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BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE REMEDIAL READING PROGRAM FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

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At the present time there is much attention being given to the requirement that high school seniors must demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in basic skills before they are allowed to be graduated. Some articles which have appeared in various popular journals indicate that there may be over 25,000,000 functionally illiterate adults in this country. To the embarrassment of school officials, many of these persons possess high school diplomas and have made satisfactory grades in English, History, and other content subjects where reading skills are a necessary part of course activity.

Though many state legislatures have legislated competency laws, there has been a disappointing amount of attention and funds directed to meaningful and effective remedial reading programs for those who have failed such tests. The major purpose of this article is to provide the reader with some salient guidelines for establishing a remedial reading program which will be useful and innovative and will meet the exact instructional needs of those students who need prescriptive help for overcoming specific deficiencies in such important areas as word attack, comprehension, and study skills.

I. Select students for remedial training who can be helped and who want to be helped.

In many instances, students are directed to remedial reading classes because they are reading "X" number of years below grade level. An important question should be kept in mind when decisions of this nature are made: "Does this learner have the potential for developing the skills which will bring him up to grade level in reading?" One method of estimating reading potential is through the use of the Bond and Tinker formula¹ which involves the procedure of taking the I.Q. times the number of years spent in school (excluding kindergarten) and adding the number one. For example, Joe, a tenth grader, enters school in September with an I.Q. of 90. His estimated reading level potential could be determined by taking .90 times 9 and adding 1. The result is 9.1. Let us assume that his reading achievement test scores are at about the ninth grade level. Even though he is reading a year below grade level, he is reading at about his potential level and probably should not be placed in a remedial reading class.

The following case study illustrates an example of a student who *would* be an ideal candidate for remedial training.

"Henry H. (not his real name) was administered a Stanford-Binet by a reputable examiner with a resultant intelligence quotient of 105. He had been referred to the clinic by the school counselor since he was a tenth grade student who could barely read eighth grade level materials. His home life appeared stable and his attitudes toward school and possible reading improvement were positive. The results of the standardized and informal tests administered by clinic personnel revealed that he was deficient in vocabulary and structural analysis. After a visit with his parents, the writer discovered that he had been ill during much of his third and fourth grade years and had missed some of the basic reading skills which are taught at those levels. The tentative judgment was made that he never learned the skills and, therefore, he was a reading "cripple" because of it.

Since Henry's level of intelligence was in the high average range and there were no complicating factors, the decision was made to accept him for remedial training at the clinic. After three months of intensive instruction, he read at the tenth grade level and was able to read class level materials with much success."²

In essence, school administrators and reading teachers need to think in terms of the reading *potential* of the student and not just the number of years of reading retardation. The proper selection of candidates for remedial instruction may well be the key to the success or failure of a remedial program.

II. *Appoint professionals to direct the program who have appropriate academic training and experience.*

No reading program can be useful unless the teacher and/or director has been trained for his/her assignment. Persons employed for such positions should possess the competencies and skills which are listed in the 1978 edition of *Guidelines For The Professional Preparation of Reading Teachers* which is published by The Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the International Reading Association. If such persons cannot be employed because of lack of funds or other reasons, the establishment of the formal remedial program should be delayed until such individuals can be employed.

III. *Purchase materials and equipment which will meet the individual needs of the students to be served.*

In many instances teaching materials are purchased before a secondary remedial program is established. The mass purchase of machines and boxes for increasing reading speed should be avoided until a considerable body of data is collected which demonstrates that reading rate is a significant

problem. For such aids to be effective, they should be obtained *after* a careful needs assessment has been made of each student's reading strengths and limitations.

It should also be remembered that there is no one teaching material which is so far superior to all other products that it should be used to the exclusion of all other devices. Despite the "cure-all" advertising claims of some companies, there is no one machine or box which can be used to correct such widely divergent skill limitations such as phonics, critical reading, vocabulary, reading speed, and comprehension. Students learn through the use of various modalities, thus, any tool which emphasizes a single modality cannot be suitable for use with large numbers of students.

IV. *Employ various techniques which will motivate the students to want to read.*

Motivation cannot be secured in isolation from regular remedial instruction.³ A secondary student who has had a long series of discouraging, unsuccessful reading experiences presents a special challenge to even the highly trained reading specialist. The remedial specialist needs to try to find the learner's reading interests, use appropriate teaching methods based on actual reading needs, and employ only those tools which have a good chance of resulting in reading growth. Since poor concept may be a problem with this type of student, significant attention should be given to any progress which may be demonstrated. The learner should be aware of his/her present reading strengths and what prospects may be present for further reading growth.

V. *Plan a program of continuous evaluation to monitor the value of teaching materials and strategies.*

Since there are literally hundreds of different types of teaching tools available, a careful analysis of the most useful aids should be made. Unfortunately, too many remedial reading programs have been established in recent years which emphasized the employment of one piece of hardware, one box of skills sheets, or a single teaching method. While these aspects may be helpful for a few students, they are not defensible for use with large numbers of adolescents with widely varying learning modalities. If programs are to be viable, an individual teaching plan should be devised for each person enrolled for remedial courses. Commercial and informal evaluative techniques should be utilized on a daily basis to substantiate or refute any plan or material which is presently a part of instructional programs.

Summary

Due to the large number of disabled readers which appear to be present at the secondary level, a useful, well devised remedial reading program should be established for these students. Two of the key ingredients in such an endeavor are the *proper* selection of learners and the appointment of well qualified professionals to direct the effort. A careful analysis should be made regarding the purchase of materials which will meet the exact in-

structional needs of the students. Serious attention should be given to the promotion of motivational techniques which cause each person to want to read. A well developed evaluation component should be established to monitor the relative value of materials and teaching methods which are employed with each student.

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