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A RECREATIONAL READING PROGRAM FOR DISABLED READERS: IT WORKS!

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Much has been written about the desirability of turning disabled readers on to reading. Replacing negative feelings and disinterest which disabled readers typically have toward books is one of the most difficult tasks of all. But when disabled readers report little or no encouragement from home the challenge becomes even greater. Recent research has shown three very important factors in developing interest in reading—all three factors within the home: (1) fathers who read to children; (2) mothers who read to children and; (3) the availability of easy reading material in the home (Sucher, Note 1). When asked about reading habits and home involvement via the *Literature Preference Inventory* (Abrahamson and Stetson, Note 2), disabled readers tutored at the University of Houston Diagnostic Learning Center reported very little home involvement (Colvin and Tomas, 1978). A tabulation of student responses concerning home reading habits revealed that 85% of the mothers and 95% of the fathers seldom or never read to them. The prospects of turning these readers on to books did not look bright. The following paragraphs detail the Recreational Reading Program (RRP) implemented at the Diagnostic Learning Center in order to meet this challenge.

Goals

Turning kids on to reading is the primary goal of the RRP. This goal is based on the premise that children can read provided they are encouraged in a positive way to read materials that are within their capabilities or area of interest (Estes and Vaughn, 1973).

Because success or failure as a reader is often shaped more by the influence of the home than by the classroom teacher or materials used at school (Larrick, 1975), a second goal of the program is direct parental involvement. By using informal questioning techniques after their children have completed a book, parents become more intensely involved in the reading development of their youngsters. Parents also participate by receiving information concerning sources from which inex-

pensive books may be purchased to begin or expand a home library (Scholastic, 1978; Perfect School Plan, 1978).

A third goal of the program is to initiate lifetime reading habits. Initially, extrinsic rewards are provided to help overcome the reluctance disabled readers usually have toward pleasure reading. Ribbons and free books are awarded according to the RRP Rule Sheet (See Figure 1). The achievement of intrinsic motivation is realized as parents report continued positive effects of the RRP for youngsters after they leave the center.

Figure 1 — Recreational Reading Program — Rule Sheet — distributed to students and parents during the first day of the recreational reading program.

RECREATIONAL READING PROGRAM (RRP)

Rule Sheet

1. READ ONE BOOK
 - a. selected by the student
 - b. paperback or hardback
 - c. fiction or non-fiction
 - d. subject of the book selected by the student
 - e. newspapers and comic books do not count
 - f. the book has never been read before

2. TALK TO AN ADULT ABOUT THE BOOK
 - a. book should be read entirely
 - b. no tests or book reports are required
 - BUT
 - c. the student must talk to an adult about the book (a parent, adult relative, or the teacher will do)
 - d. the adult should interact informally with the student by asking questions such as:
 - Tell me about the book.
 - What else happened? *or* What happened next?
 - Who was your favorite character? Why?
 - What was the best part of the book?
 - Was there someone or something in the book you didn't like? Why?
 - Would you like to read your favorite part to me?
 - What did you learn from the book?

3. ADULT SIGNS CERTIFICATE OF READING EXPERIENCE (CORE)
 - a. must be signed by adult who interacted with the student about the book

- b. adult could be mother, father, adult relative, teacher, or even a responsible adult sibling (high school or older)
 4. TURN CERTIFICATE OF READING EXPERIENCE (CORE) IN TO THE TEACHER TO RECEIVE RIBBON
 - a. certificate of reading experience required before ribbon can be awarded
 - b. CORE forms are filed in student's work folder
 - c. ribbons are displayed in the DLC until the end of term
 5. READ TEN BOOKS—RECEIVE ONE FREE BOOK
 - a. book to be selected from the trade book library
 - b. award label with the student's name is attached to the cover of the book
 - c. read thirty books, receive three free books
 6. BOOK CERTIFICATE AWARDED AT THE END OF THE TERM
-

Procedures For Implementation

After a brief discussion of the program and rules, a Book Certificate inscribed with the child's name is displayed in the tutoring area. Along side the certificate a reward ribbon is displayed to illustrate to the child what he will be working for. The last ten minutes of the typical sixty-minute tutoring period is used by the child to check out books from the center's trade book collection. Assisted by his tutor, the youngster selects one or more books on his independent reading level (Betts, 1957; Guszak, 1978; et al). A Certificate of Reading Experience (CORE) form helps keep track of books read and insures that books are being read (See Figure 2). Several of these forms are sent home with students on the first day of tutoring and must be signed and returned before ribbons are awarded.

Parents are also informed of the program through parent meetings conducted by the Center's staff. Parents are taught how to interact with their child when books have been completed. Emphasis is placed on informal sharing and parents are asked not to make the experience a grueling drill on facts and details but rather a pleasurable exchange of plot, character analysis, likes and dislikes. The RRP Rule Sheet and CORE forms identify the types of information questions to be asked.

Signed CORE forms are returned to the tutor who awards ribbons and displays them next to the Book Certificate. After ten books have been read, students earn a free book of their choice. An inscription, "Presented to John Doe for reading ten books, July 15, 1978," is added to the book's cover by the tutor. The Book Certificate and ribbons may be taken home on the final day of tutoring.

 Figure 2—CERTIFICATE OF READING EXPERIENCE

(CORE)— forms distributed to parent(s) to be completed when the student has completed a book and interacted properly with an adult.

CERTIFICATE OF READING EXPERIENCE (CORE)

Name of Student _____

Name of Book _____

Author _____ Publisher _____

I, (parent, teacher, or other adult's name) _____

do solemnly certify by affixing my name to the line provided below that the above named student did indeed read the book described above and talked with me about the book, its main characters, what happened to the characters in the book, and told me whether or not he/she liked or disliked the book. This Certificate of Reading Experience, when presented to the teacher, entitles the student to receive one ribbon.

 DATE

 ADULT SIGNATURE

 DATE

 STUDENT SIGNATURE

Results

During the first summer school term of 1978, eighty-five students attended the center daily for remedial instruction in reading. During this four-week period an average of nine books per student were read—one student read twenty-six books. All participants received at least two ribbons and thirty-five students received at least one free book.

In order to get feedback from parents, a RRP questionnaire was used during the last week of tutoring. When asked to rate the effects that the program had on changing their child's attitude towards reading, 33% reported that the program had a "dramatic" effect in a positive direction and 64% felt that the effects were "definitely positive." Only one parent reported no effect. In addition, all but one parent stated that they would continue a similar program at home after

the tutoring session was over. When asked to comment on what they considered to be the most positive aspect of the RRP, the most frequently appearing parent statement was that the entire family felt the effects of the program and that communication among family members was enhanced. Many added that the program influenced them to read more as well.

Overcoming the negative feelings many disabled readers have toward reading is difficult but far from impossible as evidenced by the success of the RRP described above. With care devoted to involving parents and matching disabled readers with interesting as well as easy recreational reading material, turning on to reading is unquestionably possible. Try it! You'll be convinced as we were.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Perfect School Plan (a program sponsored by the school to encourage parents to purchase books and magazines points are awarded to the schools for purchase of equipment), Box 866, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19105.
- Scholastic Book Services, 908 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632.