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LET'S LEAVE NO STONE UNTURNED

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What does a good remedial reading teacher do? Everything the teacher of a regular classroom does, only more in depth. Consider, for example, all that happens during a three-step lesson for a remedial reading group of nine-year olds.

The lesson is sixty minutes long. The first step is word attack skills, including phonics, sight-word practice, structural analysis, and the use of context clues. The second step is reading, both silent and oral, with discussion. The teacher models for the students, and each student reads silently along with the teacher and then orally to the class. This is also a time for discussion of each section that is read. The third step is evaluation. There is a page of questions for the student to answer. This is the time for the student and teacher to discover if learning has taken place and a time to learn how to "put things down on paper."

For about two or three weeks before the three-step lessons are begun, the students go through a preparation period. The teacher and students discuss what a sentence is and what a paragraph is. The students practice (1) how to find a certain word, phrase, or sentence; (2) how to find the beginning of the sentence that contains the specific word or phrase; (3) how to answer questions that tell who, what, when, where, how; and (4) how to answer different types of questions such as fill in the blank, true or false and multiple choice.

The teacher reads a selection and writes a question on the board. All students work together at this time, reading in unison after the teacher, finding the sentence that has the answer, giving the answer in a word or phrase, stating the answer in a complete sentence, then writing the answer on their papers. In this way the procedures and skills needed for the three-step lesson are modeled and practiced before the students are asked to do their work independently. Any misunderstandings are corrected at this time.

This proves to be an excellent diagnostic procedure also, as the weaknesses of each student often become apparent. The teacher not only sees who misses what kind of question, but why. Perhaps the student can't form his letters correctly, can't follow directions, can't locate the answers. Much remediation is based on what the teacher learns during this period of preparation. Periodically these procedures are reviewed as remedial reading students need to review frequently.

Now let's consider what happens during each step of a typical three-step lesson.

Step 1: Word attack skills From a reading selection the teacher chooses words that are new to the student, are difficult, or need to be defined. To that list are added words that will illustrate specific sounds that are being studied. Single letters and letter combinations are sounded and words “put together,” never leaving elements of a word standing alone. Reference is made to key words for help in sounding words. Both an analytic and synthetic approach are used. As syllabication rules are studied (but not memorized), they are incorporated into the lesson at this point. Each word is then read in unison two or three times; occasionally one or more students will read selected words from the list. Word meaning is discussed. The teacher models for the students, giving synonyms, antonyms, using words in sentences and letting students tell of their experiences relating to the word.

Step 2: Reading In this step the teacher reads aloud a sentence, a paragraph or a selection short enough for a particular student to handle. While reading, emphasis is put on stress, pitch, phrasing, pronunciation, accents, expression. Each student has an opportunity to read aloud. The names and meanings of punctuation marks are discussed. The teacher points out how the student should read them when he encounters them (stop, lower voice, pause, with expression). Questions are asked which are designed to improve the ability to recall details, locate the answer, make inferences, draw conclusions, decide main idea, predict outcomes and relate the story to one’s own experience, as well as to think creatively.

Step 3: Evaluation A page of questions is given to each student. All of the students receive the same page. Questions are marked with symbols (★ Δ O) to designate (to the teacher) easy, average and difficult. The student answers only those questions with his symbol. In this way the questioning is individualized without each student’s knowing which group he is in. Where applicable the student must answer the question in a complete sentence. Penmanship, spelling (which involves phonic principles), answering in a complete sentence, and punctuation are all checked when the student brings his paper to be approved. If he has made some errors, his answers are not just marked as incorrect; instead, the “why” is explained and the student is shown how to correct his errors. At this time of answering the questions on paper and seeking help from the teacher, each student gets individual attention with the concepts he has not learned. Consideration is made of the stage of development of each student, how much he can handle at one time and how much the teacher expects of him. For instance, some students are doing well to answer the question correctly and cannot yet do so in a complete sentence. Some get the answer, write it in a complete sentence but forget their punctuation. Also, in correcting an answer, the student again receives practice in how to locate an answer and how to phrase his answer so that it makes sense, so that it answers the question.

When seeking help from the teacher on how to spell a word, the student must show evidence of having at least attempted it on his own. This is one way to build independence in students who do not feel adequate enough to work on their own. Many times they know but are not sure of themselves. By

trying first, they begin to shoulder some of the responsibility for their own work.

There is great interest at present nationwide on students' inability to get things down on paper, to write a decent sentence, to fill out questionnaires, etc. This evaluation portion of the lesson forces the student to do these very activities.

Here is an actual lesson.

*A Present for George*¹

George is six years old today. His mother and father are giving George a birthday present.

“You may have one of these little white dogs,” said Father. “Pick the one you like the best.”

George looked at the three dogs. He decided to take the white dog that had the black spot. He liked that dog best.

The three paragraphs are studied one at a time. At the end of the story the third step, Evaluation, is done. This slow-motion approach is recommended for each paragraph.

Step 1: Word Attack (Words are written on the board one at a time, sometimes letter by letter.)

Write

George

George Why did I capitalize that? Yes, it is a name. You say it. *George*.

giving

We have the word give. (Write *give* on the board.) If I want to add *ING* to a word that ends in *E*, I take off the *E* and add *ING*. The new word is *giving*. You say it. *Giving*. They are *giving* George a present.

Present

present A present is something a person gives to someone else. What is a present? When could you get a present? Birthday? Christmas? Makes you feel all good and warm inside, doesn't it? Why do people give you a present? Yes, they love you. Let's all say the words together. Let's say them again. Good.

Step 2: Reading Listen while I read. (Read the first paragraph.) John, you read for us. Remember to stop at the periods, and remember that your

¹ Gates, Arthur I. and Celeste C. Peardon, *Reading Exercises, Introductory Level A*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1963, Story No. 1.

voice goes down when you stop. Like this: “George . . . today.” (Help the student with words where needed, sometimes telling him the word and other times helping him to pronounce the word. Other students may tell him the word if they wait to give the student a chance before they tell him.)

Discussion: How old is George? Who are giving him a present? Why are they giving him a present? Find the sentence that tells when George’s birthday is.

Paragraph 2: (The same procedure is used as for Paragraph 1.)

<i>Words</i>	<i>Concepts</i>
may	sound of <i>AY</i>
little	divide little lit-tle
best	sound of each letter, blend sounds into whole word.

Reading: Discuss quotation marks.

Questions: What may George have? Describe the dog. What is George supposed to do?

Paragraph 3

<i>Words</i>	<i>Concepts</i>
looked	meaning of <i>ED</i> .
three	sound of <i>THR</i> and <i>EE</i> , blend into whole word
decided	Meaning of work, meaning of <i>ED</i> . Student uses word in sentence.
white	Sound of digraph <i>WH</i> , sound of vowel <i>I</i> , rule of vowel, consonant, final <i>E</i> .

Reading: Review how to tell a paragraph and demonstrate on board.
Ask how many paragraphs in story.
Discuss meaning of apostrophe in *George’s dog*.

Discussion: How many dogs did George look at? Describe the dog that he chose. What do you suppose George did after he got his nice present? Have you ever received a nice present like that? How did you feel? What did you do? Tell how the story ends.

Step 3: Evaluation Students answer these questions, have their papers checked, correct the errors. Each student knows his symbol, and these can change as he progresses.

- ★ 1. How old is George today?
- ★ 2. How many dogs did George have to choose from?
- 3. Copy the sentence that tells who was giving George the present.
- 4. Describe the dog that George chose.
- Δ 5. Why did George choose the dog that he did?
- ★ 6. What day is this?
- 7. Who is talking in paragraph two?
- Δ 8. Find the word that means “made up his mind.”

- Δ 9. How many spots did the dog have?
 * Δ O T F 10. George chose a black dog with a white spot.
 Δ 11. What would be another good name for this story?

By the time this lesson is completed every student has 1) read silently and orally, 2) answered questions orally and graphically, 3) had a chance to recite (which remedial readers seldom have in other classes) and 4) practiced:

phonics	using punctuation rules
syllabication	thinking
meaning of endings	listening
how to add ING to E word	recalling facts
word meanings	reading with expression
how to locate an answer	spelling
penmanship	making answers fit the question
writing in complete sentence	writing a neat paper

The student has been an active participant throughout the lesson with very little chance for his mind to wander or for him to sit and stare out of the window. He has been a part of the group but has received individual instruction as well. He has been given success because there was a model which he copied immediately, and he was made to do his work correctly. He had often found his own errors and learned that as all errors must be corrected, it is better to try to do the best possible work and do it correctly the first time.

Many of the remedial students do not care how their papers look. In these lessons they are encouraged to erase well, to be neat, to remember that their teachers feel good inside when they see a nice paper, and “isn’t it fun to make your teachers feel good inside?” If the teacher feels a student has been reminded sufficiently, a messy paper is returned with the comment that it will not be accepted the way it is. So often not enough is expected of the remedial student. If shown *how* to correct his work and given time, he can do much better than many people realize. He should not be allowed to get by with messy work. He begins to know the feeling of what it is like to do a job well, even though it takes a long time, and of being praised for his efforts and accomplishments.

In summary, then, the lesson includes as many facets of reading as can be squeezed in; help is given at every step; the work is sequenced and structured; certain demands and expectations are made of the students and they know what these are. Immediate feedback, modeling, *how* to do what is expected of them are all important aspects of the lesson. Progress and improvement are visible to the students and much mention of this is made to the entire class. Also, notes are sent back to the classroom teachers telling of this progress.

Remedial reading students have their own needs, and teaching them calls for special approaches. The key words connected with these approaches are easy to remember as they all begin with the letter S. The following list is not complete; perhaps you can add more.

Structure: Give concise, well-organized directions. Goals and procedures must be evident to the student. He must know what he is to do, what he is not to do, and how he is to do it.

Simplicity: Strip away all superfluous materials; keep the work on the most basic, most necessary concepts.

Slow: Do not move faster than the student can ingest (take in) or digest (process).

Sample: Model for the student; show him what you want him to do, what the paper should look like, etc.

Sameness: Do things the same way. This helps the student to be able to concentrate on the materials and on new ideas because the procedures are the same. Or use the same materials if you are trying to teach new procedures. The remedial student is not so lost if he has some “sameness” to hold on to.

Start: Remedial students do not always have self-starters, so they need help to begin their work.

Stay: Stay with a concept until the student has mastered it. Repeat, recycle, practice. In other words: overteach.

Speak: Get the student to express the concept in his own words, then it will be his own.

Smile: Keep your cool; keep your sense of humor; treat the student kindly; let him know you like him; build good rapport. These students are often a bundle of emotions to begin with and can use a good friend.

Strengthen: Give the student opportunities to practice his new skill and knowledge in various mediums and to apply them often.

Support: Encourage, praise, appreciate, help him over the rough spots, work with him. Give recognition when he succeeds; ask how he did it.

Specific: Leave no doubt in the student’s mind what it is you are speaking of. Specific terms are preferred over general terms.

Think of the *S* list as you plan your work with the remedial student, and you can be sure you’re leaving no stone unturned in your efforts to help him learn to read.