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Instructional Activities for Classroom Teachers, An Inservice Training Approach

A Skills Training Package on

# Providing for Individual Differences in Your Classroom

An Interest Center Approach

by Alan R. Frank  
The University of Iowa

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STATE OF IOWA  
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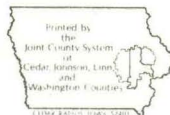
I-ACT - instructional activities for classroom teachers - is a program in which the teachers of one school building form a unit to help each other acquire new skills and new ideas in dealing with the handicaps of children in their classrooms.

I-ACT's logo represents this concept. The school building is the basic unit in I-ACT's structure and is represented by the most basic unit-shape, the circle. Within this unit, teacher helps teacher, and this communication is represented by a *typewriter* style of letter -- a basic form of our everyday, interpersonal communication. Just as I-ACT's title fills its circle, I-ACT's purpose is to fill needs throughout the school building unit.

**The Author**

Alan R. Frank received his B.A. degree in Psychology from UCLA and his M.A. degree in special education from California State University at Los Angeles. He taught children with learning problems for three years in the Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach, California.

In 1970, he received his Ph.D. degree in special education from The University of Iowa where he is currently Associate Professor of Special Education. He is the author or co-author of several articles on instructional methods and materials for use with children with learning problems. He is also the author of a document entitled *Classroom Interest Centers*, published by the Special Education Curriculum Development Center at The University of Iowa, 1971.



# Introduction

As a classroom teacher, you are charged with the responsibility of providing an appropriate education for all the students in your class. This is, by no means, an easy job. In reality, you are faced with the problem of developing a unique educational program for each child in your class. While there may be commonalities among some students in some areas of instruction, in other areas you will find varying needs and abilities. The task before you then becomes one of managing your classroom so as to meet each child's educational needs.

**What are Classroom Interest Centers?**

One method of providing for differing educational needs among your students is through the use of classroom interest centers. A classroom interest center is a place in your classroom where you store a variety of materials which a child or group of children can use on their own without *direct* teacher supervision or instruction. A wide variety of materials are included so as to serve differing student needs and interests.

**How Can Classroom Interest Centers Help?**

How will classroom interest centers help you meet the individual educational needs of students in your classroom? If the classroom teacher is cognizant of student strengths and weaknesses in a given subject area, he or she can provide materials in the interest center which are appropriate to the identified strengths and weaknesses of students. Thus, students will have available to them materials which are geared to their levels of functioning.

The following sections will describe in more detail how to develop classroom interest centers as well as how to integrate them into your classroom schedule on a daily basis.

## Developing Classroom Interest Centers

**Identify One Area of the Curriculum**

When you first begin to use classroom interest centers, it is probably best to focus on just one area of the curriculum. It will be easier to develop a wide variety of materials for just one area of the curriculum rather than for several areas. Remember, you will be needing materials to appeal to a variety of levels and interests.

**Outline the Content of the Curriculum Area**

Once you have identified the area of the curriculum in which you are going to develop an interest center, carefully outline the content of that curriculum area. It may be helpful to look at the major headings in the text book you use in this area of the curriculum. Your school district's curriculum guides may also be a source of information.

Then determine the needs of the students in your classroom in this area of instruction. Are many of your students experiencing

## Determine Student Needs

difficulties in a particular area? Do you have several students who are very slow at picking up new skills or concepts? Are some of your students working *below* grade level? Are some of your students working *above* grade level? These kinds of questions will help you determine the range of materials you will need to provide in the interest center.

It is important to consider the different formats by which you can present materials to your students via the classroom interest center. Below are listed some of the ways:

## Ways to Present Materials

1. *Teacher-made Educational Games.* A variety of formats may be used in developing an educational game. Here are a few ideas:

*The trail game.* Many commercial games use a trail format. *Candyland* is an example. In this game, the child follows a trail by drawing cards which give specific directions or ask specific questions. Any number of skills or concepts can be placed on the drawing cards.

*The Old Maid Game.* In this commercial card game, the players are required to match two cards with identical (or similar) contents. The game is carried out by players drawing cards from each others hands in an attempt to match up as many *books* as possible.

*The Concentration Game.* This game is fashioned after the television quiz game of *Concentration*. A number (usually 12 or 16) of cards are placed face-down on a table. The player is required to turn over two cards at a time and determine if they match. They match if they are identical. Or, if one answers a question posed by the other, etc. If they match, the player keeps them. If they don't, they are replaced on the table in their original positions.

*The Domino Game.* This game is taken from the commercially prepared game called *Dominoes*. In this game children are required to add on to domino blocks which have already been played. When using this format for an educational game, the dots on each block are replaced by other stimuli which relate to the educational purpose of the game being devised.

*The Bingo Game.* This game is often very popular with elementary-age children. The stimuli on both flash cards and player cards can be replaced with other stimuli to meet the teacher's educational objectives.

*Others.* Games produced by educational publishers are also a source of ideas for creating your own educational games.

2. *Worksheet-type Activities.* Puzzles, problems, and other worksheet activities may be placed in the classroom interest center. If possible, laminate these activities so they may be erased and used over again. Many times, teacher magazines contain activities of this type.

3. *Language Master Activities.* Some children may prefer activities which involve audio input. Machines, like the Language Master, are well-suited to this approach. Any number of exercises may be put on language master cards for children to use.

4. *Cassette Audiotape-recorded Activities.* Activities which require more time for descriptions or explanations may be put on cassette audiotapes.

5. *Record Player Activities.* A record player may be set up with earphones in one part of the room.

6. *Filmstrips-Worksheets.* One section of the classroom may be set up with an individual filmstrip viewer. Selected filmstrips can be placed at this center along with worksheets which ask the child to search for specific information or which help the child to develop specific skills.

7. *Manipulative Devices.* Manipulative devices, either teacher-made or commercially prepared, may be available at the classroom interest center for children who prefer to *do things with their hands*. This might involve sorting objects, constructing a project, or taking apart something.

#### Preparing Materials

Preparing materials for the classroom interest centers will be a time-consuming process. You may be able to enlist the help of parents or volunteers in preparing materials. If you are lucky enough to have a teacher aide or associate she or he can be invaluable in making materials. Commercially prepared materials will save you time and effort.

When you prepare your own materials, keep in mind that they will be used over and over again. And, children are rough on materials, so make the materials to LAST.

Some excellent sources of materials for your classroom interest centers are listed below:

1. *Teaching Exceptional Children.* This professional magazine is published four times a year. The Instructional Materials Center in your area subscribes to this journal. In every issue is a Teacher's Idea Exchange. This section contains descriptions of games and other activities which would be appropriate for classroom interest centers.

2. *Highlights for Children.* This is a magazine written for children. Most school libraries subscribe to this magazine. Every issue contains a section entitled Things to Do. These activities lend themselves to an interest center approach in classrooms.

3. *Teacher Magazine* (formerly *Grade Teacher*). In every issue of this professional magazine is a section called Creative Classroom. Look for ideas for activities here.

4. *Instructor Magazine* (formerly *The Instructor*). This is also a professional magazine which contains articles on teaching and ideas for classroom activities.

5. *Sesame Street Magazine.* This is a new children's magazine which is based on the educational television program, Sesame Street. Many activities are described which would appeal to younger children. This magazine is available from:

Sesame Street Magazine  
SM-11  
North Road  
Poughkeepsie, New York 12601

6. *Electric Company Magazine.* This magazine is designed for older children who need vocabulary that is interesting, yet not too difficult. The magazine is based on the educational television program, Electric Company. This magazine is available from:

Electric Company Magazine  
Dept. S-7  
North Road  
Poughkeepsie, New York 12601

7. *Classroom Interest Centers.* This document is available through the Instructional Materials Center in your area. It is published by the Special Education Curriculum Development Center (SECDC) at The University of Iowa. It was written by Alan R. Frank. Contained in this document are several specific activities which may be included in a classroom interest center.

8. *Catalogues from Commercial Publishers.* Look through educational materials catalogues for materials or ideas for purchasing materials. Write to the publishers listed below for catalogues of educational materials:

Ideal School Supply Company  
Oak Lawn, Illinois 60453

Constructive Playthings  
1040 East 85th Street  
Kansas City, Missouri 64131

9. *Other Teachers.* Ask other teachers for ideas. Trade games, activities, projects. Ask teachers at the grade level below you and above you for ideas for those who need something *special*.

## An Example Classroom Interest Center

### A Hypothetical Classroom

This section of the learning package will provide you with an example of a math interest center in a hypothetical second grade classroom. This second grade classroom contains a variety of ability levels, including special education students (mentally retarded and learning disabled) as well as two children who have been identified as gifted by the school psychologist

### Outline of the Math Program

The first step in planning the math interest center is to examine the content of the math program. Below is a list of topics generally covered in second grade math programs.

1. Numeration and sets
2. Place value
3. Addition
4. Subtraction
5. Fractions
6. Money
7. Time
8. Measurement
9. Geometry

In this hypothetical classroom let's assume that you have worked with your second graders on the following math topics:

1. A review of basic addition and subtraction facts
2. Expanded notation
3. Use of symbols and words
4. Fractions ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ )
5. Money (recognizing coins and counting money to 10 cents)

### Needs of Your Students

Upon evaluating each child's progress you note that:

1. Most of the students have a reasonable grasp of the above concepts and some review will maintain their understanding.
2. Four children still need *much* review in the area of both addition and subtraction facts.
3. Four children are still having problems relating amounts of money to symbols.
4. The two gifted children have done very well. They both seem to be ready for the concept of regrouping, so you have begun to work with them in this area.

### Materials for the Interest Center

Below is a description of the materials which might be placed in the classroom interest center in the hypothetical second grade classroom.

1. A teacher-made game on relating amounts of money to symbols. This game might look something like the following description.

#### Description of Game

*Purpose:* To maintain skill acquired by child in counting money and matching amounts of money to their respective symbols using the ¢ sign.

*Materials Needed:* game board, die, and flash cards

#### *Rules of the Game:*

1. Two to four people can play the game.
2. Flash cards are thoroughly shuffled. Then all 12 cards in the deck are placed, face down, on the game board, one to a space.
3. Players roll die. The player who rolls the highest number begins the game.
4. The first player draws any two cards from the game board in an attempt to form a *book*. A book consists of one card showing a symbol and another card showing coins equivalent to that symbol. For example, a book may consist of a card showing 3¢ and a card showing three pennies.
5. If the first player draws two cards which form a book, he lays them face down on the table in front of him. Then the player draws again. If the two cards do not form a book they are replaced in the same positions on the game board.
6. The player to the right of the first player takes a turn next. He proceeds in the same manner as the first player.
7. The game continues until all six books have been won.
8. The person with the most books wins the game.

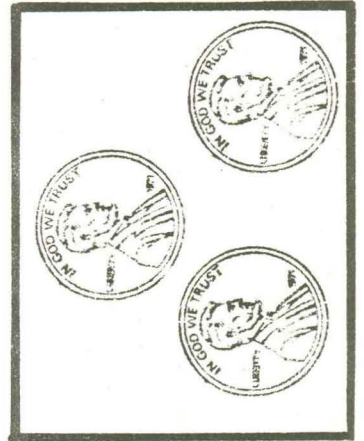
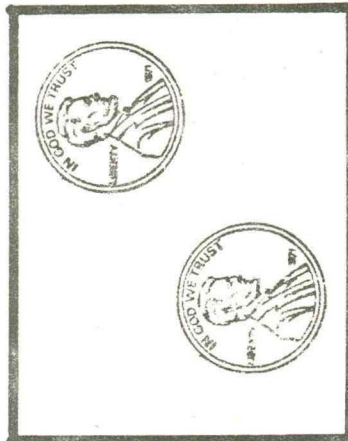
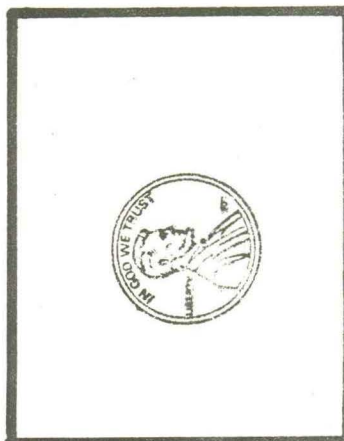
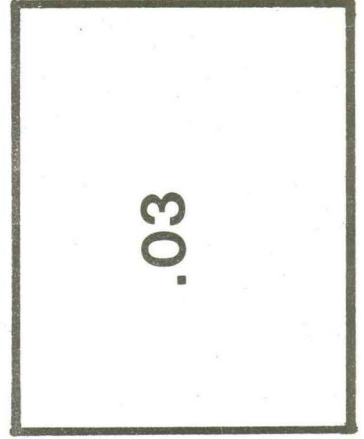
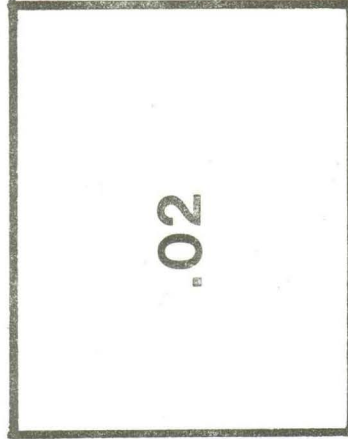
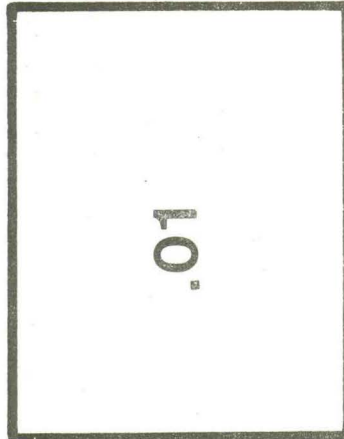
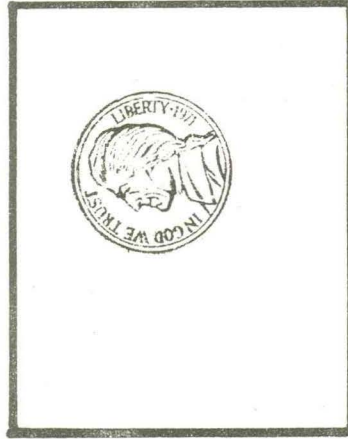
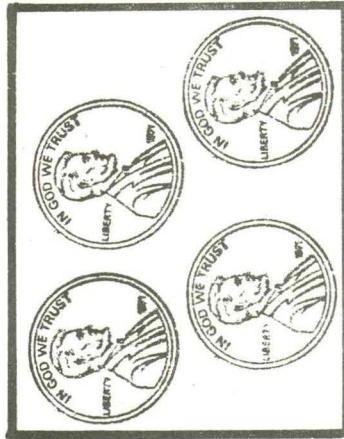
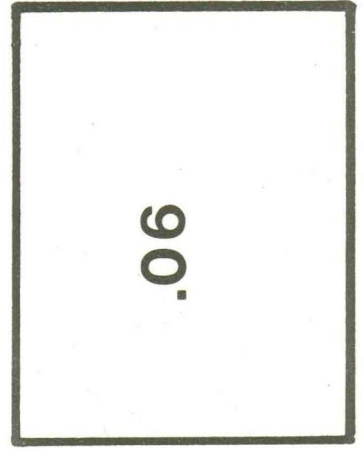
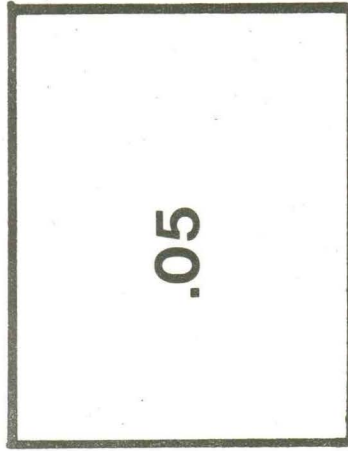
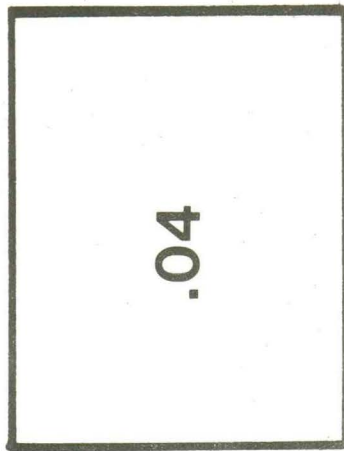
(Models for game board and game flash cards appear on the following pages.)

2. A series of cards for the Language Master which review addition and subtraction facts.
3. A game entitled Mathfacts on basic addition and subtraction facts published by Milton-Bradley.
4. FundaMath, a manipulative device produced by Ideal School Supply, which helps children learn concepts related to place-value.
5. Templates for shapes, such as circles, squares, triangles and rectangles, construction paper, pencils, rulers, scissors, glue. Students are to trace around templates and then cut

• Game Board •




# Game Flash Cards



shapes into  $\frac{1}{2}$ s,  $\frac{1}{3}$ s and  $\frac{1}{4}$ s and glue and label them on paper.

6. Let's Learn to Add and Let's Learn to Subtract records (or cassette tapes) from Learning Opportunities Educational Supply Company.

## Integrating Interest Centers into your Classroom

Once you have developed the materials for your classroom interest center, you are ready to integrate the center into the daily classroom schedule.

First, the children should be informed about the interest center. It would probably be good to show the children the variety of activities which are available. Maybe you should give them a chance to explore the materials right away so they will be more familiar with them when the time comes for them to use these materials.

It will also be necessary for you and the students to determine when the materials from the classroom interest center may be used. This will depend on what strategy you use in working with the children. If each student is working at an individual rate in your classroom, then it is appropriate to allow each child to go to the interest center after he has finished his assignment.

### When to Use the Interest Centers

If you work with your students in groups, then the following procedure may work best for you. Divide the class period (math, reading, etc.) into three segments: 1) group instruction, 2) individual work, and 3) interest centers. This schedule would allow you to work with three different groups during the class period. To begin the class period one group works with the teacher. One group receives an assignment (maybe a follow-up of the previous day's work) to be completed at the students' desks. The third group begins the hour at an interest center. At the end of the first time segment (maybe twenty minutes), the three groups rotate. Students in the teacher's group go back to their desks to complete the assignment given by the teacher. The group who was given the follow-up assignment goes to the interest center. The students who have been at the interest center come for group work with the teacher. The following chart illustrates this approach.

### Schedule During Class Period

	First Segment	Second Segment	Third Segment
Group 1	Work with teacher	Follow-up assignment	Interest center
Group 2	Interest center	Work with teacher	Follow-up assignment
Group 3	Follow-up assignment	Interest center	Work with teacher

Try more than one way of integrating the classroom interest center into your classroom. You may find that one works better for your group than another.

**Where to Use Materials from  
Interest Center**

You will also need to explain to your students where the materials from the classroom interest center may be used. Some materials will be taken to the appropriate piece of equipment which has been set up in the classroom. For example, the records will be taken to the record player, the cassette audiotapes to the table where the cassette recorder is stationed, etc. However, other materials such as games, puzzles, projects may be taken to the students' desks, a free table somewhere in the room, or a quiet corner. *Quiet corners* may be made more inviting by placing a piece of carpet on the floor, or an easy chair. Or, maybe a large cardboard box with one side cut off for those who really want to *get away from it all*.

Periodically, add new materials to the classroom interest center. Also, remove those which do not seem to be used by the students. This will help to maintain continued interest in the classroom interest centers.

**Widen Your Horizons**

Finally, you may want to try classroom interest centers in other areas of the curriculum. Some possible examples to try might be:

1. Science
2. Perceptual-motor skills
3. Reading
4. Language arts

You may also want to explore interest centers outside the general curriculum, per se. For example, maybe an interest center in photography would be of interest to some students. Another possibility is sewing. As the children. They have great ideas!

**Evaluation Component**  
**Skills Training Package on Classroom Interest Centers**

**I-ACT Teacher**  
name: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the answer which best describes your feelings about this skills training package.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. How clearly did you feel the skills training package was written?   | very clear<br>moderately clear<br>neutral<br>moderately unclear<br>very unclear      |
| 2. How difficult did you feel it was to go about developing a classroom interest center on your own after having completed the skills training package?  | very easy<br>moderately easy<br>neutral<br>moderately difficult<br>very difficult    |
| 3. How would you describe this skills training package on classroom interest centers?  | very helpful<br>moderately helpful<br>neutral<br>not very helpful<br>a waste of time |
| 4. How helpful was the skills training package section on ways of presenting materials to children (games, record player, filmstrips, worksheets, etc.)? | very helpful<br>moderately helpful<br>neutral<br>not very helpful<br>no help at all  |
| 5. How helpful was the skills training package section of sources of materials (catalogues, magazines, other teachers, etc.)?                            | very helpful<br>moderately helpful<br>neutral<br>not very helpful<br>no help at all  |
| 6. How helpful was the skills training package section on An Example of a Classroom Interest Center?   | very helpful<br>moderately helpful<br>neutral<br>not very helpful<br>no help at all  |

In order to make this skills training package as useful as possible, it may be that specific parts need to be revised. What specific recommendations would you make for revising this learning package?

**Evaluation Component**  
**Skills Training Package on Classroom Interest Centers**

**I-ACT Teacher**

Teacher's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

I-ACT Coordinating Teacher's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Principal's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe the interest center you developed for your classroom.

Describe in detail an activity you designed for your classroom interest center (grade level, subject level, etc.)

Return a copy of these completed forms to the coordinating teacher in your building. Fill out additional forms for other activities you may have designed and send them in also. These will be shared in your school and other schools participating in this project.

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