas and show materials so that they know generally what the resources are and how activities are organized. Or if you have left much of the organization for them to work out with you, explain that to them and let them start getting involved in what might be done, in taking possession. Give them some time to poke around while you just observe who gravitates to what and how they react to the environment you have set up, whatever its degree of readiness. If you and previous students worked it out pretty well in past years, tell them what problems you still have or just ask them for suggestions. Conditions usually change enough from year to year that adjustments are always needed.

People not used to this sort of curriculum need to ease into it—both teacher and students. This means some degree of compromise at first. One general way of easing in is to limit for a while the quantity of materials, activities, and choices put into play, then to open up gradually to full volume and variety. Learning stations are an excellent way to do this. A learning station is a place stocked with the wherewithal for a certain activity—such as game materials, books, tapes, machines, or art gear—and surmounted by a poster giving directions. Since a

classroom can't contain more than ten to twenty stations, they limit choice just about the right amount for beginners at the same time as they make self-managing easier. The directions, the materials, and the place are brought together for a working party. Once they've worked at all or most of the learning stations, students will be ready to seek out activity cards, materials, and a place on their own.

Another way is to put all activities into play but to direct students more at first about which to do. This is tricky, because if you do not direct them toward self-reliance, they will get in or remain in dependent habits.

A third general way is to do more large-group or whole-class work until students get to know the materials and the system.

Try not to assume too much dependence and to compromise more than you need to, and be sure to allow for much individual variation in youngsters' readiness to operate this way. We hope the following list will serve usefully as a set of strategies that you can combine in your own way.

- Plunge in with the full system of individualizing and small groups but make available for a while only a subset of the materials and activities so that students are not overwhelmed by choice nor you by counseling. The subset might comprise some of the more basic and repeatable activities and those materials most attractive to your students.
- Set up five or six groups such that each student knows or chooses some but not all of the other members. Then give each group an activity card to do in a class period and to describe afterwards to the other groups. In this way, working parties will do different things at the same time, share their products afterward, and acquaint everyone with those five or six activity cards. The next class period, rotate the groups until each group has done each activity.
- Set up several groups and give each a number of activity cards to look over and choose one from. After they have finished, ask each group to tell and show what it did. Then list the activities and let anyone sign up for any activity or choose from among the unselected cards. Attach to each card the names of those who did it the first round so that the second crew can consult with them.
- Do one activity at a time with the whole class, projecting the activity card as you read from it and referring to it frequently as students do the steps together. Use the occasion to point out all the typical features of the card as we did on pages 62 and 63. After several activities have been completed, let students choose one of those to do again and help them to form up working parties.
- Sample some of the books one at a time for the whole class by reading aloud from them or playing a recording of the texts. Then again let students choose among these and form groups. Next, project two or three activity cards for reading follow up.
- Allow students who appear self-reliant to choose activities and form their own working parties while you take others aside a group at a time to stick with them through enough activities that they get the idea and can start working without you. Teach a group to play a game; then replace yourself in that group with a student new to the game and let old hands teach her, until eventually most of the class knows most of the games. This will start some dependent children doing group work without you. In the meantime, ask the more self-reliant ones to lead a couple of the others through an activity they've already done.

- Break the class into small groups and give each a game to play. Then let them exchange games. Continue games until you think they're ready to start other activities. Now try one of the procedures above.

However you start, you want to make sure, of course, that individuals begin sometime to do different things, to work alone sometimes, and to work with a variety of classmates. Use the launching process to give all students experience with all components—books, activity cards or areas, recordings, games, and other materials. Start the charting and counseling system as soon as students have got beyond merely getting acquainted with the materials and the system and are starting to individualize enough so that you can differentiate their different experience records and their future needs.

The secret is to avoid paralyzing students with too many or too difficult choices and yet keep them making decisions. Some teachers without activity cards simply write on the board a list of activities that students can choose from. Even if the choice is only one out of two or three alternatives, that's a beginning and would threaten only the most extreme cases.

Another common sort of immaturity that must be dealt with is the tendency to lump all activity cards together in the mind and say, "I've done activity cards," as if the similarity in the form of the directions means that the activities themselves are alike. Such a student will flip through cards and be unable to find anything to do or go through activities like popcorn. Make this student slow down and really pay attention. Her growth will consist of learning to discriminate differences, so help her do this with the cards themselves by taking her or her group step by step through at least a couple of cards so that she dwells on the steps and options and cross-references along the way. She needs to do a few activities with such loving care, and so enjoy the fruits of her labors, that thereafter she understands that each activity feels different.

Newcomers to school have no more problems working in a curriculum of individual choice and small-group process than they would starting off in any other kind of curriculum, whereas the longer students have been in school, the harder it is for them to make *any* significant change. If you teach older students, you can expect some to resent and resist being asked to do things differently. They need to be reassured that all this new stuff is really "English" and that it isn't just your personal "trip."

They may test your own conviction and steadfastness about it. Some will not thank you for requiring them to make decisions and to rouse out of their familiar school stupor. But if while understanding the reluctance to have the game changed on them midway, you hold a steady course toward their personal responsibility and deep involvement with their own learning, you will see resurrections as gratifying as anything a teacher can experience.