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FIRST-AID FOR TROUBLED READERS

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More children are experiencing difficulty in reading than in any other subject area in the elementary classroom. There are various degrees of a reading disability. A reading disability can range from a reader who is a grade or two below the level of his peers to a child who is a complete non-reader. In most cases, the concern of the elementary classroom teacher of reading is to see to it that the children are able to read well enough to perform the work of the specific class-level and to receive some enjoyment from their reading. If an ordinary classroom teacher is confronted with a child who is a complete non-reader, the usual procedure is to refer the child to a qualified reading specialist who is equipped to deal directly with the serious reading handicaps in a more specific manner than would be possible in a classroom situation. Then the classroom teacher would stand ready to follow the recommendations of the reading specialist in regard to help for a non-reader.

However, if competent remedial reading assistance is not readily available, or is only available on a very limited basis, then it is the responsibility of the regular classroom teacher to find ways of providing assistance to the non-reader in the regular classroom. In any case, the help given to the non-reader must be provided on an individual basis whenever a break in the schedule permits. But at no time should the non-reader be restricted in other activities that the other children are free to enjoy in order to work on his reading problems. If the child with a reading handicap is denied his free time, he will soon learn to regard the individual assistance offered in the classroom as a form of punishment.

An evaluation of the child's readiness for learning to read is the initial step in helping the non-reader. The readiness takes the form of determining if the child has the basic physical, emotional, intellectual, and experiential readiness needed to begin the reading process.

Physical readiness could involve adequate vision on the part of the non-reader. The non-reader may be hiding the fact that he wears corrective lens. If this is the case, then the child should be encouraged to wear the eyeglasses when he needs them.

Emotional readiness involves creating a desire within the child to learn to read. The classroom teacher can help by attempting to moti-

vate the non-reader by the use of any positive means available. See that the child experiences as much success as possible with his initial reading efforts. A wise teacher will build upon success.

Intellectual readiness can be determined by the use of a good intelligence test. Once a valid intelligence test determines the child's mental age, the teacher can determine his potential reading ability and should not attempt to push the child beyond his potential reading level.

The child's background of experience, both direct and vicarious, will have a great deal of bearing on the child's progress in reading. The classroom teacher should provide many direct and vicarious experiences for the non-reader and provide opportunities for the child to verbalize these experiences.

In any case, remedial assistance should not begin until the teacher has evaluated all the areas of readiness and can make some decisions regarding what the child can realistically be expected to achieve. If the child seems ready to begin to read, then the teacher can take the steps outlined here to help the child overcome his reading problems.

First-Aid Techniques

Begin the reading instruction at the point where the child presently is. The most efficient way to determine this is to attempt a very informal type of reading inventory or survey. Ask the child to read books that seem to be of an easy nature. If he experiences difficulty reading an easy book, try a book that is even easier. Repeat this process until the child can read from a book without a great deal of difficulty. Ask a few simple questions to make a decision about his family to comprehend what he has read. When the child can read with relative ease and can answer comprehension questions without losing the main idea of the content, the reading level to begin the instruction will have been discovered.

Begin the second step with work to increase the child's sight vocabulary. Since a child learns many words by their shape and size, the teacher can utilize many games and devices to assist the child in developing an adequate sight vocabulary. Pictures or actual objects that represent the word to be learned can be used to give the child more than a vague understanding of the words they hear and see. In this manner, the child can increase his sight vocabulary so he is able to read more difficult material.

The third step would involve the child's own ability to discover new words through use of the various word attack skills that are available. Context clues, structural analysis, phonetic analysis, word-form

clues, or picture clues can be attempted by the child with assistance from the teacher. Whatever word attack technique that is attempted will still depend upon how well the child has developed his sight vocabulary. Use whatever technique works the best for the individual child. In some cases, the child can use a combination of one or more of the word attack techniques to attack a word he has never before seen in print.

Developing good comprehension is the next task for the classroom teacher concerned with the non-reader. The child must learn to remember what he reads. A teacher cannot increase a child's innate ability to remember, but the child can be helped to use his memory to its greatest potential. There are many games available to use with children to increase memory. In addition, if the child is permitted to verbalize freely what he has read, comprehension will be strengthened.

Finally, the child should be given the opportunity for wide reading experiences that bring him into contact with many books, magazines, and newspapers. As long as the material the child is reading is at his present level of competence the child should experience little frustration in his reading. The key factor remaining is that the child is encouraged to read and the reading habit becomes a part of his life.