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Shirley Madsen
Montana State Reading Council

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ECHOES FROM THE FIELD: PHILOSOPHY FOR SECONDARY REMEDIATION

Shirley Madsen, Chairman

MONTANA STATE READING COUNCIL

Almost all phases of remedial reading, from teacher training to practical application, are aimed at the early elementary levels (and rightly so), but reading problems do persist among students at the middle school, junior high and high school levels. Therefore, a committee of the Montana Reading Council has compiled this Philosophy for secondary remediation.

1. Probably the morale of the student is the most important item to consider in a secondary program. Many poor readers have developed very negative self-images. The teacher must convey to the student that he sees him, not as a poor reader, but as a capable, worthwhile individual with many fine skills and attributes who, incidentally, has a reading problem that can either be remediated or compensated for.

2. Too often there is a stigma attached to remedial reading and to the students who need this assistance. Care should be exercised to minimize this stigma. Students may be involved in an excellent program which they enjoy, and still be reluctant to attend because of teasing from their peers. If the remedial class is the only "reading" taught in the building, another name should be found for the class that sounds and looks like a class regularly scheduled for all students, such as "English-R."

It is also helpful if the reading area and staff can be utilized by all the students through extra-curricular or other activities, rather than being considered very "set apart" by most of the school population.

3. It is important that students are led to see reading as an enjoyable activity rather than a series of skills to be mastered.

4. An attractive, permanent setting for the class is important. Comfortable reading areas will enhance the student's tendency to see reading as a pleasurable activity. If the student is to feel that reading is important, physical evidence must be present that the school also sees reading as important.

5. Parent involvement is as necessary and as important at the secondary level as at the elementary, but is much less apt to happen spontaneously. Parents may be negative about a school system and anxious about their children if reading problems persist at the secondary level. Reassurance that the school has a good remedial program and a positive attitude toward their child can relieve tension and create an attitude-change that will be beneficial to the student.

Some parents need to be helped to put their children's reading problems in the proper perspective.

6. Secondary reading programs need a great variety of materials and techniques with a format suitable to the age level being served. Some material will be used exclusively in the remediation program so that it is new and different; it is wise to stagger the introduction of materials to renew lagging interest throughout the year.

7. TEACHERS

a. The teacher should be adequately trained in remedial techniques (this usually means certification in that area by the Department of Public Instruction or an educational institution) and have a working knowledge of adolescent psychology.

b. Teachers must genuinely care about their students, accepting them, the existence of their value systems, and their cultural differences.

c. It is important that remedial teachers have opportunities for contact with others in their discipline for support and continued growth.

d. Remedial teachers will serve as a liaison between the poor reader and content area teachers, who need to know both the strengths and the weaknesses of the students. Some content area teachers may need assistance in finding alternate methods and materials for teaching, and/or testing. The content area teacher may focus more attention on the remedial student if he knows another staff member is vitally interested in and willing to help with that student.

8. Guidelines for selection of remedial students are often dictated by the funding agency, but if left to the discretion of the school, the first-priority student is the one who shows the widest discrepancy between ability and performance.

When assessing ability, it is necessary to use criteria other than group tests which depend to some extent on reading ability.

9. Records and test scores should move with the students. These records should be available to the reading teachers who will be working with them.